Aalborg University

Development and International Relations

Master Thesis

Participation is Dangerous

A Qualitative Study on Christian Development Practitioners
And Participatory Development

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Abstract

The analysis in this thesis is based on interviews that I conducted with Christian development practitioners about their motivations and perceptions concerning concepts of development and development work. During the preliminary analysis of my interviews I noticed that religious development practitioners seemed to have a striking affinity to participatory development. The research aim of this thesis is about finding out why this is the case. On the basis of a theoretical framework that focuses on the manipulative potentials of participatory development I argue that religious development practitioners prefer participation because it provides a sophisticated vehicle for proselytization. In addition to that explanation I argue that participatory development serves to meet the religious desires of the practitioners which revolve around being in a close relationship to God. Participation in the perception of the religious development practitioner describes a process of personal transformation that brings the believer closer to God. Following an account by Ilan Kapoor I argue that the 'self-empowering' experience of religious transformation can result in the practitioners' increase of influence and power, which makes participation as manipulation even more effective.

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I Introduction

This thesis presents the interpretation and analysis of interviews that I held with foreign Christian development practitioners in Dhaka, Bangladesh during late summer/early autumn 2010.

In the following I wish to give an account on how the idea of doing research on religious development practitioners came about and how this led to the topic and problem formulation of this thesis. The following introduction includes some elaborations regarding the methodology of research which I will not address again in the following methodology chapter.

Important for the idea and development of this thesis were two - for me new – experiences I made after coming to Bangladesh. Considering the unique and exciting environment of Bangladesh and its monstrous mega-city Dhaka, these two experiences seem rather unexciting and lame. The first experience was that I came in close contact with expatriates engaged in the field of development - 'western' foreigners that worked for development agencies, NGOs, and international organizations. I refer to these people as 'development practitioners' in this thesis.

This personal exposure inspired me to think and ask about their motivations, ideas and opinions regarding development. Furthermore I assumed that development practitioners as a topic of study in development studies received rather minor attention, which reinforced my interest to make them part of my thesis.

The second experience was that for the first time in my life I met people - 'western' expatriates - who were distinctly religious, Christian religious. It was a new and interesting experience for me to have conversations with people who expressed their Christian faith so openly and direct. Many of these people were also engaged in development related work.

My encounter with these Christian development workers inspired me to extend my idea of doing a research project on development practitioners to conducting a comparative study on religious and non-religious development practitioners, focused on finding out about their motivations to do development work as well as their perceptions regarding different concepts of development.

After having conducted some individual interviews with religious and non-religious respondents I decided to put the focus of analysis on the concept of participation in development in order to narrow down my research.

Already during the conduct of interviewing I noticed that my religious respondents seemed to have a stronger opinion on participatory development in comparison to the non-religious practitioners. At first this observation was primarily based on how the conversations with the religious development practitioners generally developed quite differently to the ones I had with the non-religious interviewees. The most obvious difference, of course, was that in the former the aspect of personal Christian faith played a big role.

The subsequent process of transcribing the interviews and the preliminary analysis confirmed my previous observation and I was able to identify a distinct affinity of the religious development practitioners to participatory development.
This observation resulted eventually in the question which guided my further analysis and constitutes the problem formulation of this thesis. This question is a simple one and in the first case based on my very personal interest and the feeling that its explanation must have something to do with the practitioners' Christian faith.

The **problem formulation** of this thesis is:
Why do the religious development practitioners seem to have a distinct affinity to participatory development?

This problem formulation emerged as a result of comparing the interviews of the religious development practitioners with those of the non-religious practitioners. Due to the shape that the conversations with the development practitioners took, their perceptions on development, their disclosed attitudes and opinions as well as their explicit statements regarding participatory development it seemed to me that they - as development practitioners - stand closer to participatory approaches of development than the non-religious practitioners. However, to prove that this is actually the case is not subject of this thesis. Hence, I will not argue here that the

religious development practitioners have a stronger affinity to participatory development *than* the non-religious practitioners - although this is the impression I had on the basis of the interviews. But I argue that the religious development practitioners *do* have a strong affinity to participatory development - and this constitutes the outset of my analysis and research interest. Accordingly the analysis and interpretations constituting this thesis focus on the religious development practitioners.

II. Methodology

In the following I will explain the methodology underlying this thesis. I will begin with outlining the ontological and epistemological orientation of my research and go then over to elaborate the theoretical framework and its role in the analysis of my primary data. After that I will provide an account on the methods of collecting and analyzing the primary data. I will conclude the methodology with clarifying the use of the term 'development practitioner' and pointing out the limitations of this research.

1. Qualitative Research Framework

The conduct of research constituting this thesis was guided and informed by a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research is described as a research strategy that *"emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data"* (Bryman 2008: 22). Accordingly, the decision for going by a qualitative research approach followed downright logically out of the subject matter and the unit of analysis of this thesis, as it was my aim to study perceptions and opinions of individuals on social phenomena, namely the concepts of development in general and participatory development specifically.

<u>Ontology - Constructivism</u>

As usually within a qualitative research framework my ontological orientation is distinctly constructivist. Constructivism poses the alternative ontological position to objectivism which is usually associated with a quantitative research approach and which treats social phenomena as external facts that lie beyond reach and influence of social actors, i.e. individuals and groups (Bryman 2008: 18-19).

Constructivism as an ontological orientation asserts that social phenomena and their meaning in the world are socially constructed, i.e. they a created through social interactions of individuals and groups. This implies that these phenomena are in a constant state of flux as their meaning has to be constantly be negotiated and re-affirmed by social actors. Hence, according to Bryman, social reality viewed from a constructivist perspective is *"a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation"* (Bryman 2008: 22).

In a constructivist perspective, language, subjective and collective perceptions, ideas and understandings gain crucial importance as they are conceived as constitutive building blocks of our social reality, the individual is explicitly acknowledged as having an active and shaping role in the social construction of reality.

Furthermore I would like to clarify that I also understand the creation of knowledge in a constructivist perspective. My account and interpretation of the primary data in this thesis, derived from conversations that I held with individuals is at least as determined and shaped by my values and world-view as it is by the respondents themselves. My interpretation of the data is therefore to understand as one perspective among probably many possible perspectives that can emerge from the interpretation of my data.

Epistemology - Interpretivism

In accordance with a qualitative research strategy the epistemological approach of this thesis is characterized by interpretivism which focuses on understanding social agents' subjective perceptions and ideas through a process of interpretation (Bryman 2008: 16-22).

2. Theoretical Framework

Not unusual in qualitative research the relationship between theory and data in this thesis is not clearly identifiable as deductive or inductive (Bryman 2008: 369). I do not use my data to test a coherent theory (deductive approach), neither do I derive a 'new' theory from my research (inductive approach). I apply certain theoretical considerations concerning participatory development as an analytical framework on my data in order to establish a specific explanation as of why the religious development practitioners seem to be especially in favor of a participatory approach to development.

The theoretical framework is constituted by a critique of participatory development that especially focuses on participation as a social process highly prone to manipulative misuse. This critique is inspired and influenced by Bill Cooke and Uma

Kothari's critical reader *Participation. The New Tyranny* (2001). Besides the general assertion of participation in development as a potentially very sophisticated vehicle for manipulative processes the theoretical framework is constituted by three concepts that I have taken from three critical articles on participation, two of which are contributions to Cooke and Kothari's book. Within the theoretical framework I have labeled these three concepts 'participation as religious experience' (Henkel & Stirrat 2001), 'participation as coercive persuasion' (Cooke 2001) and 'participation as self-empowerment' (Kapoor 2005). All of these three concepts are to be seen in the context of participation as manipulation.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection – In-depth Interviews

The focus of research and analysis in my thesis lies on the perceptions and opinions of development practitioners. Accordingly my main method of collecting data was the conduct of interviews.

In the course of data collection I conducted twelve individual - face-to-face - in-depth interviews with religious and non-religious development practitioners, six of each 'side'. The interview design was semi-structured. I prepared a series of questions according to what I believed would provide me with fruitful insights on practitioner's perceptions and opinions on development related topics as well as their motivations. However, I granted myself the freedom to change the sequence of the interviews. I also incorporating unforeseen questions if I felt this would contribute to the collection of relevant data. Furthermore, I left the interviewees some scope to take influence on the direction of the interviews. One interview lasted between 40 and 120 minutes. Within the thesis I use the terms interview and conversation interchangeably, as well as the terms interviewee and respondent. The process of interviewing eventually generated over 200 pages data. However, as I have already mentioned in the introduction, the analysis conducted in this thesis focuses on the data derived from the religious development practitioners.

My method of sampling is best described as a purposive snowball sampling. In purposive sampling the researcher samples while having certain research goals in

mind and selects respondents because of their relevance to understanding a social phenomenon (Bryman 2008: 415). My initial research goal was to find out about motivations and perceptions of religious and non-religious development practitioners. Accordingly, my criteria for sampling were religious and not-religious, and a development related occupation.

Snowball sampling describes an approach in which *"the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contact with others"* (Bryman 2008: 184). In some way my sampling method can be described as snowball sampling since I have found some of my respondents via the above cited procedure.

The approaches of purposive and snowball sampling do not allow the researcher to generalize his findings to a population. Accordingly I do not wish to generalize my findings.

Besides the collection and use of primary data derived from individual interviews the research of the thesis is especially informed by several publications on participation. The majority of the literature used takes a distinctly critical stance towards the concept of participation.

Data analysis

The analysis of my interview data reflected a procedure that corresponded roughly with the stages of data analysis described in Denscombe (2007: 252). Splitting up the process of analysis into stages or steps is always somewhat artificial since data analysis is usually a very iterative process.

The stage of data preparation was characterized by the full verbatim transcription of the interview recordings. Since I conducted the transcripts myself, this step already entailed a big deal of initial data exploration and generated ideas for the further conduct of research. The actual analysis of the interview transcripts was characterized by seeking and identifying patterns and similarities which eventually developed into themes that are reflected in chapter V 1. of this thesis. The analysis was furthermore informed by the theoretical framework of this thesis, in the sense that it adjusted the focus of analysis.

Some comments on the use of interview extracts in the text of the thesis: I use quotes of my respondents in the thesis to illustrate and give supporting evidence to my arguments which are based on the in-depth analysis of the interview data. Occasionally I use the quote of a single religious practitioner due to its representative quality in order to exemplify an important theme. Furthermore, incorporating the voice of my respondents by the use of extracts makes the account livelier.

Lastly, the names that I refer to within the text are not the real names of my interview practitioners, but made up by me.

4. Limitations

The most important limitation regarding this thesis is that the findings and answers cannot be generalized to religious development practitioners beyond the sample I have studied. This is mainly due to the limited sample size of six religious development practitioners as well as to the method of sampling. From the beginning on conceived as a qualitative study it was however never the aim to make generalizations. The research was driven by an interest in the specific observation that I made regarding the development practitioners' attitude towards participation and the idea of explaining this specific observation with the help of critical theoretical considerations on participatory development derived from the literature.

It is my opinion that the argument of participation's manipulative potential - although in this thesis based on and supported by academic literature - is in need of further and more detailed scrutiny focused on its underlying (socio-) psychological workings and the functions of power within the process.

5. Terminology

The development practitioner

Under the term 'development practitioner' I understand in this thesis the 'western' foreigner who works in a development related field in a developing country. My interviewees worked for NGOs, national development agencies, as well as social business type work with a community development dimension. Regarding the

classification as a development practitioner I relied primarily on the respondents own self-conception. If they perceived themselves as such they qualified for being an interviewee in my research project.

<u>The religious and non-religious development practitioner</u>

The term ‘religious’ in front of ‘development practitioner’ implies that the motivation of the individual practitioner is substantially informed by his Christian faith. Again I relied on the self-conception of the potential participant. I was open in my intention of wanting to do research on religious development practitioners. My first religious interviewees I met at a (Christian) Bangla language school. Via these initial contacts I was able to make contact to other religious development practitioners.

I usually knew - or assumed - in advance who was a religiously informed development practitioner and who not. In the case of the non-religious respondents the very last question of the interview was always: ‘Are you religious?’ However, my pre-assumption regarding the religiousness or non-religiousness of the respondent had never failed me. When I use the term ‘religious development practitioners’ in the text of my thesis I refer to the religious development practitioners that I have interviewed, and not the religious development practitioner in general, i.e. beyond the scope of my sample.

IV. Participation in Development

1. Introduction

Participation in development is a highly contested term with no final meaning. As one of the "catchwords" of contemporary development discourse 'participation' lends itself to a multitude of applications. The content of this concept is blurry and its boundaries elusive (Chambers 2005: 104; Mikkelsen 2005: 53-54). Grasping participation, pinpointing the essence of the concept and providing a clear definition is therefore extremely difficult if not impossible, and from a post-modernistic viewpoint probably not even preferable. Departing from this insight the aim of the chapter 'Participation in Development' is to present participation in its diversity of meaning and to provide a framework for facilitating understanding of the concept and its different dimensions. Due to the complexity of participatory development this chapter does not claim to provide an exhaustive account.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* participation means:

"The action or fact of having or forming part of something; the sharing of something".

This definition gives us little substantive value however, since it does not tell us how this process of 'having or forming part of something' actually looks like; how much being part of something qualifies as participating in something? And what and how much has to be shared? Already this definition suggests that participation as a concept without a clear normative orientation can come to mean everything and nothing.

In the context of development participation is defined by Guijt & Shah (1998) by focusing on its aim:

"The broad aim of participatory development is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives" (Guijt & Shah 1998: 1).

But also this definition suggests that there is no clarity on how this increase of involvement should look like or how far it should go.

One of the most popular methods participatory development is PRA (participatory rural appraisal), which gained wide popularity especially through the advocacy of Robert Chambers during the 1980s and 1990s. He describes PRA as a *“growing family of approaches and methods to enable local (rural or urban) people to express, enhance, share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act”* (Chambers 1994: 1253).

The proponents of PRA argue that its practice results in the participants’ empowerment by providing them with the means to make they own analyses regarding their situation, on which basis they will be able to define and make informed decisions and gain some leverage towards external power-holders. In Robert Chambers’ view PRA is a core practice in bringing about a reversal of power-relations between what he refers to as ‘uppers’ (power-holders, development agencies, government officials) and ‘lowers’ (the poor, local community)(Chambers: 1997).

Before I will go deeper into a more detailed elaboration of participation’s different understandings I deem it as helpful to provide a brief overview of the historical development of the participatory discourse in the 20th century.

2. Historical Reflections on Participation in Development

Participatory development is generally considered a *“relatively new frontier”* (Mikkelsen 2005: 54) in development studies and practice, and both governments and development organizations tend to promote participation with a ring of novelty and innovation. However, participation in the context of development can be traced back far into the Twentieth Century.

According to Majid Rahnema the idea of participatory development made its first appearance on the screen in the late 1950s. Social activists and development workers disillusioned by the apparent failings of development started proposing alternative forms of development that focused on inclusion and participation of the local poor and challenged the dominating top-down strategies of mainstream development, which perceived as responsible for the sobering results of Western-led development (Rahnema 1997: 156).

Further back in time goes Andrea Cornwall, who points at participatory approaches in the disguise of British colonial development in the first half of the century (Cornwall 2006: 51-52). In two publications (2000; 2006) dealing with the history of the concept Cornwall describes the different shifts of perspective on participation over the decades and puts them into the context of changes within the wider development discourse.[1]

Besides demonstrating that participation in development is not at all a novelty of 1980s and 90s development thinking Cornwall also shows that over the decades certain arguments and understandings of participation re-surfaced in the mainstream development discourse after having been replaced for some years by seemingly different understandings. According to Cornwall these changes in mainstream discourse have been cosmetic variations in rhetoric that served to provide participation with a new shine of innovation rather than serious alterations in the dominating understanding of the concept. At the same time, however, her historical overview shows that the concept of participatory development has always been subject to contrasting interpretations and understandings. Simplifying the complex of different understandings for the sake of clarity the major fault-line can be identified as running between instrumental understandings of participation and conceptions of participation as an end in itself.

In the following I wish to provide a brief overview of participation in development from the 1950s up till now. My account is based to substantial extend on two publications by Andrea Cornwall (2000; 2006). Besides exemplifying the points

[1] Cornwall (2000 & 2006) makes a case that in a lot of cases the discourse on participation of past has striking similarities regarding its content to understandings and interpretations of participation that constitute contemporary debate and practice of the concept, and that these similarities are neglected by today's development organizations who often present participation and participatory methodologies as rather novel and innovative ideas to development.

mentioned above the following overview shall demonstrate the blurriness of participation as a concept of development. Furthermore, providing some concrete historical examples, I intend to point to participation's usability as a concept, and the convenience with which it can be (and has been) co-opted by different actors following agendas that are in stark contrast with the promises of empowerment, generally associated with participatory development.

The 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950s the concept of participation emerged as a form of community development. It was defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as *"participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living* [...] *and the provision of technical and other services"* to make participation of the people more effective (cited in Cornwall 2006: 54). The underlying motivation of the UN as well as the USA in promoting community development, however, was to contain and control social unrest of subversive elements within the post-colonial developing world[2] (Cornwall 2006: 54). Citing Batliwala and Dhanraj (2004) and pointing to the de-politicizing effects that participatory development can unfold, Cornwall argues that community development and self-help-groups of the 1950s can in many ways be conceived as fostering *"exactly the kind of busy work that dissipates dissent by diverting people's energy from politics"* (Cornwall 2006: 54).

The potential (mis)use of participation as a means to exercise control over people constitutes an important concern within the critical analyses of participation (e.g. Cooke & Kothari 2001; Rahnema 1997) and is also considered as a possible form of (illegitimate) participation in Sherry Arnstein's elaboration on citizenship participation which I will introduce in chapter III 3.1.

