Abstract
The article examines the relationship between two forms of communication: oral history and ICT. Both forms generate new structures of knowledge production and are constitutive for the dynamics of societal knowledge repertoire in Ghana today. The actors creating these dynamics are women’s organisations and networks trying to act and react in a changing social environment. They have established social and virtual spaces for politicising knowledge aimed at transforming the knowledge order as well as political institutions along the local-global scale on interaction. The two features of “communicability” and “explication” of knowledge are significant indicators for the gradual transition of a Southern country to a knowledge society.

Introduction: Glocalisation, Knowledge and Communication
Academic debates on the emergence of knowledge societies have extensively focused on the transition in northern countries and have yet to include southern countries. According to Nico Stehr, the importance of a cross-cultural discussion concerning the nature of knowledge, the locations of knowledge production, and the control of knowledge lies in the insight that “(...) knowledge is not only the key to the secrets of nature and society, but the key towards the becoming of the world” (2003:22). One common characteristic of knowledge societies is the fact that a growing part of societal room of manoeuvre and of results of agencies is driven and governed by knowledge (Stehr, 2003:19). Empirical evidence in multiple sub-disciplines of sociology indicate that knowledge is one or even the major factor for contemporary societal change.

When conceptualising knowledge as a dynamic social process between actors, its new frame of reference lies in processes of globalisation and the new configuration in which knowledge is produced and generated: local and translocal. The interplay and communicative connections between localities constitute “glocalisation” (Robertson, 1995:26). These connections are opened by and continue to open social and virtual spaces for the building up of new knowledge repertoires. The actors I refer to are women’s groups and women’s organisations in Ghana, who have formed an “epistemic culture” at local, regional and even national level which extends beyond being connected with the interactive social and electronically supported World Wide Women’s Web. The common aim is to bring about social change through politicising knowledge. The establishment of this local-global framework took place over
the last 25 years, during and in the aftermath of the four World Conferences on Women. Using different and multiple forms of communication emerging as a necessity for bridging distances, borders and in connecting localities as well as in connecting the electronically “connected” with the “unconnected” those living in rural parts of Ghana who do not have direct contact to new communication media. My intention is to show how multiple forms of communication co-exist. I argue on the basis of plurality and complementarity of communicative media indicating the existence of “multiple modernities” within one region.

Narrating the Past – Shaping the Future

Oral history is a practice of remembering its own past in the presence. In present Ghana, history is actively embedded by women’s groups in a process of “reflexive modernisation” (Lash, 1994:113-115): by reflecting and acting on social constrains women groups refer to, reconstruct and include historical aspects in their discursive and strategic struggle for expanding their room of manoeuvre from the private to the public sphere. The core of struggle is to (re-)gain social and political power, which women have lost in post-colonial Ghana. At village, regional and national level, historical knowledge serves to claim for participation in political institutions. In new social spaces such as formal/informal meetings or forum women reflect on the decay of living conditions, critically examine the development of the modern (knowledge) system e.g. in agriculture or medicine, analyse the reasons for the “pathologies of modernity” (Habermas, 1981) and attribute it to their absence in powerful political institutions. In reference to the wisdom of the knowledgeable and well experienced old women in the family, younger women claim to be the keepers of knowledge and wisdom and use this identity for claiming political participation. In their everyday life, they use their historical knowledge for re-defining long-gone social and symbolic practices and fill it with new elements of knowledge whether concerning environmental, social, economic or educational issues. New elements of knowledge also based on scientific research results circulate through individual mobility in-between social spaces and through networking with global women’s health, peace and environmental movements. Practising “innovative history” contains four aspects: historical and scientific knowledge, reflection on everyday knowledge and active transformation of the social order of knowledge. These four aspects create along a meta-level knowledge on knowledge. History as a re-representation in real time becomes even more important in a globalised age, contributing towards shaping the social and cultural diversity of localities and the formation of knowledge repertoires.

Strategic Information Channelling between Worlds

Using the Internet as a medium for communication and as a strategic tool for development has attracted women’s organisations, groups and movements world-wide. The expansion of the scope of communication geographically towards a global “communicative accessibility” (Luhmann, 1997) among women, serves not only to connect different local realities but to transcend the diversity of local realities onto a global sphere. Gilian Youngs termed this power of transcendence towards the global level “shared politics” (1999). Shared politics is the active sharing of local realities at a global level meaning
that people in Ghana know what is of concern for women living in other parts of the world.

Electronic networks not only distribute power, but enable new forms of power, constituting the double feature of the electronic space as “cyber-segmentation” (Sassen, 2000:144). The network WiLDAF (Women in Law and Development Africa) uses ICT for distributing up-to-date newsletters, for emergency letters or for mobilization and extends beyond Africa in terms of common petitions addressing international development organisations (IMF, World Bank) and their specific interventions into national politics. The use of the Internet becomes in a political struggle over “conflicting views” (Sassen, 2000: 163) an expression of resistance, empowering women to act and react on external interventions. In its core, the electronic space is used for the defence, maintenance and security of the local lifeworld by combining the two processes of 1. strategic linking and 2. the links of strategies. The “disembedded”, “deterritorialised” global sphere emphasises and empowers local actions. Many virtual actions like www.womenaction.org, www.femmeafric.org, www.flamme.org are well documented in the book Women@Internet (Harcourt, 1999) drawing our attention to the growing importance of virtuality as a new condition for defending localities in a global arena.

Conclusion: Belonging to Multiple Spaces of Knowledge Production

The current societal knowledge repertoire in Ghana is composed of different sources, which do not stand in isolation but are connected along multiple internal and internal-external relations. Three key elements form the societal knowledge content: historical, scientific knowledge and “informational” knowledge. Individuals now belong to multiple social and virtual spaces. More important: the new feature of societal “explication” and “communicability” on knowledge in the public makes knowledge a current relevant factor for social change and speeds up the emergence of this particular knowledge society through having the power of establishing a second order knowledge. Articulation and politicising knowledge enhances the growing control over one’s own resources of knowledge. The sites of knowledge production will remain context-dependent, therefore keeping and maintaining cultural diversity; making one’s own knowledge potentials even more independent on external knowledge and interventions.

“Explication” and “communicability” of knowledge are sustained by two forms of communication: Oral History and ICT. The specific difference are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Oral History</th>
<th>ICT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Limited scope: local audience</td>
<td>Unlimited scope: global audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicative focus on local life-world</td>
<td>Communicative focus on glocal life-world</td>
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<td>Microcosm, limited personal</td>
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The composition of knowledge and relation thereof refer to a pluralistic pattern of internal and internal-external relations. As researchers we have to deal not with one or the other, but with one as well as the other.

Coming to the overall topic of this conference of scientific knowledge and cultural diversity we can conclude that cultural diversity remains exclusive through its existence in a process of globalisation. Exclusiveness not as a cut-off product, but as exclusiveness through interwovenness. Fluid integration between scientific and local knowledge via mutual learning processes remains a challenge. Theoretically we must follow an agency and process-oriented approach for understanding the dynamics of knowledge repertoires in a locality. Practically, as outside researchers we can follow the manifest of Kwasi Prah who suggested that: “First we have to learn to look at ourselves, hear others about ourselves, and above all, allow others to speak for themselves” (Prah, 1997: 444-445).

Bibliography