The 1970s

According to Cornwall the 1970s are *"the decade in which participation first hit the development mainstream"* (Cornwall 2008: 269). The rhetorical focus shifts away from 'community development' to 'popular participation' which promoted the

[2] This use of participation as a means of control in this decade has to be seen in the wider context international relations that were dominated at that time by the geo-political and ideological antagonism of the two superpowers Soviet Union and USA, and the attempts of the latter to "contain" and prevent the spread of communism.

inclusion of wider parts of society into a participatory development process. Main promoter of this understanding were the United Nations, presenting 'popular participation' as a "central pillar" in the basic needs-approach to development which was concerned with a shift *"away from top-down, technocratic and economistic interventions towards greater popular involvement in the development process"* (Cornwall 2000: 17).

The discourse on participation during the 1970s placed more emphasis on the political dimension of participation and connected its practices with the consolidation of democracy. The UN defined participation's requirements as to be voluntary and democratic, embracing the active participation of all elements of society in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres of the state to achieve the common goal of development (Cornwall 2006: 55-56).

Compared to the more limited and political rather neutral understanding of 'community development' the discourse of the 1970s describes a rhetorical scale-up of participation from the micro-level of encased participatory exercises to the macro-level of popular participation in comprehensive national development strategies. An expression of this development can be seen in UN ECOSOC's recommendation to governments from 1975 to encourage participation in the development process and to adopt popular participation in national development strategies (Cornwall 2000: 17; Cornwall 2006: 50; Rahnema 1997: 157).

Cornwall points to the striking resemblance that this form of advocacy for participation carries with the concern of the 1990s and 2000s to extend depth and breadth of participation to include civil society, foster ownership of recipient governments, and to move away from the narrow project approach that dominated development in the 1980s (Cornwall 2006: 50 & 56).

The 1980s

Despite the existence of a quite vibrant participatory discourse since at least the 1950s, most academics and practitioners would pin down the breakthrough of participation in the 1980s and/or 1990s. The move of participation *"from the margins to the mainstream of development"* (Hickey & Mohan 2004: 3) took up considerable pace in the 1980s, and the rhetoric of participation came to invade every

sphere of development related activity. The promise of participatory development was soon to be incorporated into the official mission statements of governments and international aid organizations (Chambers 2005: 101; Cornwall & Brock: 1046; Williams 2004: 557). By critics the rise of participation in the development discourse during these two decades has been interpreted as the emergence of a *"new orthodoxy in the world of development"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 168).

Robert Chambers - probably the most renown and influential proponent of participatory development - states that,

> "[...] *it was only in the 1990s that* [participation] *entered almost every field of development activity and became a preoccupation on a global scale preached about and promoted by lenders, donors, INGOs* [international NGOs] *and governments alike. By the turn of the century, the words participatory and participation were embedded in development speak"* (Chambers 2005: 101).

For Chambers this process describes nothing less than a paradigm shift in development; a move away from hierarchical top-down procedures to a grassroots oriented and people-centered approach of development (Williams 2004: 560).

But participation in the 1980s did not only mean radical grassroots-orientation and people's empowerment as enunciated by Robert Chambers from an alternative development perspective. Andrea Cornwall identifies two main contrasting versions of participatory development during that decade (Cornwall 2006: 56-57). The more dominant current of participation was influenced and driven by the neo-liberal values of individualism, privatization, and consumerism that characterized the societal and political climate of the Reagan and Thatcher era. It was advocated under the label 'community participation' and materialized primarily in participatory exercises including beneficiaries in pre-designed development projects for mainly instrumental reasons related to project efficiency and cost-sharing (Cornwall 2000: 23-24; Cornwall 2006: 56). In addition to that the populist potentials of participation came once again to the fore. Cornwall states, asserting the similarities to the 1950s discourse of participation, that the development mainstream of the 1980s, highly infused by neo-liberal thinking, came to regard participation as a powerful means to encourage popular support for liberalizing reforms. She suggests that the promotion of participatory development by the World Bank during that time can be explained in

reference to the opportunities that participation *"afforded for countering grassroots resistance to reforms, providing a palliative that served to neutralise popular resistance to liberalising reforms"* (Cornwall 2006: 57). Participatory development again prominently served as a means of containment and control.

In direct contrast to this technocratic approach of development and its instrumental understanding of participation proponents of an alternative development perspective propagated 'people's self-development' as a means through which excluded and marginalized populations could regain self-determined agency in the development process of their societies. This alternative vision of participation advocated a genuine grassroots orientation in contrast to the top-down strategies of mainstream development and placed high importance on the concepts of capacity-building and empowerment as development goals in their own right (Cornwall 2000: 26). This understanding of participation emerged from within an alternative development discourse that had started to assume shape in the 1970s, and pays much credit to the writings of the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1972) and the Latin American movement of popular education (Chambers 2005: 99; Cornwall 2000: 24; Cornwall 2006: 56-57; Jupp & Ali 2010: 31-32).

<u>The 1990s:</u>

The 1990s saw a convergence of 1980s mainstream participation, characterized by the parameters of neo-liberalism, with re-emerging arguments from the 1970s demanding 'popular participation'. The mainstream discourse proposed to move participation beyond the community level to the wider political and economical sphere. The inception of the term 'stakeholder' replacing 'beneficiary' symbolizes this extension of range in participation. The term 'stakeholder' embraces a wider scope of actors within the process of participation, beyond project-'beneficiaries'[3] (Cornwall 2000: 37; Cornwall 2006: 60).

The rhetoric of the participation of civil society became intertwined with the call for further economic liberalization and decentralization. Across wide swathes of

[3] According to World Bank's understanding stakeholders are *"those affected by the outcome - negatively or positively - or those who can affect the outcome of a proposed intervention"* (World Bank 1996, 125). Stakeholders can be government officials, NGOs, the private sector, the poor (formerly referred to as "beneficiaries") as well as the staff of national development agencies or international development institutions like the World Bank (McCracken & Narayan 1998: 4-5).

development discourse ‘popular participation’ was attributed an important role in the transition to market economies and processes of liberalization and privatization (Cornwall 2000: 31-32).

Cornwall asserts that by the early 1990s “*the process of recasting ‘popular participation’ within the parameters of neo-liberal thinking which begun in the 1980s had* [...] *secured its place in the mainstream*” (Cornwall 2006: 59). In this context the access to a free market economy became an essential requirement of ‘popular participation’.

As part of this development the concept of empowerment, popularized in the 1980s by the alternative development school was absorbed by the development mainstream and cleansed from its radical political vibe. Empowerment was re-casted to mean liberation from an interventionist state and a process of enabling people to participate in capitalist economy (Cornwall 2006: 59). Empowerment was often presented as an automatic outcome of simple participation in development projects - of whatever form this participation might be - focused mainly on individual economic gain (Cornwall 2000: 32). Peter Oakley describes this diffusion of empowerment very clearly when he states:

> *“[...] the term ‘empowering’ has come to be very loosely used to describe any development project, process or activities which might have some impact upon people’s abilities to relate to different political and administrative systems; to skills training, management techniques, organisational abilities and so on”* (Oakley 1995 cited in Cornwall 2000: 32).

This understanding of empowerment is emptied of any radical political agenda that aims to genuinely tackle unequal power-relations. The dominant version of empowerment of the 1990s mainstream is de-politicized and de-radicalized as it disregards the analysis as well as the challenging of existing power-relations. Instead it has been economized and adapted to the demands of neo-liberal ideology (Cornwall 2000: 32-33). This version of empowerment stands in contrast with the empowerment that forms an important part of the alternative development school in the 1980s (Cornwall 2000: 33; Friedmann 1992).

This portrait of participation in the 1990s is simplified in the sense that it concentrates very much on what can be conceived as the dominant current of

participation brought forward by mainstream development. This is not meant to suggest that there have been no alternatives to the mainstream understanding of participation or tensions within the mainstream itself. As Cornwall points out in some detail and with reference to original documents, there is evidence that aspects of participation associated with an alternative perspective influenced the perception of major development institutions. Against the tendency of overlooking aspects of power the British Overseas Development Agency (ODA, now DFID) explicitly brought participation in connection with politicized questions of exclusion, rights and control, and with relations of power. And the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) emphasized participation as an end in itself calling it a "democratic right" (Cornwall 2000: 37-40).

<u>The 2000s</u>

In some way one can say that the participatory development discourse of the new century continues to follow the direction of the 1990s: The move of participation from the micro- to the macro-level. This development is in accordance with development cooperation's general concern of shifting emphasis away from projects towards sector programs and macro policy environments which is, for instance, reflected in the inception of Sector Wide Approaches in development cooperation or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Cornwall 2006: 59).

Furthermore, describing somewhat of a departure from the 1990s and 1980s disregard of politics, the discourse of the 2000s reflects the (re-)integration of a political dimension into the mainstream discourse of participation. Cornwall asserts that:

> *"[p]olitics, notably by its absence from participatory development discourses of the 1980s and 1990s, was to make a re-appearance as the turn of the century reconfiguration of the governance agenda recast the boundaries between social and political participation"* (Cornwall 2006: 61, after Gaventa & Valderrama 1999).

The convergence of the social with the political sphere of participation is reflected in the rhetoric pooling of two contrasting positions: the "good governance"-agenda with its emphasis on accountability and democracy on the one hand and *"[...] an increasingly rights-focused articulation of participation as popular engagement in*

making demands of the state, on the other" (Cornwall 2006: 61; after Goetz & Gaventa 2001).

Conclusion

> *"Through the decades the concept of participation in development has had many streams, with flows separating and merging, and new springs coming in"* (Chambers 2005: 99).

It was not the aim of this sub-chapter to provide an exhaustive account on participation's complex and multifaceted history that Robert Chambers calls our attention to. It was my intention however to present a narrative of how participation gradually entered mainstream development discourse and how different decades witnessed the rhetoric emphasis of some meanings of participation over others. From this narrative a pattern emerges from which one can isolate three interrelated tendencies of mainstream participation.

Firstly, mainstream development thinking has a strong tendency to emphasize participation's alleged instrumental values, conceiving it rather as a means than as an end in itself. The application of participatory practices and procedures is very often promoted with reference to enhanced efficiency and cost reductions of development interventions. In some cases the underlying motive referred to participation's usability to serve as an instrument of social control (British colonialism, USA in the 1950s), and in other cases to encourage popular support for political and economic agendas (1980s and 90s neo-liberalism).

Secondly, mainstream participation discourse tends to avoid tackling unequal power-relations within communities or the broader socio-political environment. With exceptions one can state a general absence of a political dimension that emphasizes genuine political transformation for the benefit of the poor.

Cornwall asserts a prevailing disregard of power in mainstream participation over the decades up until now despite a change in rhetoric.

> *"The current recasting of participation within the frameworks of 'empowerment', 'democratic governance', 'rights-based approaches', and 'social accountability' reveals, on closer inspection, little more attention to the underlying causes and power effects of poverty and inequity than in previous incarnations."* (Cornwall 2006: 62)

In connection to that it can, thirdly, be asserted that progressive concepts and ideas coming from the alternative spectrum tend to be whitewashed and stripped of their radical potential as they are co-opted into the vocabulary of mainstream development. This occurred to participation as it "suddenly lost its earlier subversive connotation" (Rahnema 1997) while becoming an acceptable concept of development mainstream.

My quick run through the decades in pursuit of participation illuminated a number of other characteristics of participation's problematic nature as a concept of development.

- Participation is highly elusive and blurry, as it embraces a multiplicity of positions and meanings. As Cornwall puts it, participation is

  > *"[an] infinitely malleable term, [and] can be used to evoke and to signify almost anything that involves people. As such, it can be framed to meet almost any demand made of it."* (Cornwall 2006: 50)

- Participation can be put to use as a vehicle for different kinds of purposes. Although generally harnessed and associated with moral goals, the co-option of participation taking the form of a "trojan horse" is an actual possibility (Rahnema 1997: 167).
- Participation can be conceived as a means or an end in itself. Mainstream development has historically placed more emphasis on participation as a means (as we have seen, for different purposes), whereas the alternative school highlights participation's potential for empowerment as a process in itself (Parfitt 2004).

3. Unraveling Participation

The literature on participation has brought forward several typologies in order to grasp and highlight different forms of participation. These typologies express the multi-dimensionality of the term and take into account its applicability for very different kinds of relationships between actors. Typologies of participation can be conceived as an attempt to bring some (theoretical) order into the bewilderment

surrounding the concept, as well as analytical tools to facilitate the analysis of participatory practices. Typologies are often based on the degree or intensity of participation that takes place in a given "participatory" interaction. They are presented in the form of ladders describing an idealizing gradation of participation. One end of the spectrum contains genuine or optimal forms of participation in which people have control over resources and the power to substantially influence or initiate societal processes reflecting their own interests. The "negative" end of the ladder, usually placed on the lowest rungs, displays forms of nominal participation. They refer to essentially non-participative processes of one-directional top-down interactions between "uppers" and "lowers" (to use with Chambers' terminology) in which the latter are degraded to a passive role of (at best) receiving external information and nodding through directives that have already been decided on by the former ("uppers", external power-holders). An overview and discussion of ladders and typologies of participation is provided by Chambers (2005) and Mikkelsen (2005).

3.1. Typology by Arnstein

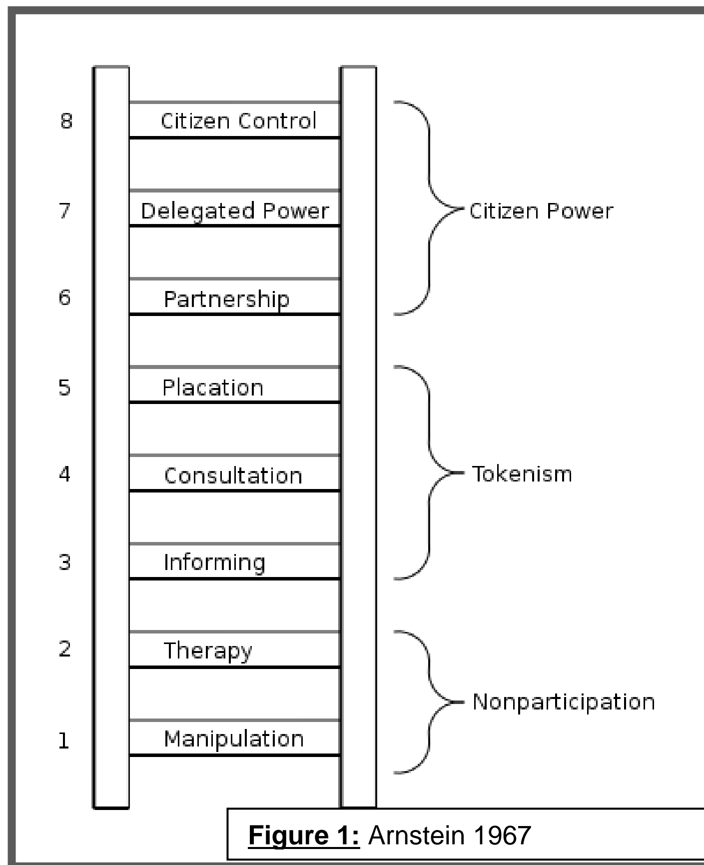

Figure 1: Arnstein 1967

An early example of a participation ladder is provided by Sherry Arnstein's classic article 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' (Arnstein 1967).

For Arnstein "citizen participation" is a "categorical term for citizen power." The most essential aspect of participation is the redistribution of power, without it participation is merely "an empty and frustrating process for the powerless" (Arnstein 1967: 2). Participation is therefore described as a process of power-redistribution aiming to enable the formerly powerless people ("have-nots") to take substantial part in political and economic processes (Arnstein 1967: 1).

Arnstein's ladder is made up of eight rungs, each of them corresponding to the extent of power that the citizens have to influence social, political and economical outcomes. The single rungs are (from below) manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control (Arnstein 1967: 2; see figure 1). The rungs describe three different forms of participation. These are (from below) non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power.

According to Arnstein "real" participation only starts taking place at the level of "partnership". At this stage citizens gain power and are enabled to actually take some kind of influence in the process. "Partnership" is the outcome of a negotiation process between "citizens" and "powerholders" that entails the re-distribution of power and an agreement among the partners to share planning and decision-making responsibilities (Arnstein 1967: 9). The next two rungs, "delegated power" and "citizen control" describe the move from having genuine part in the decision-making

process in a form of partnership to dominating that process, and eventually holding full-managerial power (Arnstein 1967: 10-13).

The three levels of participation under the headline "tokenism" describe a process of information sharing, in which the "uppers" inform the "lowers", and the latter are able to inform the "uppers" ("consultation"). However, the lack of power-redistribution leaves the powerless without any ability to ensure that their views and aspirations have any influence on the process and its outcome. Arnstein argues, *"[w]hen participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no 'muscle,' hence no assurance of changing the status quo"* (Arnstein 1967: 2).

Of special relevance for the case of this thesis is that Arnstein's typology includes forms of "non-participation" which yet appear in disguise of participatory practices. These types of participation, described on the ladder as "manipulation" and "therapy", enable the "powerholders" to remain in total control and determine the outcomes of a given process, while at the same time maintaining an appearance of legitimacy and moral authority by referring to the participation of the people in the process. Indeed manipulative is such a process in the sense that it attempts to give the so-called "participants" the illusion that they have a say in the decision-making process (Arnstein 1967: 4-5). Manipulative forms of participation often make use of committees, advisory groups, and councils which have no legitimate function or power. Such bodies are used to legitimize pre-determined decisions by the "powerholders". Through "education" and "persuasion", for example via selective provision of information or by exploitation of people's unawareness, "powerholders" may "engineer" people's support for decisions and projects which actually run against the citizen's interests. By referring to attendance in committees and signature-lists the "powerholder" displays a "particpatory" process and legitimizes his actions.

As Arnstein puts it "manipulation", the lowest rung in his ladder *"[...] signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders"* (Arnstein 1967: 4).

The second lowest rung labeled "therapy" refers to participation as a mask for "group therapies" and is grounded in a discriminatory assumption that powerlessness and poverty is rooted in the individual itself, in the form of mental illness or some other pathologic characteristic. While engaging "participants" in "extensive activities"

under the pretense of involving them in some planning- or decision-making process the administrators of such practices aim to “cure” the “participants” from their “pathology” (Arnstein 1967: 5). As a common example for this form of participation Arnstein refers to public housing programs where tenant groups are used as vehicles for promoting control-your-child or cleanup campaigns. The reasoning behind the establishment of these groups, however, is to divert the tenants from dealing with issues that might trigger unrest or protest, such as arbitrary evictions, segregation of the housing project, or the existence of bureaucratic hindrances that are of disadvantage for the tenants (Arnstein 1962: 5).

The idea of suppressing (legitimate) protest and the awareness of injustice contained in this level of Arnstein’s ladder calls to mind the insinuated intention underlying the practice of community participation in the 1950s and 1960s of containing and defusing civil unrest. An example of participation as a public relations vehicle can be seen in the use of participatory practices in development projects of the 1980s.

The dimension of manipulation within the concept of participation as a critically concern has been dealt with especially by commentators affiliated to the post-development school. Majid Rahnema argues that in the context of (the already manipulative) mainstream development being mainly concerned with modernization and economic development, *“[...] participation is easily transformed into manipulative designs totally opposed to what the people want it for”* (Rahnema 1997: 158). Within these manipulated, or “teleguided” forms of participation, *“[...] the participants do not feel they are being forced into doing something, but are actually led to take actions which are inspired or directed by centres outside their control”* (Rahnema 1997: 156). Ilan Kapoor (2005) sees the manipulative character of participation inter alia in its tendency to appear open and transparent while obscuring the “real” distribution of power which remains in favor of the development facilitator. He argues that the ostensible renouncement of power (“handing over the stick”) in participatory community practices, such as PRA, by the development practitioner has the effect of increasing his or her power. He asserts that,

“[p]retending to step down from power and privilege [...] is a reinforcement, not a diminishment, of such power and privilege” (Kapoor 2005: 1207).
These critical elaborations will be continued and deepened in chapter IV.

3.2. Typology by Pretty et al.

Typology	Characteristics of Each Type
1.Passive Participation	People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals
2. Participation in Information Giving	People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. People do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings of the research are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.
3. Participation by Consultation	People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views. These external professionals define both problems and solutions, and may modify these in the light of people's responses. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4. Participation for Material Incentives	People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Much on-farm research falls into this category, as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in the experimentation of the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.
5.Functional Participation	People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organisation. Such involvement does not tend to be at early stages of project cycles or planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but may become self-dependent.
6. Interactive Participation	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. These groups take control over local decisions, and so people have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7.Self-Mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated mobilisation and collective action may or may not challenge existing inequitable distribution of wealth and power.

Figure 2: Pretty et al. 1995.

Another and widely used typology of participation that I want to present and elaborate is the one developed by Pretty et al (1995). It is based on experiences in rural development projects and research and was designed with its application in practical development work in mind. The described forms of participation can also be understood as possible stages of participation within a project cycle. The seven types of participation that constitute this typology are (from below, least participatory): passive participation, participation in information giving, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilization (Pretty et al. 1995). In the following I will describe the different types in more detail. (1) The form of participation at the very bottom of the participatory intensity scale describes a unilateral top-down approach of information sharing. The people participate in that they receive information on decisions that usually already have been taken by the "powerholder" (administration or project management). People are not given the chance to contribute or take influence. (2) The next level on the scale describes a slight improvement of the participatory process as people are now included in information gathering, as they are subjected to questionnaires and surveys. The whole procedure, from focus of inquiry and generation of questions over to the analysis of data and its validation lies out of the people's reach. (3) Participation by consultation describes a form in which "powerholder" consult people to find out about their opinion. On the basis of the extracted information the "powerholders" might modify their pre-defined problems and solutions; they are, however, under no obligation to do so. Furthermore, the consultative process does not entail any share in decision-making. (4) "Participation for material incentives" means the utilization of people's labor or assets in development projects. In return the people are given food, money or other commodities. This form of participation, although incorporating people in a process by animating their contribution, does not subscribe any kind of decision-making power to the people. (5) Functional participation includes the formation of social groups and committees through which people participate to achieve predetermined goals. Although the groups are usually dependent on external initiations and facilitators they might become self-dependent. According to Cornwall (referring to Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger, 1996) this is probably the most common type of participation in development. Its underlying rationality is the increase of project

efficiency and cost-reduction (Cornwall 2008: 271). (6) In the stage of "interactive participation" people gain control over local decisions as a result of systematic and structured learning processes and their participation in joint analysis (together with the development agency) and formulation of action plans that lead to the constitution of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. The people have a stake in maintaining structures or practices. (7) The highest level of participation according to Pretty et al. is labeled "self-mobilization" and is characterized by the independence of people from external actors to initiate projects or processes of change through collective action "in systems". The role of external agencies is to provide aid by through resources and technical advice, while the people retain full control over the use of these resources. Cornwall argues that "self-mobilization" was, and partly still is, the "nirvana" of participation in the 1980s and 1990s, which was still mainly conceived and practiced in the context of development projects and community development instead of comprehensive programs incorporating wider civil society and the government which have been increasingly promoted around the turn of the 21th century (Cornwall 2008: 270). However, interesting is that Pretty et al. leave open if this type of participation challenges existing inequity of wealth and power. Unlike Sherry Arnstein, Pretty et al do not emphasize transformation of unequal power-structures as a normative objective of or end goal of participation.

3.3. Typology by Bhatnagar & Williams

A typology similar yet less differentiated to the one proposed by Pretty et al. was put forward by Bhatnagar and Williams for the World Bank in 1992. The typology explicitly refers to degrees of participation within "Bank-supported operations" and distinguishes between four levels of intensity in participation. The authors furthermore clarify that different degrees of participation might co-exist in World Bank-supported operations (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 178-179). The four different intensity levels of participation are described as (from below): information sharing, consultation, decision-making, and initiating action. I will elaborate the four levels individually.

(1) *Information sharing,* the first stage of the typology is described as a "form of low-level participation", in which designers and managers of Bank-supported operations "may" share information with beneficiaries. This process is perceived as having a positive impact on projects as it facilitates collective or individual action and "equips people to understand and perform their tasks better" (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 178-179). The sharing of information which remains under total control of the external project manager or agency in regards of what kind and if at all information is provided to beneficiaries (designers and managers "may share information") is already conceived as a process of positive participation. The potential of manipulation that lies within this interpretation is not taken into consideration.

(2) The level of intensity of participation increases when people are not only informed but consulted on "key issues". *Consultation* provides the people with the opportunity to voice their opinion and to give feedback to the development agency. However the people have no assurance whatsoever that their opinions or comments will have any influence on project implementation. As formulated by the authors the agency "can" take the people's feedback into account, implying that this is without guarantee of actually happening (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 179).

(3) *Decision-making* signifies the next higher level of participation. It describes a stage in which people "have a decision-making role in matters of policy, project design, and implementation" (Bhatnagar &Williams 1992: 179).

(4) The "peak" of participation is reached with *initiating action*. It describes a stage in which especially disadvantaged people *"are able to take the initiative in terms of actions and decisions pertaining to a Bank-supported operation."* The authors define "initiative" as *"a proactive capacity and the confidence to get going on one's own"*, instead of only acting or deciding on issues that are brought forward to one by the external development agency (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 179).

Just like Pretty et al. and Kanji & Greenwood the typology provided by Bhatnagar & Williams does not understand the transformation of power-structures as a necessary goal of participation. A possible empowering effect of participation is primarily perceived as remaining within the boundaries of the "Bank-supported operation" which are defined by the external implementation agency or the World Bank itself.

The typology by Bhatnagar & Williams has to be seen in context of what objectives the World Bank subscribes to participation in development interventions. Bhatnagar

& Williams list as possible objectives of participation *empowerment*, *beneficiary capacity*, *effectiveness*, *cost-sharing*, and *efficiency*.

As the authors make clear, however, *Empowerment,* understood as a *"more equitable sharing of power and a higher level of political awareness and strength for disadvantaged people"* is not pursued as an end in itself within the World Bank development activities (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 177-178). The most important result of a development activity that is guided by the objective of empowerment might be the *"development of people's capacity to initiate actions on their own or influence decisions of more powerful actors"* (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 178).

More attention than to political and social empowerment is paid to the aspects *effectiveness*, referring to the degree to which a given objective is achieved, *cost-sharing* with the beneficiaries, and *project efficiency*, meaning an improved cost-output relationship, as well as building *beneficiary capacity* in relation to the project, which might enable people to take a share in management tasks of an operation (Bhatnagar &Williams 1992: 178). Generally these objectives refer to an instrumental understanding of participation.

Instrumental / Transformational

The single typologies themselves as well as compared to one another relate to the question whether participation is understood as a means (of development) or an end (of development) in itself. Participation as a means, referred to as **instrumental participation**, emphasizes concerns regarding effectiveness and efficiency of a development intervention in reaching its goal, whereas the goal can be the improvement of a service delivery system or the extraction of popular support for economic reforms. Instrumental participation tends to be politically neutral and as it usually does not touch existing power structures.

Participation as an end in itself, referred to as **transformational participation**, focuses on the genuine empowerment of people. Participation is understood as a process of transformation of existing unequal power-structures, which are perceived as crucial causes of poverty in the first place (Mikkelsen 2005: 38; Parfitt 2004: 538).

3.4. Interests in Participation - White 1996

As participation can take on various forms it is generally able to serve many different interests. Some suggestions regarding motives and interests underlying different forms of participation have already been made on basis of the three typologies elaborated on above. In this part I will provide some more elaboration on the dimension of interests and add them to the dimension of degrees. Identifying and distinguishing different interests and motivations is important for understanding and assessing participation, especially when analysis is based on a normative understanding of the concept.

Sarah C. White (1996) provides a matrix which displays the connection between forms of participation with interests and expectations from two perspectives, the top-down perspective of development agencies (designers and implementers), and the bottom-up perspective of people participating in the given participatory action. Her matrix is completed by a column characterizing the overall function of each type of participation (see figure 3).

Whereas the typologies of Pretty et al. and Bhatnagar & Williams are rather a-political, paying little or no attention to power-structures, White brings a sharp political edge into her typology, by drawing attention to the importance of power-structures in shaping participatory processes.

Interests in Participation (**Figure 3:** White 1996)			
Form	Top-Down (interests and expectations)	Bottom-Up (interests and expectation)	Functions
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

However, typologies only display ideal types, and have the tendency to display the different groups of actors (development organization and people/community) as homogenous units and to de-politicize participation. In order to avoid that White

complements her matrix with a graphic that takes into account the dynamics of different interests, forms and functions competing with each other in a single development intervention. It acknowledges that individuals within groups will most probably have different interests and expectations regarding a given project. One participatory project can also serve different functions, while giving the participants a voice in project implementation, or even empowering them in a broader social aspect participation will most probably also serve the function of display without being only a nominal form of participation. The politics of development cooperation will also lead to actors presenting their interests and participatory form of their projects differently to different actors. An implementing NGO in the South might put more emphasis on transformation when reporting to its radical Northern funder whose dominant interest lies in empowerment, while at the same time stressing the instrumental form of participation while pointing to improved efficiency when dealing with the local elite and national government (White 1996: 11).

White also stresses the fact that the character of participation within a project will typically change over time. The intensity of participation, for example, may fall or rise during the project period. The form of participation may decrease from being representative to being nominal, or, in the positive sense, it can step up from being representative to transformative (White 1996: 11).

Conflicts in projects are likely to emerge along the dimension of interests in participation, especially considering the many tiers within international development, from donor governments and international development organizations over national governments and agencies to implementing NGOs and participating locals. The interest of the national government in participation might lie dominantly in legitimizing a project to meet to donor's requirements, perceiving participation mainly as a nominal exercise. In contrast to that the NGO-staff in charge of implementing the project or the people participating in it might have a genuine interest in gaining a leverage to influence the project design and management. White asserts, however, that it is not always the top-down interests that prevail. Rather optimistically she argues that participation, in whatever understanding it might be encouraged by the development organization, has always the potential to be "co-

opted from below", and be re-casted by the participants into a "higher" form of representative or even transformational participation (White 1996: 12).

White makes another interesting point when she argues that intentional non-participation by people who are encouraged to participate can sometimes be *"the most empowering option"* (White 1996: 12). Participation is not always in the interest of those who are being encouraged to participate; it depends on the context, the type of participation, and the terms on which it is offered. In a more negative formulation it means that participation can be disempowering. In a nominal or even instrumental form the participatory practice can divert people from the issues that (should) really matter to them. The manipulative aspect of participation and its disempowering effects is especially stressed by Arnstein, and is also suggested by Cornwall referring to the co-option of participation for reasons of control and disencouraging protest and, in another case, for generating support for neo-liberal reforms.

The final dynamic elaborated by White is the one that refers to the role of power in the construction of interests. As the graphic symbolizes, interests of both top-down and bottom up actors are shaped by two dimensions. First, the interests driving the participation process *"are not just 'there', but reflect the power relations in wider society"* (White 1992: 12). Second, these interests not only shape the process of participation but are also informed and re-shaped by the experience of this process itself; positive experiences might encourage the participants and increase their motivation and ability to discover new opportunities for action. Negative experiences might have the opposite effect, in that the people might lose faith in the project leading to their decreased, or only nominal, participation.

3.5. Discussion

All of the above presented typologies describe a gradual move from a situation in which the processes are controlled by external authorities (powerholders, experts, development agencies, international institutions) to one in which the people (citizens, have-nots, beneficiaries, disadvantaged people) who were previously without control gain control over these processes. However, comparing Sherry Arnstein's ladder of

citizen participation with the typologies of participation in development some interesting differences come to light. For example the intensity of the highest level of participation in the typology of Arnstein is higher than the in the highest level of the other typologies. Also is her normative view on participation more pronounced.

Both the typologies of Bhatnagar & Williams and Pretty et al. present participation primarily as an instrumental concept, paying little or no attention to the dimension of transformation and genuine political and social empowerment.

The highest degree of participation in the typology of Bhatnagar & Williams is not envisioned to cross the boundaries of the development intervention which might be, after all, highly determined by the external development agency. *Initiating action* basically means initiating action within the World Bank-supported program. Effectiveness and overall cost-reduction are emphasized as objectives of participation.

The typology of Pretty et al. leaves the question open whether participation will lead to a process of transformation, as *"self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power"* (Pretty et al. 1995). Participation in this stage remains potentially open for co-option by external actors. As Cornwall notes, *"local self mobilization may be actively promoted by the state and international agencies as part of efficiency goals that are entirely consistent with a neoliberal approach to development"* (Cornwall 2008: 271).

Unlike Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation the typologies of Pretty et al. and Bhatnagar & Williams do not tie transformation and political empowerment as normative goals to the concept of participation. This lets both typologies seem far less political and normative than the one provided by Arnstein which has a radical and explicitly normative tone to it. Arnstein places high importance on the aspect of power and power-relationships. Her understanding of citizen control describes a degree of participation which entails the transformation of an unequal distribution of power which is perceived as a cause for poverty and social exclusion and a process in which people regain "power over live" (Arnstein 1967).

Interesting about Arnstein's typology is furthermore that it explicitly acknowledges illegitimate forms of participation in contrast to legitimate forms, and the possibility that forms of manipulative non-participation is disguised behind a participatory veneer. Pretty et al. and Bhatnagar & Williams do not make any comments on

illegitimacy and legitimacy. They are merely implicitly normative in that they suggest a progression from lower to higher degrees of participation.

However, whereas the types of *informing* and *consultation* within Arnstein's ladder, for example, are described as *tokenism* due to the absence of genuine power in the hands of the people and the potential of these forms to merely serve as a participatory window-dressing, Bhatnagar & Williams present *information* and *consultation* as legitimate forms of participation. The World Bank even equates the provision of information with empowerment (Cornwall 2008: 70). It is quite obvious that there are different understandings of the nature of participation and what it should achieve, are underlying the different typologies.

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation provides for a more critical (and normative) analysis of participation than do the presented typologies that refer specially to participation in development. Arnstein distinguishes between illegitimate and legitimate forms of participation and draws attention to the potential of manipulation through participation. Pretty et al. as well as Bhatnagar & Williams pay no attention to that aspect and present all forms of participation as legitimate and in essence positive. Taking a closer and critical look at the two typologies one can identify potential entry-points for manipulative behavior in virtually every described form of participation. Problematic is, that this aspect is not sufficiently acknowledged and discussed within the typologies. This might be connected with the ideological and institutional origin of the authors. The potential of manipulation existent within participatory development practices and approaches is mainly addressed by commentators from the post-development school.

	White	Arnstein	Arnstein	Pretty et al.	Bhatnagar & Williams
	Forms	Forms	Levels	Levels	Levels
	Transformative Representative Instrumental		Citizen Control	?	?
	Representative Transformative Instrumental	Citizen Power	Delegated Power	Self-Mobilization	
			Partnership	Interactive Participation	
	Representative Instrumental Transformative				
				Functional Participation	Initiating Action
	Instrumental Representative Transformative		Placation		Decision Making
	Instrumental Nominal Representative	Tokenism		P. by Material Incentives	
			Consultation	P. by Consultation	Consultation
	Nominal Instrumental			P. in Information Giving	
			Informing		
	Nominal Instrumental	Non-Participation	Therapy	Passive Participation	Information Sharing
			Manipulation		

Figure 4: Combined Typology (based on the typologies by White 1996; Arnstein 1967; Pretty et al. 1995; Bhatnagar & Williams 1992.

4. Mapping Participation's Manipulative Potential

In this thesis I argue that participatory approaches to development harbor significant manipulative potential. I speak of "manipulative potential" because I do not intend to claim that participation in development *automatically* means the manipulation of "beneficiaries" by development agencies. So, although I do agree with Cooke and Kothari to some extend - in that I argue that participation *can* be a form of tyrannical subjection - I do not wish to follow their demand to abandon participation as a development approach completely (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 15).

The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following definition for the term manipulation:

> *"The action or an act of managing or directing a person, etc., esp. in a skilful manner; the exercise of subtle, underhand, or devious influence or control over a person, organization, etc.; interference, tampering."*

On the basis of this definition I argue that participatory development can serve as a vehicle to exercise influence in a skillful manner aiming to achieve control over an individual or a group of individuals to manage or direct their development (including behavior and thoughts). "Skillful manner" refers to the subtlety of the process leaving the subject of manipulation unaware of the fact he is manipulated.

The argument that participation in development can serve as a method of manipulation is based on some interrelated aspects characterizing the concept and its surrounding discourse.

- Participation is widely perceived as inherently "good" and committed to the achievement of desirable and moral goals - it seldom comes to mind that its application *"may apply to evil or malicious purposes"* (Rahnema 1997: 155).
- Participation is a powerful source of legitimization due to its high moral status in the development discourse.
- Participation can easily be co-opted in behalf of different interests and intentions due to its conceptual flexibility and theoretical weakness (Cornwall 2000; Hickey & Mohan 2005).
- The mainstream development discourse does not acknowledge participation's manipulative potential.

- Participation is largely ignorant towards factors of politics and power in development as well as in its own participatory processes (Williams 2004).
- Participatory practices and methods provide a platform for subtle influence and persuasion - due to participatory processes being pervaded (and remaining pervaded) by unequal power-structures and the fact that this is little acknowledged (Kapoor 2005).

Especially the last two arguments are central points of the *de-politicization critique* against participation. This critique holds a prominent place with the more fundamental critiques of participation (Cooke & Kothari 2001), but has also been formulated by practitioners reflecting critically on their field experiences (Williams 2004: 558). In a nutshell, the de-politicization critique claims that *"participatory development has often failed to engage with issues of power and politics and has become a technical approach to development that, in various ways, depoliticizes what should be an explicitly political process"* (Hickey & Mohan 2004: 4).

In the following chapter I will provide an account of Cooke and Kothari's critique of participation as a form of tyranny in order to give more theoretical backing to my argument of participation's inherent manipulative potential. I will furthermore introduce three concepts that together will constitute the central analytical framework of this thesis.

4.1. The Power of Participation as a Discourse

The discourse of participation itself has grown to be very powerful within the context of development. As already elaborated in chapter III.2 the concept of participation has long entered and deeply rooted itself within the development mainstream. Even the big international organizations, such as the World Bank have incorporated participation into their vocabulary and promote it as central to development, even presenting it as a condition for funding of development projects. On the level of rhetoric and official declarations of development organizations as well as governments, development without participation is not an option any more.

The concept of participation receives its power from the general perception that is ascribed to it as being a “good” and “moral” approach to development that has replaced the traditional - and in tendency neo-colonial - top-down oriented development processes that dominated in the decades after the Second World War. Within the mainstream development discourse participation holds substantial moral authority (Cornwall & Brock 2005: 1043; Rahnema 1997: 155).

However, it is important to critically reflect and question this high status. As demonstrated in chapters III.1-3, a critical investigation of the concept uncovers its highly elusive character and its lack of specificity. Beyond the definition of participation as *“having or forming part of something”* (Oxford dictionary) the concept of participation in development embraces many different meanings. Subjecting the definitions presented by different development actors to critical analysis brings to light subtle yet important differences in the understanding and importance ascribed to concepts of empowerment and transformation in participatory approaches. These differences relate to the means-end dichotomy, the question whether participation is mainly understood and applied in an instrumental manner to enhance efficiency and sustainability of a given intervention or if it aims towards empowerment in the sense of genuine social transforming (Parfitt 2004). These differences in understandings, however, are overshadowed, or one might say masked and hidden, by the unison promotion of participation as a “moral” and “good” approach to development interlinked with the promise of empowerment. As a result of this participation can come to serve development agencies in legitimizing development interventions of very different kind. In this sense participation bears the potential of manipulative misuse, as it can serve as a vehicle to legitimize interventions that are essentially top-down, controlled by the donor or development organization, and are guided by interests ranging from enhancing project efficiency, engineering support for certain kinds of reforms, or even containing of social unrest.

Furthermore, the moral authority that participation claims in the development discourse might contribute to the prevention of closer and critical attention to the actual implementation of practices as long as these are convincingly presented as participatory.

Both Majid Rahnema (1997) and Ilan Kapoor (2005) argue that the assimilation of participation into the development mainstream served to neutralize critique against

the dominating discourse and practice of development that especially emanated from alternative perspectives of development. Kapoor refers to this rehabilitative function of participation in arguing that participatory development *"[...] has become a kind of development with a clear conscience"* (Kapoor 2005: 1206). He emphasizes participation's high moral status within the development discourse in asserting that participation's *"*[...] *'empowerment' dimension* [...] *gives it an almost sublime character, so that it has come to be associated with a series of seemingly incontestable maxims:* [participatory development] *is naturally progressive, community participation is inherently good, championing PD is blameless and honourable"* (Kapoor 2005: 1206).

It is important to note therefore that the concept of participation can not only be conceived as a powerful vehicle for legitimizing single development interventions, but also for legitimizing the idea of development and development cooperation as such (Rahnema: 1997).

4.2. Nominal and Instrumental Participation

The combined typology (figure 4) helps in pinpointing when, in the sense of in which forms, participation in development can be seen as especially prone to manipulative misuse. Spaces and possibilities for manipulative misuse are seemingly most obviously provided by forms of participation that White (1996) terms as "nominal" and "instrumental". "Nominal" refers to participation as a rhetorical device that is tagged onto development interventions which might make use of some "participatory" alibi measures in order to make the whole operation seem authentically participatory. The dominating underlying interest of agencies in such a form of "participation" is to legitimize development interventions and to meet the demands of donors to access funds. While serving as a legitimization device for the development agency they might also provide the "participants" with a feeling of inclusion into the processes (see figure 3). One rank above the "nominal" sphere "instrumental" forms of participation can be conceived as describing processes that aim to extract some sort of contribution from the people in order to make the project more effective, for example via utilizing low-cost labor-power (White 1996: 8) or making use of local knowledge where it seems to further the pre-determined goals of

the project. In Arnstein's (1967) terms "nominal" as well as "instrumental" forms of participation will most likely not move beyond the levels of "non-participation" and "tokenism", which in Arnstein's normative understanding do not reflect legitimate forms of participation (see figure 1).

So within the normative framework symbolized by the combined typology the participatory types of "information sharing" and "consultation" in the typology of Bhatnagar & Williams (1992) are likely to serve mainly nominal and instrumental purposes. The authors themselves describe these types of participation as processes of unilateral information-sharing and forms of consultation in which the parameters of conduct as well as the decision-making power remains completely in the hands of the agency (Bhatnagar & Williams 1992: 178-179). Furthermore, on the ground of WB's intentions behind the promotion of participation which are mainly directed at improving effectiveness and cost-reduction and do not include transformation as an end in itself, even the types of "decision-making" as well as to some considerable extend the highest degree of participation "initiating action" have to be conceived mainly as instrumental.

"Nominal" and "instrumental" forms of participation have in general little in common with participation understood as a transformational process in which affected people - the participants - are granted some sort of substantial role in the decision-making process of both design and implementation of the development project. Measures utilized for participatory window-dressing in the context of nominal participation may include the inception of advisory committees or community groups in which people are provided with a feeling of inclusion, of being part in something, while in reality being pawns (Arnstein 1967). Collected signatures of "participants" or attendance sheets of group meetings may be produced to "prove" the participatory nature of the project. Cursory PRA exercises may serve the same purpose of display.

Trevor Parfitt argues that for various types of development agencies it seems to be a common pattern "[...] *to adopt PRA in name so that they can claim to be participatory, only to try and institutionalise it as part of their existing top-down procedures"* (Parfitt 2004: 546-547). Using PRA as a way of displaying participation is accommodated by the fact that participation in development is by some perceived

as equivalent to PRA, whereas it should be clear that the multiple activities subsumed under the PRA-headline reflect only one set among many methods and procedures of participatory development (Chambers 2005: 100). PRA as a participatory veneer for essentially top-down development projects is quite convenient as it can be utilized as a clearly delimited product serving to claim a participatory approach without actually having to confront any challenges or risks connected with true transformation of power-structures and empowerment outside of the pre-defined boundaries of a project (Parfitt 2004). Also David Mosse suggests the usability of PRA as a nominal participatory exercise aming to legitimize pre-determined development interventions. He asserts that "[...] *not infrequently, programme decisions take place with little reference to locally produced knowledge at all. PRA charts and diagrams provide attractive wall decorations, making public statements about participatory intentions, legitimizing decisions already made - in other words symbolizing good decision-making without influencing it"* (Mosse 2001: 23).

Instrumental participation is generally technocratic and problem-solving in character and not concerned with underlying socio-economic and political structures and the re-distribution of power. Participation in an instrumental understanding primarily intends to to improve effectiveness and efficiency of a project, and often appears as a *"[...] managerial exercise based on 'toolboxes' of procedures and techniques"* (Cleaver 2001: 53). Parfitt points out that, in such kind of interventions, *"[t]he role of those mobilized to participate will simply be to rally around to work for the predetermined goals of the project. Power-relations remain traditionally top-down"* (Parfitt 2004: 540).

Framed in the normative typology of Arnstein both "nominal" as well as "instrumental" participation are conceived as forms of "non-participation" and "tokenism", as there is no moment of power-transfer to the people affected by the development intervention. Interestingly enough these categories contain numerous practices utilized by development agencies that are labeled participation without being participatory in the understanding that underlies this thesis. Indeed most types of participation indentified by Pretty et al. (1995) have to be, taking Arnstein's ladder as a yardstick, considered "non-participatory" or "tokenistic". The types of participation presented by Bhatnagar & Williams (1992), reflecting WB's understanding of the concept, lie almost completely in the sphere of "non-

participation" and "tokenism", or have to be interpreted in White's terminology as "nominal" and "instrumental" forms of participation. Hence, if we view the types of participation within the typology of Pretty et al. and Bhatnagar & Williams in the light of our normative understanding informed by an alternative development approach and the ladder of Sherry Arnstein, most of the envisioned forms of participation exemplified in two sources within the development discourse do not even qualify as legitimate participation, but rather as illegitimate participation, using Arnstein's terms (1967).

The problem is not that the described processes of information sharing and consultation, the inception of community groups, or the cost- and labor-sharing between development organization and people is per se a bad thing; the problem is that mainstream development tends to sell this as (genuine) participation, harnessing (often traditional top-down) development interventions with the moral and ethical armor that participation as a concept of development provides. As mentioned before, problematic is the concept itself in its elusiveness and capability of including almost an endless array of different development practices that have in reality little to do with the noble ideas of "empowerment" and "emancipation" that the concept of participation comes along with in the development discourse.

The previous discussion as well as the combined typology demonstrates that development agencies may adopt several "illegitimate" types of "participation" subsumed under Arnstein's and White's categories "non-participation" and "tokenism" and "nominal" and "instrumental" participation, and yet are able to claim their development interventions as being participatory, while they are not.
The participants in those kinds of interventions become pawns in a game called participatory development that mainly serves the purpose of legitimizing the agency's development project and/or the increase in efficiency. At the same time the control over the project remains safe and sound in the hands of the agency.

The participatory pretense provided in "nominal" and "instrumental" forms of participation can harbor multiple possibilities for manipulative processes. Participants do not receive any substantial share in the design and implementation of

the project, and yet they are given the feeling to be included into the process and to actually have some sort of influence in what is happening. But in reality the whole operation is pre-determined. Via the selective provision of information and the conduct of some meaningless activities under the pretense of PRA for example, the development agency is able to manipulate the people into believing that the intervention is actually in their own interest and might even be depending on their participation under which development agencies and project organizers can pursue a manifold of different interests.

Now does this mean that participation conducted by the World Bank is always manipulative as it has to be conceived as mainly "instrumental" or "nominal"? Furthermore, is manipulation automatically inherent in the four types of participation at the bottom of Pretty et al.'s (1995) typology, as those as well have to be considered as non-participatory or tokenistic in the framework of the combined typology.

Processes subsumed under the categories of "non-participation" and "tokenism" are - of course - not automatically processes of manipulation. I did not intend to insinuate that. But it is problematic, and indeed somewhat deceitful, that the development discourse tends to sell these types as participation. According to Kapoor who refers to the definition of ideology by philosopher Slavoj Žižek, participation in the above context is then a *"'lie which pretends to be taken seriously'"* (Žižek 1980: 30, cited in Kapoor 2005: 1207), a lie that, as I argued above, provides actors of development with a moral authority that legitimizes action, prevent criticism and serves as a shield under which a manifold of different interests can be pursued.

The manipulative potential of participation is directly linked to and rooted in its missing concern with issues of power and politics. The types of participation subsumed in the combined typology under the categories "nominal" and "instrumental" neither conceive genuine power-redistribution within the intervention (meaning a genuine turn from top-down to bottom-up) nor a transformation of unequal power-structures within the community or society as a central aspect of participation. Empowerment as social and political transformation is not a central

concern in these types of participation, even though they might harness themselves with "empowerment" rhetoric.

I argue that where participation in development is not firmly embedded in a normative and theoretically informed framework and connected to a genuine commitment for empowerment and transformation via re-distribution of power the space for manipulative misuse remains wide open. This position is also held by Sam Hickey and Giles Mohan who see the lack of a *"strong theoretical basis"* in mainstream participatory approaches as a reason for their tendency to be *"easily co-opted within disempowering agendas"* (Hickey & Mohan 2005: 238). They suggest the (re-)conceptualization of participation *"in terms of an expanded and radicalized understanding of citizenship"* within a *critical modernist* approach to development (Hickey & Mohan 2005: 238). Similar attempts to recover the concept of participation from its a-political and in effect disempowering character via re-imagination in a radical political perspective are undertaken by Williams (2004) and Kapoor (2005).

Prevailing top-down procedures in development interventions are tried to be overcome by attempts to improve participatory practices, especially by paying attention to the skills of the individual development worker. Participation in development is thus seen depending on the right set of "participatory" attitudes and behaviors of the so-called "development facilitator" (Chambers 2005).

IV Theoretical Framework - Participation as Manipulation

1. Participation as Tyranny

One of the central arguments in this thesis is that participation in development harbors a significant potential for manipulative misuse. This claim is inspired by the provocative idea of participation being a form of 'tyrannical' subjection. This radical critique runs as a red line through the analyses compiled in Bill Cooke's and Uma Kothari's book entitled *Participation. The New Tyranny?* (2001). According to editors and contributors the tyranny of participatory development is the result of participation's systemic failure (or intended neglect) to critically address issues of power. Cooke and Kothari argue that *"the proponents of participatory development have generally been naive about the complexities of power and power relations"* (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 14). Translated into participatory development practice this naivety acts both to conceal as well as reinforce oppressions and injustices based on unequal power-relations (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 13).

In this critically context participation's promise of empowerment stands in question. Indeed *The New Tyranny* suggests that participatory development more often than not results in the disempowerment of the already marginalized rather than their empowerment (e.g. Cooke 2001; Kothari 2001; Henkel & Stirrat 2001). Henkel and Stirrat assert that the empowerment that participation in development attempts to achieve *"might not be so straightforwardly liberating as it appears"*. Instead they argue that what is called empowerment in the mainstream discourse of participation *"might be in effect very similar to what Michel Foucault calls 'subjection'"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 178). This subjection is conceived as the attempt of participatory development to integrate its beneficiaries into modern structures (political, economical, and ideological) that the concerned people have very little control over (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 183). What the people in this context are 'empowered' for is *"to be elements in the great project of 'the modern'"*; as rational citizens in the modern state, as consumers in the global market, participants in the labor market etc. (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 182).

In accordance with Henkel and Stirrat's argumentation Uma Kothari claims that the inclusion of people into the development process via participatory approaches

acts to disempower them "*to challenge the prevailing hierarchies and inequalities in society"* (Kothari 2001: 143). She identifies the tyranny of participation in *"the very act of inclusion, of being drawn in as a participant"* (Kothari 2001: 142). This argument - control via inclusion - is reminiscent of Sherry Arnstein's account on the manipulative effects of illegitimate participation discussed in chapter 3.1. We have furthermore seen a historical example of participation as a form of control in the practice of community development in the 1950s and 1960s (see chapter III.2).

The critique of participation in *The New Tyranny* is fundamental. The editors are determined to move beyond the internal critique which is preoccupied with technical limitations of participation's methodology to *"more fundamental critiques of the discourse of participation"* (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 7). They target the very theoretical basis of participation in asserting that "*participatory development's tyrannical potential is systemic, and not merely a matter of how the practitioner operates or the specificities of the techniques and tools employed."* The aim of critique is to "*address more directly how the discourse* [of participation] *itself, and not just the practice, embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power*" (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 4).[4]

In their introduction the editors highlight four main themes that they identified as emerging from the corpus of critique in the *The New Tyranny*. These main themes refer to (a) the *"naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behavior in participatory processes"*; (b) the way how the discourse of empowerment masks the development actor's actual instrumental interests in managerialist

[4] The vast critique of participation in development can be divided into internal critique and fundamental critique. Internal critique is generally formulated by proponents of participation and focuses primarily on technical and practical problems within participation's methodology. It stresses the need for a continuously re-examination of participatory tools as well as a constant critical self-awareness of the participatory development practitioner. Individual attitudes and behaviors are deemed great importance. However internal critique does not fundamentally question the concept of participation and its associated benefits. Fundamental critique (as found in Cooke & Kothari 2001) focuses to greater extend on the *"theoretical, political and conceptual limitations of participation"* (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 5). Fundamental critics argue that the promise of empowerment is a misrepresentation of participation's actual effects which tend to materialize rather in forms of subjection, control and manipulation. However, it should be mentioned, that some perceived problems of participation that play a big role in the analyses of the fundamental critiques have also been identified and acknowledged by critics who do not question participation in its substance. These shared concerns include the simplistic notion of 'the community' (Guijt & Shah 1998) as well as the danger of participation being co-opted by actors following agendas which do not seek the empowerment of the poor (see for example Chambers 1997). The difference between internal and fundamental critics is that the latter conceive the disempowering and manipulative potentials of participation as a systemic problem, while the previous regard it more as a matter of good or bad practice and further research.

effectiveness; (c) *"the quasi religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice"*; and (d) *"how an emphasis on the micro-level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice"* (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 13-14).

Especially the claim of a religious dimension in participatory development is of interest for the analysis of this thesis and the investigation of the problem formulation. This theme will therefore find more attention in chapter IV.3.

Cooke and Kothari furthermore identify three sets of tyrannies inherent in participatory development discourse and practice: (a) the tyranny of decision-making and control; (b) the tyranny of the group; and (c) the tyranny of method (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 7-8). These tyrannical forms can all be seen as results - in one form or the other - of the asserted failure of participation to adequately address complex power-relations. In the following I will give an account on two of the three tyrannies; tyranny of the group and tyranny of decision-making and control.

1.1. Tyranny of the group - the idealization of the community

The perceptions and tendencies within participation that ultimately come to constitute the tyranny of the group are well summarized by Williams:

> "[…] *by homogenising differences within communities, and uncritically privileging 'the local' as the site for action, far too many accounts of participatory development are in danger of actively de-politicising development. They draw a veil over repressive structures (of gender, class, caste and ethnicity) that operate at the micro-scale but are reproduced beyond it and, by emphasising 'the community' as the site where authentic development can occur, they direct attention away from wider power relationships that frame local development problems*" (Williams 2004: 562).

It is the de-politicization of development by participation – apparent in its failure to take into account local power differences and its idealization of 'the community' - that eventually leads to the *tyranny of the group*.

Participatory discourse tends to present the poor rural community as a defined and homogenous entity, often set in spacial (and moral) opposition to the industrialized and powerful urban 'North'[5]. The 'community' is furthermore treated as the primary site of empowerment to occur. It is argued that this de-politicized understanding disregards the messy reality of unequal power-relations within local communities and acts to perpetuate and deepen existing disempowering social and economic structures (e.g. Guijt & Shah 1998; Mohan & Stokke 2000; Mohan 2001). Williams asserts that the *"uncritical celebration of 'the community'"* obscures local power-structures, which are very often characterized by patron-client relationships (Williams 2004: 561). Participatory methodologies, especially PRA, have the tendency to conceal intra-community divisions (e.g. gender or economic-wise) due to their pre-occupation to present the outcomes of their participatory inquiry as community consensus. The presentation of local knowledge as authentic and consensual disavows the fact that this knowledge itself is a product of local power-relations and will most likely reflect the views of the more powerful and influential individuals in the community. According to Mohan and Stokke the uncritical notion of 'community' and the pre-occupation of participatory methods to produce knowledge that can be

[5] In Chambers' terms 'the community' presents the 'lowers' in contrast to the powerful 'uppers' which are are associated with the rich and industrialized 'western' world (for a brief critical discussion of Chambers' binary opposition between 'uppers' and 'lowers' see Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 175-178).

presented as community will "*may actually empower the powerful vested interests that manipulated the research in the first place*" (Mohan & Stokke 2000: 253). This concern is echoed by Uma Kothari. She stresses the importance of acknowledging that local knowledge is always a product of power relations in society. By accepting this knowledge as "some kind of objective truth, participatory methodologies are in danger of reifying these inequalities and of affirming the agenda of elites and other more powerful actors" (Kothari 2001: 145).

1.2. Tyranny of decision-making and control - the primacy of the individual

In a nutshell, the *tyranny of decision-making and control* refers to the conviction of participation's fundamental critics that no matter how participatory a development project might seem the power to direct and make decisions remains ultimately in the hands of the development practitioner or the implementing development agency. This critique touches the concept of participation at its very core. It questions participation's ability to deliver its promise of empowerment by transforming traditional top-down power-structures within the development process.

One of the major mistakes of participation contributing to the tyranny of decision-making and control is identified in the strong emphasis that the discourse places on the role of the development practitioner engaged in participatory approaches. The individual abilities of the so-called development facilitator as an agent of empowerment are generally overestimated. Williams mentions that the notion of participatory development is pervaded by *"naïve expectations of the transformative power of development professionals as individuals"* (Williams 2004: 559). The pre-occupation with the individual is especially prominent in the work of Robert Chambers.

Chambers promotes the conduct of PRA techniques as a method to initiate a process of empowerment in which the relationship between the ones in power (the 'uppers', i.e. development practitioners, development agencies) and the marginalized (the 'lowers'; beneficiaries/subjects of development interventions) is transformed into what Williams paraphrases as *"open power-structures of free-floating*

relationships that are deemed to be mutually empowering for all involved" (Williams 2004: 560).

According to Chambers this transformation depends on a series of personal, professional and institutional changes on the side of the 'uppers' (Chambers 1997: 220-223). However, the emphasis lies clearly on the importance of the behavior and attitudes of individual development practitioners (Chambers 2005: 156-177).

According to his critics Robert Chambers contributes to the de-politicization of development as. His widely influential work, especially on PRA, *"is largely individualistic and heavily reliant on voluntarism"* (Williams 2004: 561). He pays little attention to structural (political and economic) constraints that development practitioners might face in their attempt to facilitate the transformation of power-relations. Ilan Kapoor, accusing Chambers of a narrow view of power, adds that the focus put on the *"role of PRA facilitators, and the personal behaviour of elites overshadow, or sometimes ignore, questions of legitimacy, justice, power and the politics of gender and difference"* (Kapoor 2002: 102).

The emphasis on *"personal reform over political struggle"* (Williams 2004: 558) and the idealistic promotion of self-disempowerment via 'handing over the stick' obscures the actual agency of the facilitator, and its crucial importance in the participatory development process. It furthermore tends to neglect the fact that the individual practitioner is informed by his own and culturally as well as ideologically contingent interests. Ilan Kapoor provides some good insights on this tendency of participation in his article *"Participatory Development, Complicity and Desire"* (2005). In the following I will highlight those aspects of his analysis that have important implications for the notion of participation as a vehicle for manipulation, and that provide useful ideas for the subsequent analysis of my interviews in regards of the research question.

2. Ilan Kapoor – Participatory Development as Self-Empowerment

Kapoor's main point of argument is that participatory development tends to disavow 'our' complicities and desires, *"making* [participation] *prone to an*

exclusionary, Western-centric and inegalitarian politics" (Kapoor 2005: 1204). The term 'complicity' refers to the development facilitator's inescapable affiliation to a certain cultural and ideological origin that informs his interest and desires. Kapoor writes that in the *"current geopolitical conjuncture"* the participatory facilitator *"tends to be us as members of elites and institutions in both the North and South"*. He argues further that it is *"because of such inescapable complicity that personal and institutional benevolence in* [participatory development], *while outwardly otherregarding, is deeply invested in self-interest (geopolitical, cultural, organisational, economic) and desire (narcissism, pleasurability, self-aggrandisement, purity, voyeurism, manageability, control)"* (Kapoor 2005: 1214).

The problem is not so much the fact that complicities and desires enter participatory development. Problematic, and indeed dangerous, is rather that the propagation of participation *"is premised on overlooking these contaminations"* (Kapoor 2005: 1214). According to Kapoor this disavowal of complicity and desire by participatory development is a "*technology of power, as a result of which participation can easily turn into its opposite - coercion, exclusion, panopticism, disciplinarity"* (Kapoor 2005: 1214). The disavowal of one's cultural and ideological contingent interests serves the desire of narcissistic self-promotion and -glorification. As a 'technology of power' it furthermore enhances the agent's power to influence the processes according to individual or institutional interests; *"'participation as empowerment' morphs into 'participation as power'"* (Kapoor 2005: 1215).

In this perspective the act of 'handing over the stick' in participatory development is an illusion. While portraying himself or herself as a *"neutral and fair arbiter"*, the development facilitator remains in reality the manager of all proceedings; *"deciding on the need for, and purpose of, the meeting; selecting whom to include/exclude on the invitation list; making up the agenda; choosing which participants speak, on what topic and for how long; and/or shaping the form and use of the meeting outputs"* (Kapoor 2005: 1207).

Of special importance for my subsequent analysis and the notion of participation as manipulation is Kapoor's claim, that the more the development practitioner exercises self-effacement, the more his power within the participatory development process

increases. The more he pretends to step-down from his privileged position, i.e. the stronger he conceals his complicity - the more this will camouflage the actual distribution of power which remains *"tilted decidedly in favour of the convenor"* (Kapoor 2005: 1207). In Ilan Kapoor's own words: "*Pretending to step down from power and privilege, even as one exercises them as master of ceremony, is a reinforcement, not a diminishment, of such power and privilege"* (Kapoor 2005: 1207). The crafted illusion of the facilitator's (or development agency's) disempowerment in participatory development - a demand made by Chambers (Chambers 1997: 234-236) - allows power to enter the development process incognito, i.e. unrecognized by the participants who are left in the belief that they are in control of the processes that take place around them. It is exactly this misrepresentation of power-relations that opens up the space for manipulative misuse in participatory development.

Ilan Kapoor's argumentation suggests that the adoption and cultivation of personal attitudes and behavior traits such as honesty, humility, sensitivity, respect and patience (promoted by Chambers 1994: 1253, 1256; 2005: 162-163) act to increase the illusion of participatory development's benevolence that covers its inherent complicities and desires, making it an even more effective 'technology of power'.

On the basis of Kapoor's analysis I conclude that participatory development may constitute a vehicle for 'self-empowerment' rather than a methodology for the empowerment of the 'other'. I argue - based on Kapoor - that this 'self-empowerment' meets and satisfies personal desires of self-glorification and -gratification. As Kapoor puts it:

> "[Participatory development] *promotes the sharing of power, but manages to centralise power by personalising and mythologizing the role of the facilitator. The latter feature is perhaps what makes PD so desirable to the development establishment - its narcissistic pleasurability: not only does one get to stage the empowerment process, but one also gets to be the centre of attention, deriving enjoyment and praise for it"* (Kapoor 2005: 1208).

At the same time 'self-empowerment' via participatory development - by the personalization and mythologization of the facilitator's role - results in an actual increase of - potentially manipulative - power, in the form of subtle (because

concealed) influence; on the procedures of the participatory process as well as on the participants of this process as individuals.

Kapoor presents another interesting aspect of participation's nature; a thought he takes from two chapters in *The New Tyranny* provided by Henkel and Stirrat and Paul Francis. That is the insight that participatory development bears a certain religious flavor.

Obviously, the idea of a religious dimension within participatory development promises some valuable insights for the thesis' question regarding the relationship between religious development workers and participation. I will therefore investigate this connection by providing an account of Henkel & Stirrat's elaborations regarding this aspect. They assert that participatory development, besides ostensibly posing an alternative to traditional top-down-development approaches has a connotation of evangelical promises of salvation and is *"endowed with a highly spiritual aroma"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173).

3. Heiko Henkel and Roderick Stirrat - The Religious Dimension of Participatory Development

Henkel and Stirrat state that *"the concept of 'participation' [...] has distinct religious overtones, although it appears today in a completely secularized way"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 174).

This is due to the historical heritage of the concept. Henkel and Stirrat provide a genealogy of participation that identifies its roots far back in the early modern past. One of participation's historic roots goes back to the bourgeois emancipation in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where participation constituted the program of the political movement of the emerging bourgeoisie claiming its share in the economic and political sphere (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173).

However, of more interest here is the concept's importance during the Reformation. In its early modern usage participation *"meant primarily the participation of man in the infinite grace of God"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173).

According to the author's account participation during the Reformation was not just an abstract theoretical concept; the idea of 'participation' developed indeed a very concrete impact as a key issue on the levels of theology and liturgical practice as well as an overarching administrative principle. This is exemplified by the radical reform of the Church's structure: *"The (theoretically) strict - and indeed global - hierarchy of the Catholic Church was replaced by a far more decentralized administrative structure"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173). This new structure emphasized what in development studies is referred to as 'grassroots' decision-making. The 'subsidiarity principle' of the Protestant Church demanded that decisions were to be taken at the lowest levels of the hierarchy whenever possible. This alteration of structure was the result of the theological understanding that the relationship between the believer and God is direct instead of mediated by the clerical hierarchy (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173-174).

Further developments that increased the space for the believer's participation are reflected in Martin Luther's translation of the Bible from Latin into German in 1522 as well as the full participation of the congregation in the sacraments such as bread and wine (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 173).

Henkel and Stirrat note that the Protestant Reformation, besides making the direct participation of the believer possible, placed a moral imperative on participation; to be a good Christian required participation, as Henkel & Stirrat put it: *"Salvation was to be attained through individuals actively participating in the duties of the community"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 174). According to the authors this moral imperative to participate is also identifiable with contemporary proponents of participation.

The Religious Dimension in Participatory Development according to Robert Chambers

The religious dimension of participation is especially tangible in the work of Robert Chambers as well as in his own personality as a charismatic promoter of participatory development. To Henkel and Stirrat it seems that Robert Chambers *"is advocating an approach to development that is remarkably akin to what is conventionally called 'religion'"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 177).

The commonalities between the religious world and participatory development as promoted and popularized by Robert Chambers include the *"dualistic cosmos of good and evil",* reflected in Chambers' binary oppositions of 'uppers' and 'lowers', the importance he places on the reversal of the 'uppers' - 'lowers' relationship, as well as how he envisions to attain these reversals through attitudinal and behavioral change as a form of personal conversion (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 178). Robert Chambers' call for the 'reversal' of binary oppositions ('uppers' - 'lowers') as a means to attain development is *"remarkably reminiscent of many religious movements that seek to find salvation in the imminent future"* (Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 177).

According to Kapoor Chambers' writings are full with moral exhortations that demand from the development facilitator to cleanse himself from hierarchical and 'Western' ways of thinking (see e.g. Chambers 1994: 1256). The emphasis of personal change, attitudes and behaviors is, however, also reflected elsewhere (e.g. Blackburn & Holland 1998). Participation in this context functions as an exorcism from 'conventional' development thinking and the contaminations of the self with 'Western' values (Francis 2001: 80). In reference to Ilan Kapoor I wish to argue that this reflects the disavowal of 'our complicities and desires' as well as our 'self-empowerment' in its highest form.

4. Bill Cooke: Participatory Development and Coercive Persuasion

In his contribution to *The New Tyranny* Bill Cooke investigates the "Social Psychological Limits of Participation" (Cooke 2001). On the grounds of his analysis he argues that *"participation* [understood as a group process] [...] *can be used consciously or otherwise to manipulate group members' ideological beliefs"* (Cooke 2001: 102).[6]

[6] Citing Allport (1968: 3) Cooke understands social psychology concerned with "how thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influences by the actual, imagined and implied presence of others" (Allport 1968: 3, in Cooke 2001: 102). Basically social psychology is concerned with the cognition, emotions and behavior of individuals in group processes. Social psychology is primarily concerned with the study of group processes and group dynamics.

Cooke elaborates on four different social psychological concepts of group dysfunction that describe how group interactions may become “tyrannical”.[7]

In the following I will concentrate solely on the fourth concept labeled ‘coercive persuasion’. I believe that this concept provides an interesting idea of how manipulative processes in participatory development approaches on the community level may take place. I furthermore claim that ‘coercive persuasion’ is compatible with the concept of ‘self-empowerment’ that I have taken from Kapoor. I argue that the ‘self-empowerment’ experienced by the facilitator in participatory development practices potentially increases the effectiveness of his or her influence in the sense of his or her ability to exercise ‘coercive persuasion’.

Bill Cooke’s elaboration on the concept of ‘coercive persuasion’ is based on the work of Swiss psychologist Edgar .H. Schein (Cooke 2001: 116). ‘Coercive persuasion’ attempts to explain how group processes can intentionally be shaped to set up specific psycho- and group dynamics to achieve a particular outcome. Citing Schein Cooke argues that *“’participatory’ group processes are used by ‘change agents in the day to day business of producing ideological change’* “(Cooke 2001: 117-118). For explaining ‘coercive persuasion’ serves an analytical framework describing three stages of attitudinal and behavioral change. The three stages are labeled (a) unfreezing (social disintegration, disconfirmation); (b) changing (social reconstruction); and (c) refreezing (social reintegration of individuals’ cognitive frameworks) (Cooke 2001: 117). The process described by Schein’s three-stage model has to be understood as iterative rather than strictly sequential.

In the following I will describe on the basis of Cooke’s account how the three-stage model of ‘coercive participation’ can be applied to explain the manipulative process of a participatory development project. It is furthermore important to note that the application of this model implies that participation - contrary to how it is generally portrayed - is not (never) value free or necessarily benign; in Cooke’s words: *“participatory processes never take place in an ideological vacuum”* (Cooke 2001: 119). Ilan Kapoor has also made us aware of the culturally contingent self-interest

[7] These four concepts of group dysfunction are ’risky shift’, the ‘Abilene paradox’, ‘groupthink’, and ‘coercive persuasion’ (Cooke 2001: 102-103), according to Cooke they provide insights into the limitations of participatory development.

inherent in every participatory practice (see chapter IV.2). We should also keep in mind that it would be naïve to assume that the participants in participatory development processes participate completely out of free will (Cooke 2001: 118).

I will now explain every stage of the model in isolation and how it might translate in the context of participatory development.

Stage 1: Unfreezing (creating motivation and readiness to change)

The process of unfreezing might be constituted by the development facilitator presenting alleged 'fatcs' that suggest the need for change of the current situation if future calamities shall be avoided. The 'evidence' in this case can be the result of collective data collection methods (e.g. via PRA), claiming to have uncovered knowledge and insights that have previously been concealed or unspoken. These actions, primarily orchestrated by the facilitator, can create anxiety or insecurity with the participants. A sense of psychological safety is provided by the very presence of the development facilitator and by the benevolent language of development assuring that the situation will improve if certain principles are followed and processes take place (Cooke 2001: 118-119).

Stage 2: Change (cognitive restructuring)

The process of change will be brought about by alternatives to the current status quo provided by the development facilitator. He or she might refer to positive examples such as developments that took place in other communities or role models with which the participants can identify. It is also not unlikely that the facilitator will be conceived as an exemplary role model, in which case the effectiveness of the process of 'coercive persuasion' increases (Cooke 2001: 119).

Stage 3: Refreezing (integration of the new point of view into personality and self-conception, and relationships)

The process of refreezing can be imagined as rewarding certain actions and behaviors that are in accordance with the overall (and externally set) objectives of the process. At the collective level rewards might take the form of a commitment of the outsiders for further development funding. At the individual level rewards might materialize as career opportunities (e.g. the chance to become a 'local' facilitator) (Cooke 2001: 119).

The social psychological perspective and the concept of 'coercive participation' urge us to recognize the importance of the 'outsider' in participatory development. The commonly used terms to label the development worker in participatory approaches – facilitator, change agent etc. - distract from the external's true nature in that process. The facilitator in participatory development is an 'interventionist'. To intervene means to *"enter into an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them"* (Argyris 1970: 15, cited in Cooke 2001: 103). Thus participatory development constitutes an intervention; the process would not happen without the presence of the interventionist (facilitator).

We have to be aware of the paradox that surrounds individual agency in participation. On the one hand participatory development discourse shows a belief in the ability of the individual development worker to facilitate social transformation and the empowerment of the people. On the other hand this ability is highly dependent on the development worker stepping down from his privileged position - 'handing over the stick'. This however, it has been argued, serves to conceal the facilitator's crucial (and potentially manipulative) agency, and not only does it conceal his true nature of agency. The very process of disavowal of one's power - coming back to Kapoor - serves to reinforce that power.

Conceiving participation as a vehicle for 'coercive persuasion' means conceiving participatory development as a technology, or a means - directed by the facilitator - for the changing of consciousness (Cooke 2001: 119-120). Arguing from this perspective participation is indeed a means of empowerment, the question, however, is for what are the participants empowered. This depends to great extent on the facilitator, the development agency, or the provider of development funding. Participation's co-optability is theoretically unlimited.

5. Attitudes, Behavior and Participation

The significance of attitudes and behavior of development practitioners in participatory development, especially PRA, has been emphasized by several advocates of participation (see for example Blackburn & Holland 1998; Chambers 1994, 1997, 2005; Kumar 1996; Pratt 2001). It has been argued "*that attitudes and behaviour are the foundation of true participation*" (Kumar 1996: 70). For Robert Chambers a change in behavior and attitudes is *"a key point of entry for doing better in development"* (Chambers 2005: 156 and 162).

The focus on the individual's attitudes and behaviors by development academics and practitioners is a reaction to the traditional disregard of this aspect in development studies, which has primarily dealt with macro-level concepts (resource- and technology transfer, capital accumulation etc.). The importance of the individual's agency in the development process has long time been neglected (Blackburn & Holland 1998: 6). The importance that is now subscribed to an attitudinal and behavioral change is linked to the recognition that the agency of the development professional is of great significance for bringing about transformational changes and empowerment. Furthermore it is an expression of the conviction that it is the "uppers" - development institutions as well as individual development practitioners - who have to change in order to be able to successfully contribute to people's empowerment. This is expressed by Blackburn & Holland who call for more self-reflection and warn *"that if we not begin with ourselves, we are unlikely to make a difference to the more abstract economic or social dimensions of development 'out there'"* (Blackburn & Holland 1998: 5).

The adoption of the right set of attitudes and behaviors is conceived as a crucial component of the role-shift of the development professional from "teacher" and "transferor of technology" to "facilitator" and "provider of support". The development practitioner's role is the one of a catalyst in the participants' own analysis and action (Chambers 2005: 166).

In "Ideas for Development" (2005) Chambers provides a list of injunctions for the development practitioner engaged in participatory development (162-163).
He or she should:

- ensure participation of shy and submissive people;
- be sensitive;
- be humble;
- be nice;
- create mutual trust;
- be transparent;
- learn and share together;
- learn not to interrupt;
- hand over the stick;
- be an active listener;
- avoid leading questions;
- respect innovation;
- learn to unlearn;
- learn not to be judgmental

This list is enhanced by a set of nine behavioral directives (Chambers 2005: 163):

- Do not put forward one's own ideas. This is, according to Chambers, essential in order to ensure that the poor (farmers, women etc.) gain confidence to express their own realities and conduct their own analysis.
- Do not criticize. Criticisms posed by the outsider might inhibit the participants to put forward their own ideas.
- Keep quiet and do not interrupt. Interruptions can distort and sabotage the participatory process and its outcomes. It also makes the participants more conscious of the presence of an outsider.
- Relax, and do not rush. According to Chambers, a *"pervasive defect of uppers' behaviour is being in a hurry"* (Chambers 2005: 163). This might also lead to the distortion of the participatory process and prevents the participants to open up and put forward their opinions and ideas.

- Develop rapport. It is important to take time and show interest in order to gain rapport and build a good relationship.

To the above can furthermore be added (Chambers 1994: 1254)

- Offsetting biases. By being relaxed and not rushing, focusing on listening instead of lecturing, being unimposing instead of important.
- Self-critical awareness. Meaning that the development practitioner continuously and critically examines the own behavior. This includes embracing error as an opportunity to learn and a positive attitude towards failure.
- Personal responsibility. Rather than relying on the authority of manuals or a set of rules, practitioners take personal responsibility for the proceedings and follow their own judgment.

The adoption of these behavioral traits involves the abandonment of top-down modes of thinking which are, as Chambers recognizes, *"resiliently buffered against change by personal and professional conditioning, by habits of teaching, and by institutional procedures and cultures"* (Chambers 2005: 166). The process of behavioral and attitudinal change is therefore a difficult and slow one.

The importance placed on attitudes and behavior furthermore reflects the individualistic bias of participation, i.e. the concentration on the individual as an agent of transformation. The preoccupation with this personal dimension in participation has been lamented by critics who argue that this individualism contributes to the de-politicization of development as well as participation's failure to address wider socio-economic constraints to empowerment, which of course lie out of the individual's reach (see chapter IV 1.2).

V. Interview Analysis

1. Introducing the Religious Development Practitioner

<u>Thesis 1: Christian Faith is the motor of motivation</u>

"Our motivation came from our Christian faith" (Martin's answer when asked for his motivation of him and his wife to go overseas)

What follows might be an obvious point and little surprising. Nevertheless, I wish to reinforce the importance of personal Christian faith as a motivational source that, according to my interpretation, holds true for all the religious development practitioners that I interviewed. Every single one of them presented their Christian faith as the primary source of motivation regarding their engagement in development.

Lisa, for example, who had worked for Christian Aid a couple of years before coming to Bangladesh to set up a social business with a community development orientation told me that she had always felt drawn to charity work, and helping other people. I asked her when this feeling for charity developed:

"That started way back [...] *I started going to church when I was eleven years old with a friend, it was a really evangelical kind of church* [...] *my teenage years I spent in that church. So it probably started there and it was very much tied up with my faith, and I felt it was right."*

Jason, who manages the overseas development and aid arm of his home country's Baptist Missionary Society in Bangladesh, also expressed the connection between Christian faith and motivation for development work when he explained:

"I had always wanted to live and work overseas in some sort of job or activity which involved the poor. This primarily came about, this idea, or thinking, or calling, it primarily started when I became a Christian."

Furthermore I argue that the individual religiousness of - at least most of - my respondents as motivational source and inspiration goes beyond the dimension of development work. Their faith can rather be seen as the very fundament underlying and informing all of their decisions and actions in life. This interpretation of mine rests primarily on the frequency with which statements of faith surfaced during the conversions - I could also say, the frequency of God and Jesus appearing in the course of the interviews. Christian faith, the teachings of the bible, as well as Jesus and the religious tradition of his life are clearly crucial and determining factors in decision-making.

While Martin told me the story of how it came about that he and his wife came to Bangladesh in the 1990s to work for a mission hospital, he mentions how both of them prayed and waited for a message from God to inform their decision whether to take the step to go to Bangladesh or wait for another opportunity.

Others have expressed the crucial importance of faith as the determining factor in life very explicitly. Sebastian, for example, informed me during our conversation that as a Christian he has a spiritual motivation behind things that he does. Also Pamela emphasized that all of her decisions are based on her faith. For Jason the inextricably connection between the individual conduct of life and the spiritual sphere constitutes a main characteristic of all Christians, whereas he defines as a Christian *"a person who has at some stage become a follower of Jesus, intentional."* He is convinced that Christians *"would attribute everything that they do [...] to the creator God."*

<u>Thesis 2: Helping is Imperative</u>

The deep conviction that helping others is an imperative that follows directly out of the individual Christian faith is another prominent theme that informed the motivation of my respondents for doing development related work overseas.

In the case of my respondents Christian faith leads as it seems very naturally or automatically to a feeling, yes one could say an urge, to act in behalf of the poor, i.e. to take action in order to help the poor, who are conceived as victims of injustice, which is a result of sin.

This religiously based imperative is pointed out very representative by Pamela who responds to my inquiry regarding her motivation to join her future organization in Kolkata. In her own words: *“[...] as a Christian I am called to like everybody, and that is the case no matter where I am, so also if I am in New Zealand and I see poor people or people who are struggling - or even people who aren’t struggling - I’m called to love and to serve them.”*

Pamela’s statement can be conceived as representative. Almost all of the religious development practitioners - Lisa is the only one where I hesitate to make this judgment - insinuated in one way or the other that their motivation to engage into development work in order to help the poor and marginalized is rooted in the belief - or rather the conviction – <u>that this is what God calls them to do as Christian</u>.

In a similar vein as Pamela my respondents generally made clear that the obligation to help and serve and love is not limited to the poor, but includes all people. However, the focus and main subject of my interviewee’s engagement is the extreme poor and marginalized people of the global south. There is no doubt about that. Some described themselves as being “passionate” about poverty and the poor. While discussing his motivation for coming to South Asia, Martin tells me: “[W]*hen people ask me what I’m passionate about, I think in Bangladesh I’m passionate about poverty.”* And Jason in the same context as Martin stresses his passion for the poor by saying: *“My deep calling and interest has always been the poor, no matter where they are. Bangladesh fitted the category because it has many poor people.”*

The following quote by Martin exemplifies very well the connection between personal faith and the intention to help the poor and gives us a first hint as to why this often translates into actively seeking to help the relatively extreme poor people in developing countries.

“I've had a very blessed life, and, you know, for me, part of my faith is about seeking to serve the poor, and the needy, and it doesn’t have to be overseas, but, you know, the Christian faith has always sought to project itself overseas, and meet the needs of the very poorest.”

What this statement hints at is the proselytizing character of Christian religion; it *"has always sought to project itself overseas"*. I intend to investigate the aspect of mission and proselytization in a development context in more detail below. As I will demonstrate on the basis of my interviewees' own accounts, serving the poor, or 'doing development' cannot be separated from 'doing Christian mission'. But before I will elaborate this aspect I wish to trace two other - interlinked - interpretations regarding the asserted imperative of helping the very poor. The following explanations and connected concepts emerged fully out of my respondent's own accounts.

God's Special Care for the Poor

It was Jason who enlightened me about the importance that the topics of poverty and injustice have in the bible. According to him *"the teachings of the bible have a very large focus on God's* [...] *heart or special care for the poor. It's throughout the bible. It's probably the largest single topic of teaching in the bible."* And he goes on specifying that God's care and love for the poor *"comes because of his special concern for justice"*.

This "special concern of God" for what is first and foremost a materialistic and worldly issue is reflected in how God embodied himself and came to earth as Jesus. According to Bryant Myers "[...] *the Incarnation is the best evidence we have for how seriously God takes the material world"* (Myers 1999: 46). The concept of incarnation will receive further attention a bit further below.

All of the respondents - except Lisa - described themselves explicitly as 'followers of Jesus' or presented themselves as God's servants who make their decisions according to what they believe God calls them to do. Bringing this Christian self-conception in context with the above account provided by Jason what follows is that the Christian believer, as a follower of God, is required to work with or assist the poor and the people who suffer injustice in the world. A quote by Pamela might contribute to exemplify this strand of thought. We were talking about her future workplace, the fair-trade business in Kolkata that works with women of one of Asia's biggest red-light districts, and the Christian motivation of the foreign staff. She said:

“[As Christians, referring to the foreign staff of the business] *we believe that all humans are loved and created by God. So for us to see women who are trapped in a situation that they don’t have control over, they don’t want to be in, we feel like, as Christians who believe in God and want to become more like him that we should act on their behalf. So that’s what it’s about.”*

Pamela provides us here with a further hint of explaining the “imperative of helping”; she mentions that Christians “want to become more like God”. I believe this statement can be interpreted as a somewhat extreme expression of the wish to be in a close relationship to God. I could identify this desire (theme) in almost all of the religious development practitioners I talked to - again with the exception of Lisa.

The Desire to Be Close to God

The expressed urge to serve and help the poor can therefore not only be conceived as deriving from the Christian obligation to serve God. It also seems to entail a genuine personal desire to be in a close relationship to God, which corresponds with *“a desire that God has for all human beings to be in relationship to him”* (Jason). Hence, doing something in the name of God brings one closer to God. Jason described this connection the other way around, stating that not helping the poor means to turn away from God.

“When you see a poor person, when you see anybody, when I see you, I see someone made in the image of God. [...] *Jesus said: ‘what you done for one of the least of these you have done for me.’ So,* [a] *way of viewing it, is that the poor person who is living under shelter at the railway line down here or who knocked on the door before* [...] *are Jesus, and to walk on them or turn them away, is to walk on or turn away Jesus.*”

The most natural way of seeking a close relationship to God is to live a life according to Jesus as God’s incarnation on earth. Darrel, the young man from the United States, shared with me his conviction about the right life of the Christian

believer: "[…] *we are not called to live like the Saints, we are actually called to follow the very example of Jesus himself."*

Following Jesus - Incarnation and Transformation in the Name of Christ

I wish to summarize: According to my respondents, Christian faith entails a must to help the poor. This is due to the belief that God as the creator of the universe loves and cares for all human beings and has a special concern for the ones who suffer of injustice and poverty. The believing Christian, understood as a follower of God, is henceforth 'called' to act in assisting and helping the poor and needy. I have further argued that the 'need' to help others, especially the poor, as expressed by all my respondents, is due to a personal desire of seeking a close relationship to God, or even to become more like God, and that one of the ways to meet this calling and desire (maybe the most highest) is to live by the example of Jesus.

Following the example of Jesus does not only mean helping the poor, it also suggests living among them and seeking a personal relationship with the poor. Accordingly all of the respondents placed considerable relevance on the factor of what I would like to call immersion into the local sphere, the local community. This was reflected for instance in the value and importance that the religious development practitioners subscribed to the building of personal relationships with the local people, often it was also referred to as developing friendships. The aspect of building personal relationships was for example far more pronounced with the religious interviewees than with the non-religious ones. In addition, all of the religious respondents had learned the local language or were in the process of doing so. The close proximity to the local people was also reflected in the level on which the development related work took place. Half of my religious interviewees were engaged in Christian based social business models with a focus on community development. Darrell was about to live and work in a slum in Kolkata. And Martin, who is now the Medical Director of an internationally funded hospital in Dhaka, has worked almost fifteen years with a mission hospital in rural Bangladesh that focuses on community health development. There are definitely differences in degrees. In my opinion Darrel and Pamela showed the most positive and embracing attitude towards the poor

people of South Asia, emphasizing the "joy" that emanates from them (Pamela) as well as their rich amount of knowledge and wisdom (Darrel). Both of them displayed the most distinct eagerness to become part of the local sphere in their respective locations of work. Whereas Lisa expressed a somewhat more critical attitude, pointing to Bangladesh's very hierarchical and paternalistic society, and confessed her difficulties in adapting to her new life in Dhaka. Nevertheless, she stressed the creative potential and talent of the local women that she has met in her neighborhood so far. However, despite the differences regarding the intensity of actual immersion they all came to Bangladesh to help the poor. Reflecting on the accounts they gave me regarding their motivation it seems that they have been drawn to head out into the world to be close to and help the poor. It is interesting that the religious development practitioners tend to speak about the poor; the poor person, or the poor people, hence focusing on the person, the individual who suffers from poverty, whereas the secular development practitioners usually spoke of reducing poverty or inequality, using terms which are more abstract as they refer to concepts instead of people. Of course I do not want to insinuate that the non-religious development practitioners do not care about people. But I do argue that the way the religious development practitioners refer to development and the goal of development as helping and assisting the poor (person), unveiling the poor's potential etc. reflects their greater concern with the (well-being of the) individual person, and stands also in accordance to the higher value and importance they subscribe to building personal relationships and immersing into the local sphere.

The theological equivalent for the process of immersion and indeed for the process of development as understood by the religious development practitioner is the incarnation of God to earth in the person of Jesus. One of my interviewees explained to me that incarnation means to identify with the poor, with the people that are suffering injustice. This process of identification as immersing into the poor person's life-reality is most vividly pronounced and reflected by Darrel who I talked to one day before he left Dhaka to go live and work in one of Kolkata's urban slums. Asking him about the NGO that he will work for he tells me:

"A big part of our ethos that defines us is the incarnational aspect. And what we mean by that is the way that Jesus incarnated to earth. We also want to incarnate ourselves or uproot our lives and plant ourselves inside the slums where we work."

The concept of incarnation is embraced by the notion of transformation or, using the term of Bryant Myers, 'transformational development'. According to Myers transformational development refers to an alternative approach of development - in contrast to the traditional or conventional type of top-down development primarily concerned with economic growth and material wealth - that seeks the *"positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually"* (Myers 1999: 3). Myers emphasizes the procedural character of transformational development, describing it as a *"life-long journey"* (Myers 1999: 3). Furthermore, this 'journey' is taken by everyone engaged in the development process, *"the poor, the non-poor, and the staff of the development agency"* (Myers 1999: 3). In accordance to Myers elaborations it became quite clear in the interviews with the Christian development practitioners that the process of development is always also conceived as a process of personal transformation, as exemplified in this statement of Darrel: *"We believe that the power of Christ can transform poor communities but it can also transform us as workers, so we hope to be transformed in the process as well"*.

In my interpretation this self-transformation ultimately serves the desire to enter into a closer relationship with God, or even, as Pamela had put it, "to become more like him".

Within this context the incarnation of Jesus becomes *"a powerful theological metaphor for those who practice transformational development"* (Myers 1999: 46).
As already mentioned above, the incarnation refers to God's own concern for the poor and exemplifies the very concrete and 'real' materialization - or embodiment - of this concern in the birth of Jesus Christ. Myers puts it this way: *"God became concrete and real.* [...] *Real people were healed; a dead man lived again"* (Myers 1999: 46). Consequently this means that doing transformational development is doing what God does. This logic is echoed in a representative manner by Darrel responding to my question about the objective of his NGO:

"We want to be part of what we believe God is doing in the slums to bring transformation in the name of Christ."

Incarnation and (self-)transformation are two interesting interlinked concepts that I will deal with again a little bit further down when I will concentrate on religious development practitioners and the concept participatory development and the analysis will be conducted explicitly in the light of the theoretical framework.

Before that, however, I want to investigate a bit more the connection between development and Christian mission on the basis of what I was able to find out by talking to the religious development practitioners.

Thesis 3: Christian-Based Development Work is Christian Mission

The term 'mission' in its basic meaning refers to the *"sending of Christians to propagate the faith among unbelievers"* (Stanley 2001: 9903). A central component of Christian mission has traditionally been the process of proselytization. The term proselytization means the recruitment of converts from other religious systems and communities. However, nowadays, the relation between the act of proselytization and Christian mission is not unproblematic. The Christian community has made attempts since the mid 20th century to differentiate between the act of proselytization and the conduct of Christian mission. *"Medical and relief work, Christian education, the promotion of agricultural development, and agitation for a just international economic order, are now seen by Christians as integral parts of the mission to bring the world into conformity with Christian values"* (Stanley 2001: 9903).

On the ground of my interpretations of the interview data I argue that all of the religious development practitioners - again with the exception of Lisa - conceive their presence in South Asia and their development related work as a form of mission and understand themselves as missionaries, although they are very careful when it comes to labeling themselves with the term 'missionary'.

My respondents described mission generally as the proclamation and demonstration of God's love. Jason provided me with the following definition, which stands as representative for mission as understood by the other respondents: *"A missional activity I would describe as a signpost pointing to God"*. Hence, *"*[i]*n*

practice, mission would mean to proclaim and demonstrate [...] *the love of God. Sometimes you would say to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel* [the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection]*"* .

For Pamela doing mission means talking and cheering to people about God. She described to me her understanding of mission and being a missionary as follows:

"[M]y personal believe is that all Christian are missionaries [...] I mean, the idea of a missionary is that you go to an area and you tell people about God, right? So, if I'm in New Zealand I should be telling and cheering to people that I'm around about God, if I'm here I should be telling and cheering people about God. Wherever I am, as Christians, that what we are called to do is to cheer about the God that loves us and that has changed us, and then out of that love we want to share that for other people so they can also experience".

As this quote suggests for Pamela being a missionary and 'telling people about God' is a result of being a Christian in the same way as is the imperative of helping the poor; it is a natural act for the Christian believer.

The logical connection between personal faith and mission is also implicitly included in this statement of Jason who mentioned during our discussion that *"the call to follow God is also a call to try and bring about God's love and justice in this world".*

However, mission is not only understood as talking and cheering about God, or proclaiming the Gospel. Mission is explicitly tied to action. The aspect of 'demonstration' mentioned by Jason is to be understood as a demonstration by deed. And the primary deed of mission in our context is the act of helping the poor and contributing to their development. During our discussion about mission Martin commented on his understanding of mission and his role as a missionary in the mission hospital he worked in as a doctor: *"[T]he way I saw my role was really to demonstrate God's love in action through the work that we ran. And I believe that is mission".*

Hence, transformational development can be conceived as Christian mission in the above understanding of the term.

The Religious Development Practitioner - A Missionary

Most of my respondents displayed an ambivalent relationship to the term 'missionary'. All of them showed an awareness of the negative connotation that is generally connected to the word. The response of my interviewees to my question if they are missionaries was usually of the kind 'I would say I am a missionary, but...' The attempt to avoid being associated with the picture of an eager missionary trying to talk people into changing their religion in order to achieve salvation was very prominent.

Darrel pointed to the negative meaning of the word 'missionary' and expressed his wish to avoid being associated with it, although he conceives himself 'technically' as a missionary:

"I think I speak for most people in our organization when I say that the word missionary has a bad meaning today [...]. So we shy away from that word because we don't feel that missionaries have always represented the person of Jesus and what he stood for in building his kingdom on earth. So, people can call us missionaries, and technically I would be a missionary. I might first want to call myself a Christian, or Jesus following development worker.

In a very similar Sebastian responded to my question if he sees himself as a missionary as follows:

"[I]*t's a weird word that I've always struggled with. Yes, some people would call me that. I guess by the strictest definition, yeah, I am, but I wouldn't say, I'm a missionary, Sebastian, nice to meet you".*

These two excerpts can stand as representative examples for the way the religious development practitioners I interviewed deal with the term missionary. With the one exception of Lisa, everyone explicitly expressed or insinuated clearly a self-

conception of being a missionary, in the sense that they serve God in proclaiming and demonstrating Christian faith, however, all of those also made quite clear that they do not deem it as a good idea to shout it from the rooftops.

Talking about Proselytization

The majority of respondents revealed a similar ambiguity when discussing proselytization. I argue that my following interpretation reflects by and large the attitude of the interviewed individuals with - unsurprisingly - the exception of Lisa who displayed a far more critical attitude - in her own words "maybe to critical" - attitude towards proselytization, and mission in general. Lisa is the only one of the religious development practitioners I talked to who I would refrain from calling a missionary.

We should keep in mind that Christianity has always been a proselytizing religion and that Christianity and Islam are mutually exclusive. Despite all - of course necessary and laudable - attempts of mutual understanding we should be aware of what Martin said to me while telling me about his dissertation that he wrote on building bridges between Christianity and Islam:

"[W]*hen it gets to the end, you know, Islam and Christianity are not the same, and we should be honest about that. Muslims believe that Mohammad was the prophet of God and Christians believe that Jesus was the son of God, and there is a fundamental theological difference".*

Considering this I argue that the proclamation of Christian faith in effect has to undermine every other religion in its validity, and ultimately tends to attract and bring people to accept the truth of Christianity. In conclusion Christian mission is therefore to be understood as in some way always proselytizing, in the sense that it seeks to convince people of Christianity, although this process definitely does not have to assume the shape of an overtly coercive process to qualify as proselytization.
Proselytization, understood as the attempt to convert people of other religious belief systems to Christian faith, can take the form of producing attraction to Christianity.

Jason expressed the idea of mission as ‘attracting vision’, as exemplified in the following quote:

[As Christians...] *we want our lives and our words to* [...] *be attractional to our God, we'll say the God in the bible as supposed to some other God. We would say that would be a Christian missional approach”.*

He elaborated more on this aspect of mission as an attempt to create attraction a bit further into the interview:

“[S]*o if I would were to do mission to you now - which I'm doing by taking part in this interview - then I want to attract you to consider ‘who made you?’. And as a result of that how you could or should live in relationship to a creator [...]. And so my missional approach would be to say: ‘Hey, I want you to be attracted to my God” by the message I can give you of God's love for you”.*

Also Pamela, Sebastian and Darrel admit to their preference, or long-term aim to see people convert to Christianity.

Sebastian provides definitely the boldest, and perhaps most honest statement:

“Well, honestly, you know, as a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, I think people are better off following Jesus Christ [...] *so if I can share that with people, and* [...] *I can help to facilitate more followers of Jesus Christ, then I think that would be the bottom line of developing people spiritually”.*

As a follow-up to this statement I asked Sebastian if he makes an attempt to convert people, and his answer to that was ‘yes’. However he emphasized that the approach of doing so is mainly via conversing with the people and answering their questions. Sebastian in his own words:

“[W]*hat I do mostly is - a lot of Muslims have asked me questions about what do I believe, and so I will share, you know. I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the Bible, okay, and then they're very inquisitive; who is Jesus Christ, who is he to you? So, a lot of time is just spent answering questions. I made a lot of friends with Muslims, and they're very inquisitive, and we sit down and read, look at the Quran together,*

we look at the Bible together. And I share my faith, and they share their faith, and we have some really good discussions".

Not considering the context this paragraph merely describes a process of interreligious and -cultural discussion. In context with Sebastian's prior statements regarding his self-conception as a missionary, however, we can read his words as an approach to Christian mission aiming to convert non-Christian people.

Pamela and Darrel both insinuate their interest in contributing to the eventual conversion of non-Christians to Christianity. However, they emphasize that it is not their *"primary task"* (Pamela) or the goal of their organizations to *"check off a number of converts"* (Darrel), their intention is rather *"to love people no matter what"* (Darrel) and to use the God given skills to help where ever necessary.

The given statements regarding conversion were somewhat ambiguous and, in my view, characterized by the effort of the respondents not to fall under the generally negative understood label 'missionary'.

Lisa - who was, as I already mentioned, very critical about mission although she worked for a Christian organization and conceived herself as a believer, and who was a colleague of Sebastian by the way - suggested the dishonesty of missionaries regarding their motivation. She expressed her conviction that the motivation of many Christian development organizations is ultimately to convert people, especially in Bangladesh. I asked her if she thinks that these organizations and their staff are about this motivation. Her answer was: *"They whisper it. They wouldn't tell you. Which is something else I dislike about it".*

In the end, my opinion regarding proselytization is, it is a central part of Christian mission and it is part of the development practitioner's intention of engaging into development work.

Trying to get a clear answer about Christian mission and proselytization and I posed the question to my respondents if I can understand the conversion of non-

Christians to Christianity as a long-term aim of missional activity (at least one of the aims, if not the central one). The response to that question was clearly positive. This clear statement became somewhat ambiguous only when I asked about the personal attitude and approach to proselytization. And this ambivalence or caution displayed by the respondents I subscribe to their intention not to appear in the picture of what they presumably thought I thought to be a missionary.

Development Work s a Vehicle for Christian Mission

On the basis of my interpretations and conclusions so far I argue that development work can serve as a vehicle for Christian mission activities which ultimately have the aim to bring about people's conversion to Christianity. It is important, however, that the process of proselytization (understood as eventually resulting in 'the others' conversion) has to be conceived as a slow and long-term process that rejects any kind of open force or coercion.
I have already argued on the basis of my data that the development related activities of the religious practitioners to assist and help the poor can be conceived as missional activity and the religious development practitioner can be understood as a missionary. This conclusion follows pretty much straight forward out of the statements and accounts of my respondents, which are relatively clear in this regard.

In this part, however, I wish to draw attention to the indeed instrumental character that development, especially the alternative grass-roots or community oriented form of development, can have for the conduct of Christian mission.
First, the label 'development' or 'community development' can distract from underlying intentions. The term 'development' serves as a powerful substitute for the term 'mission'. I say powerful because framing an activity as development aid or cooperation aiming at contributing to the MDGs or poverty reduction in general provides the possibility to access donor money. Both the mission hospital that placed the focus on its community health development program that Martin used to work for as well as the "aid and development arm" (Jason) of Jason's home country's Baptist Mission Society receive funds from governments and secular development agencies.

Jason exemplified the instrumental - legitimizing - use of development quite clearly. While he talked to me about the organization he works for, he explained that it was set up as the *“development and aid arm”* of his home country’s Baptist Mission Society as *“a form of doing mission* [...]. *Working in overseas, helping the poor in a developmental sense”*. And secondly, he told me, *“it was set up as a way of accessing Government funding, so secular funding from the government”*. He came back to that aspect later and elaborated to me that the organizational profile has been written *“in such a way that we are able to access funds from the government which for* [the Baptist Mission Society] *would have been more difficult to do”*.

In my conversation with Martin my attention was drawn to another interesting point. In Bangladesh people have the right to change their religion and they also have the right to proselytize others. However the right to proselytize only applies to Bangladeshi citizens. It is illegal for foreigners in Bangladesh to evangelize. Evangelize means to proclaim the Gospel. So, strictly speaking, Christian mission by foreigners – understood as proclaiming, demonstrating, and attracting to Christian faith - is an illegal act. In this context the observed caution and ambiguity with which some of my respondents referred to the terms ‘missionary’ and ‘proselytization’ makes a lot of sense. Focusing in the external communication on the aspect of development and labeling activities as development work rather than mission work can therefore be interpreted at least in part as the attempt to avoid complications with the (Muslim) host country.

Besides serving this legitimizing function I argue that development activities as such can be conceived as providing a sophisticated vehicle for missional activities.

2. The Religious Development Practitioner and Participatory Development

I have argued that the religious development practitioners showed a pronounced opinion towards participatory development and seemed to have a higher affinity to the concept than the secular development practitioners. This argument is firstly based on comments and statements that the religious development practitioners

made explicitly in regards to the concept, i.e. after I asked about their perception of the concept of participation. And secondly this argument is based on my interpretation of the conversations as a whole. The opinions and perceptions of the religious development practitioners on development and the conduct of development work in general revealed a set of attitudes and principles that is generally associated with the ideas and principles of participatory development, as they are especially propagated by advocates of participation with a focus on participation in community development and the practice of PRA as well as they are reflected in the discussion about the right attitudes and behaviors of individual development practitioners of participation (see for example: Blackburn & Holland 1998 and Chambers 1994; 1997; 2005).

These two observations underlie my argument that religious development practitioners show an especially high affinity towards participatory development.

In general, the religious development practitioner's displayed a somewhat more personal relationship to the concept, either in the way that they expressed a normative advocacy and / or in referring to their own conduct of development work as participatory[8], whereas the secular development practitioners emphasized instrumental aspects and argued and commented generally in a more neutral, and sometimes also cynical way on participation, in the sense that it was admitted that the concept of participation, although nominally part of every development agencies' and governments' development approach, is often little more than a cosmetic window-dressing praxis involving mainly consultations which do not affect pre-determined decisions or projects.

Some of the religious development practitioners also brought the concept of participation explicitly into the conversation, while talking about development and development cooperation in general, even before I explicitly asked them about participation.

[8] If this conduct of development qualifies to be called participatory is – of course – another story and depends highly on the yardstick that is applied to assess and evaluate participation.

Just to exemplify the generally high opinion and appraisal of participation in development here some few quotes from my respondents.

Darrel referred to participation as the *"core of development"*. Pamela's first words after I asked about the concept were: *"Participation is key"*. Martin told me that due to his experience in development as a doctor in the mission hospital he has *"grown much more into a participatory approach"*. And Jason began his elaboration on participatory development with saying: *"[...] there are only two words I learned in all my development studies, only two that matter, one is participation, and the other word is empowerment"*.

The last quote by Jason is representative for another informative observation that I made. The accounts of the religious development practitioners generally reflected the common association between participation and empowerment in a more pronounced way than it was the case with the non-religious development practitioners. Generally the concept of empowerment appeared during the conversations with the religious development practitioners very often.

Besides the rather obvious examples of the development practitioners' generally very positive attitude towards participation in development the in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts revealed perceptions and attitudes of the religious development practitioner that suggest a strong - and indeed deep-rooted - affinity to participatory approaches to development.

The religious development practitioners placed much importance on building personal relationships in development work. Furthermore, the perceptions concerning the right conduct of development work was usually very focused on the individual. The overall aim of development was often expressed as enabling the poor individual to achieve its full potential. Accordingly, many of my respondents described their roles in the development process as seeking and facilitating opportunities and potentials. Jason's concise personal definition of what development should be may serve as a good example. According to him doing development means *"helping, facilitating, assisting people, and in particular poor people, to achieve their full potential...as God intended"*.

The notion of development as facilitating or enabling people to address existing opportunities themselves was expressed in a representative manner by Darrel. He told me that the development approach of his organization includes the attempt to "[...] *realize opportunities or struggles in the community and leaders in the community. We try to understand* [...] *their unique opportunity or struggle that we can help empower the people to address themselves".*

Taking an approach to development that puts the emphasis on helping the poor to address and realize their inherent potentials is conceived as a long and slow process and demands the establishment of relationships with the local community. The importance of the time factor as well as of building relationships is exemplary expressed by Pamela who talked about the way she envisions her conduct of work in Kolkata: "[T]*he key is to do it slowly, build the relationships, and once you got this friendship base* [...] *find out what it is that they want you to do, and then work slowly and identify people that can sort of walk along beside you and learn from each other".*

The importance of time was also addressed by Martin who criticized the tight time frames in which internationally funded development projects and programs often have to take place, and argued that development work can only have a sustainable long-term impact if the development intervention is thought of "in terms of decades, rather than years":

"One of the problems with development work [are the] *increasingly short time frames* [...] *and you almost never get a project funded for more than three years* [...] *and people want to see an impact in one year. And it's crazy. If you want to have a lasting impact on the community level you need to work with communities over decades. One of the huge advantages of the mission is that it's been there since the 1970s, and we've been working with the same communities and people know we're not going to go away".*

The above quote by Martin stands representative for the importance of time that was a recurrent theme in the conversation with every single of the religious development practitioners. They all emphasized the importance of slow and long

term processes in order to achieve a sustainable development impact. In reference to their own work in development they stressed the importance of 'not rushing' and 'taking time' in connection with building relationships and even friendships with the local people.

Another recurrent theme in our conversations that was always closely linked to the aspect of time was the strong emphasis placed on the priority of listening and learning from 'the other' over 'teaching' and 'lecturing'. This was for example expressed in the priority of gaining a deep understanding of the context first, before engaging into any kind of action. Darrel, who emphasized the importance of taking time in the development process especially distinct and whose stay in one of Kolkata's slums is accordingly open-ended brought the priority of learning instead of doing to the point:

"[W]e don't go in with any assumptions about, they need water or they need health care or whatever. [...] we don't go in with an attitude of action; we go in with an attitude just of learning".

The same aspect is very concisely expressed by Pamela:
"Before I do anything, before I say anything I need to learn, I need to learn what they think is good, what they think is bad, what people have tried what hasn't worked I need to learn from them."

The above statements are also a tangible example for the generally very pronounced open-mindedness of the religious development practitioner ('coming without any pre-assumptions').

This very pronounced self-effacement in regards of the development process stands in connection with the self-conception of the religious development practitioner as a facilitator that I could observe generally. And this again stands in the context of development conceived primarily as a process of empowerment directed at enabling people to achieve their full potential.

The attitude of the facilitator is for example very well reflected in two statements made by Pamela and Sebastian referring to the way they understand their own approach development. Pamela stresses that it is not about her *"coming in and doing it for them"*, but about her *"enabling them to do it for themselves"*.

Sebastian displayed the attitude of stepping aside and taking the role of the facilitator in his elaboration on how he deals with local staff of the business he works in case of problems: *"Rather than me just fixing it, I ask: 'how do you think we should handle [this]?'"*.

The self-effacement of the religious development practitioner which is for example reflected in the priority that he subscribes to the acts of listening and learning, instead of doing, as well as the general understanding of development's aim of empowering people in the sense that they are enabled to be active, and indeed the primary agents of the development process, is highly reminiscent of Chambers' notion of power-reversals and his slogan of 'handing over the stick'.

This process of stepping down and 'handing over' is quite accurately expressed by Darrel in the way he referred to the people in the slum that he will live with: *"*[W]*e call them our teachers and we'll say we want to learn your language, your culture, your religion, your way of life."*

Using the terminology of Chambers the teacher-pupil relationship can be seen as a relationship between "uppers" and "lowers". In the way that the religious development practitioners emphasize their role as humble and open-minded facilitators of development and present themselves implicitly as students they, at least rhetorically describe / conduct the power-reversal that is propagated so prominently by Chambers.

And indeed, Darrel was explicit in expressing his hope that "our attitude of learning *from them [...] will be empowering for them"*

While talking about participatory development Martin also got very explicit in expressing the importance of 'handing over the stick' in the development process: "...to achieve a long lasting impact, you have to be able to give up power...".

The religious development practitioners generally placed a lot of importance on a couple of aspects which are strongly reminiscent of the attitudes and behaviors proposed by Chambers and others that I have listed in Chapter IV 5.

In order to make that aspect very clear I will repeat them and list them here:
Time, Relationships and Trust, Learning, self-effacement, Listening, handing over, power-reversal, stepping behind

VI. Religious Development Practitioners and Participatory development under the Theoretical Framework

1. Introduction

In the following I will scrutinize the conclusions of my previous analysis under the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The religious development practitioners disclosed a perception of development and indeed seem to follow an approach to development which is highly informed and characterized by participatory thinking. Above I have outlined some of the themes that have emerged in the analysis and interpretation of the interviews and are especially prominent.

All of the respondents emphasized the building of personal relationships with the local people as a crucial factor in development work. Seeking personal relationships to the people perceived as the 'beneficiaries' of development are envisioned to result in mutual trust, and in some cases even friendship. The priority of building relationships over any other kind of action was explicitly mentioned more than once by the respondents. The fact that all of the religious development practitioners either already learned and were able to speak the local language 'Bangla', or were in the process of learning, can be seen as a further indicator for the 'relationship theme'.

Linked to the importance that the religious development practitioners subscribed to personal relationships is the priority they gave to listening and learning from 'the other' over taking action. This attitude was embedded self-critical awareness regarding the limits of the own knowledge and 'western' thinking in the context of a foreign culture. In conjunction to this the religious development practitioners showed a general open-mindedness regarding the processes of development and one's own work and role in this process.

Accordingly, the self-conceived role of the development practitioner in the development process was the one of a development facilitator. The task of the facilitator was conceived as to facilitate people in unveiling and utilizing their own

potential. In other words, in the understanding of my interviewees the development practitioner working on the community level should be an ‘agent of empowerment’.

I have argued that the disclosed attitudes of the religious development practitioners as well as their ideas on how development should look like can be interpreted as describing a process of reversing power relations as described and promoted by Robert Chambers as a constitutive element of participatory development.

Furthermore, calling into mind the prescribed attitudes and behaviors for participatory development workers that I have provided in chapter IV 5, it can be concluded that the presented attitudes and opinions of the religious development practitioners are highly corresponding.

2. The Religious development practitioners’ view on participation and development viewed in the context of the combined matrix

In chapter III 3 I tried to map the manipulative potentials of participation in development with the aid of a matrix that I constructed by combining different typologies of participation including their different understandings and definitions of participation. I have argued that the potential for manipulation in participation is highest where participatory development is mainly used as a label or window-dressing practice to legitimize development processes that are essentially characterized by a top-down approach and do not entail a real transfer of power or decision-making control. Using the terminology of White (1996) these forms of participation can be labeled ‘nominal’. Sherry Arnstein (1967) terms these forms of participation ‘non-participation’ and ‘tokenism’, emphasizing more distinctly their susceptibility to misuse by actors for manipulative purposes.

However, on the basis of my interpretation, the understanding of participatory development held by the religious development practitioners cannot be classified under the nominal and mainly instrumental types of participation that are especially prone to manipulative misuse. The dominant understanding of development reflected in the interviewees as well as the statements made on participation by the religious development practitioners rather present an understanding of participatory

development that should be located in the graphic of the matrix around the border between 'instrumental' and 'transformative'. Most of the religious development practitioners brought participation - or development in general - into connection with the aim of empowering people. This process of empowerment was generally understood as enabling people to achieve their full potential and was usually referred to as the main objective of development. Participatory development in this context was generally understood as brining about this process of empowerment, by involving the people into the process from the start and by the behavior of the development practitioner himself, characterized by giving up power, giving value to the people by taking time to build relationships and listen and learn from them. The understanding of empowerment here is very close to the definition provided by White:

"The idea of participation as empowerment is that the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions, and taking collective action to fight injustice is itself transformative. It leads on to greater consciousness of what makes and keeps people poor, and greater confidence in their ability to make a difference" (White 1996: 8-9).

The reason why I hesitate to classify religious practitioners' understanding of participation higher up in the typology is that the aspect of political and social power re-distribution in the wider structural context is not pronounced. The respondents' view on development in general as well as on participation and empowerment is very focused on the individual and rather a-political.

3. Participatory Development and Christian Mission

In chapter VI 1 I have argued - with Cooke and Kothari (2001) – that the manipulative potential of participatory development is a fundamental feature of the concept rather than a matter of bad or good practice, right or wrong attitudes and behaviors, or the conception of participation as instrumental or transformative. On the basis of this claim as well as my own interpretations of the interview data I argue that participatory development can serve as a sophisticated vehicle for conducting Christian mission with the ultimate aim to proselytize non-Christian individuals. In

this perspective the process of proselytization can be understood as an active process of persuasion and taking influence.

I argue that development work and especially the process of participatory development provide the Christian development organization as well as the individual missionary with a device for concealing the process of proselytization.

The effect of camouflage operates in two directions:

Externally it distracts governments, other development organizations or individuals from the underlying intentions of Christian development work. I have already suggested above that branding overseas Christian missional activities as 'development' contributes to avoiding possible complications with local governments. I also presented an example of how the label 'development' is used to access donor money.

Internally, i.e. directed at the subjects of the development slash proselytization process, participatory development acts to conceal missional intentions by disguising them under the very process of participation. This means that the participants of the process may be distracted and blinded by the self-effacement of the Christian facilitator and the ostensible process of their own empowerment. Their empowerment, however, is more an illusion due to the pronounced practical self-effacement of the practitioner.

Further below I will argue with the aid of the concepts provided by Ilan Kapoor and Bill Cooke that participatory development lends itself especially to the religious development practitioner/missionary as a vehicle for Christian Mission with the aim to proselytize.

But first I wish to view the asserted affinity of religious development practitioners to participatory development in the light of the concept of Participation as Religious Experience, which I have derived from Henkel and Stirrat (2001).

4. Participatory Development as Religious Experience

Henkel and Stirrat (2001) have elaborated on the religious dimension of participatory development in pointing to the theological importance of the concept in European Reformation as well as to the striking similarities of religious concepts and practice to the participatory development approach advocated by Robert Chambers (see chapter IV 3).

The notion of a religious dimension in participatory development - especially on the community level - seems to make an explanation of why religious development practitioners are especially drawn to participatory development a quite straight forward task.

I argue here that the affinity of the religious practitioners to participatory development results naturally out of their Christian faith because development work in a participatory manner provides them with an activity to meet their religious desires, which are following Jesus' example and getting closer to God.

According to my interpretation of the interviews the central religious desire of the religious development practitioner is to be in a close relationship to God, or even to become more like God himself. This desire is met by participatory development as it provides the opportunity for the religious development practitioner to take part in what God is doing to bring about transformation in the community.

I have mentioned that all of the religious development practitioners - with one exception - have referred to themselves as followers of Jesus. Following Jesus means to follow Jesus' example. And the example of Jesus, the way he lived his life on earth and his concern for the poor and marginalized, bears similarities with the ideal of the development facilitator in participatory development. One of my interviewees, Darrel, elaborated on the life of Jesus in a way that clarifies this connection very well:

"His [Jesus'] *example was* [...] *to come from heaven to earth. So he left his privilege. And even the way he was born* [...], *he was born among animals in kind of like a slum location; around animals, their dung and whatever. And then he lived a life that was simple and he went to the margins of society, during his whole ministry".*

Very similar to the example set by Jesus, participatory development - especially as promoted by Chambers - emphasizes the close relationship to the local community and requests the development practitioner to step down from his privileged position and hand over power to the poor and marginalized.

In some sense one can argue that the theological equivalence to participatory development is the concept of incarnation. In this perspective the immersion into the poor community - stepping down from one's usually high standard of living, giving up power and taking up the role of the humble facilitator of people's development is correspondent to Jesus' incarnation and work on earth.

Participatory development promotes and reflects a modus operandi of helping the poor that corresponds significantly with the way the religious development practitioners described to me God's incarnation and work on earth. Hence, the community focused participatory development approach serves the religious practitioners as a platform to participate in God's concern and work for the poor. According to this interpretation participatory development can be conceived as bringing the religious individual into a closer relationship to God.

5. Participatory Development as a Vehicle for Proselytization

In the previous chapter I gave one possible explanation of why religious development practitioners seem to be so close to participatory development regarding their attitudes and understanding of development. In this chapter I will provide a second possible explanation. This explanation is directly linked to the thesis of participation as a potential vehicle for manipulation. To facilitate the following elaborations I wish to repeat the definition of manipulation provided by the Oxford Dictionary. The dictionary describes manipulation as *"*[t]*he action or an act of managing or directing a person, etc., esp. in a skilful manner; the exercise of subtle, underhand, or devious influence or control over a person, organization, etc.; interference, tampering".*

On the basis of my data analysis I have argued that for most of my respondents - with the one exception being Lisa - doing development also implies the conduct of Christian mission. This results as an imperative out of their Christian faith and religious self-conception. Furthermore I claimed that in the view of my respondents the conduct of mission entails proselytization with the conversion of 'the other' to Christian faith as a long term objective.

On the basis of these conclusions I argue that the asserted affinity of religious development practitioners to participatory development is rooted in its practicality and sophistication as a vehicle for conducting proselytization. I have already pointed out how development in general and participation specifically can be seen as instruments for concealing missional intentions and legitimizing missional activities.

In this chapter - informed by the concept of coercive persuasion provided by Cooke (2001) - I argue that participatory development comes to be such an effective vehicle for proselytization because it provides a way to *"consciously or otherwise"* manipulate and change ideological beliefs (Cooke 2001: 102).

I claim that the process of proselytization - intending to bring about a change of religious faith in the individual - corresponds to the process of producing ideological change, meaning a change of consciousness. And following Cooke I argue that participation provides a sophisticated means of changing, i.e. manipulating consciousness. Therefore I conclude that - since the act of proselytization aims at a change of consciousness – participatory development can be understood as a potential means for conducting missional activities and is therefore the preferred model of development by religious development practitioners.

To emphasize the manipulative potential of participatory development in the hands of the religious development practitioner even more I argue in the context of self-empowerment that the religious development practitioner can be conceived as an especially effective agent of (manipulative) change in the process of 'coercive persuasion' described by Cooke. This is primarily due to the religious practitioners' appearance as a humble facilitator and his - distinctly participatory - attitudes and

behaviors that emphasize self-effacement and humility. I follow here the argumentation of Kapoor who states that the

In the light of Kapoor's conceptualizations one can conceive the act of stepping down from privilege and immersing into the local community as 'a technology of power' which ultimately acts in increasing the practitioners manipulative influence on the participatory process. No matter how much the religious development practitioner attempts (or pretends) to step down from power and privilege according to Kapoor he will still remain *"the master of ceremony"*. He argues that "[p]*retending to step down from power and privilege* [...] *is a reinforcement, not a diminishment, of such power and privilege"* (Kapoor 2005: 1207).

Furthermore I argue that the reinforcement of manipulative influence through the exercise of self-effacement is increased by the 'self-empowerment' that the religious development practitioner derives from the process of participatory development itself. This process is conceived by the religious development practitioner as a form of (self-)transformation, bringing him or her closer to God. When translating Kapoor's argumentation to the case of the religious development practitioner, then one can argue that the pronounced concern for 'the other' - the poor person, is at least as *"deeply invested in self-interest and desire"* as it is (might be) genuinely *"otherregarding"* (Kapoor 2005: 1214). And the self-interest and desire of the religious development practitioner is the relationship to God.

VII. Conclusion

This thesis represented a qualitative study on religious development practitioners and participatory development.

On the basis of the in-depth analysis of interview data I argued that the religious development practitioners show a distinct affinity to participatory development. This affinity was reflected in their general opinions towards the concept of participation as well as in their attitudes and perceptions on the idea of development and development work. Originating from this observation I set out to go after the question:

Why do the religious development practitioners have this distinctive affinity to participatory development?

The approach of analysis aiming at providing possible explanations for that phenomenon was guided and informed by a theoretical framework based on critical theoretical considerations that revolved around the idea of participatory development as a method for manipulative practices and processes. The theoretical framework is highly influenced by the critique of participation as a form of tyrannical subjection presented by Cooke & Kothari (2001). Enhanced is the theoretical framework by three concepts that I derived from Henkel and Stirrat (2001), Bill Cooke (2001), and Ilan Kapoor (2005). Following the authors' own terminology I termed the concepts 'Participatory development as religious experience', 'Participatory development as coercive persuasion', and 'Participatory development as self-empowerment'. All three concepts follow the argument that participation is prone to turn tyrannical or manipulative and lead to the subjection of those that it ostensibly claims to empower.

The three concepts provided ideas that seemed promising in explaining the thesis' problem formulation.

Prior to the analysis and interpretation of the interview data and the application of the theoretical framework I provided a conceptual account on participation in development (Chapter III). This included a historical overview, tracing the development of the participatory discourse in the 20th century as well as a discussion of different types and typologies of participation. The conclusions drawn from this

part included claims of participation's malleability as a development concept and its easy co-optability by potentially harmful, disempowering and manipulative purposes. One example of such a purpose is the use of participation as a label to legitimize development interventions which essentially remain characterized by a traditional top-down design. Another one is the use of participatory development as a means to exercise control through manipulative processes.

It was furthermore argued that participation is especially prone to manipulative misuse where it is primarily conceived as instrumental. An instrumental understanding of participation tends to neglect aspects of power and does not entail the genuine re-distribution of power in favor of the poor as an end in itself - although the rhetoric is usually harnessed with the promise of empowerment.

The account on participation in Chapter III served to provide the groundwork for the more radical and substantial critique of participation used in the theoretical framework.

In Chapter V I presented my interpretations of the interview data and I elaborate on different highly interlinked themes. On the basis of my interpretation I argue that - for my respondents - helping the poor results as an imperative out of their personal Christian faith. This theme is linked to the personal desire of the religious development practitioner to be in a close relationship to God, which is in some cases expressed as being pursued by following the example of Jesus.

Furthermore I made the two claims on the basis of my interviewees accounts that Christian development work is Christian mission and that the religious development practitioner has to be conceived as a missionary, whose long-term aim is the proselytization of non-Christians.

In Chapter VI I set out to answer my research question by using the concepts of 'participatory development as religious experience', 'participatory development as coercive persuasion' and 'participatory development as self-empowerment'.

The first explanation offered is guided by the concept of participation as religious experience derived from Henkel and Stirrat (2001). Here my argument is that religious development practitioners are close to a participatory development approach as it gives them a possible to meet their personal religious desire of coming

closer to God. I have argued that the principles of participation - especially as proposed by Robert Chambers - reflect a modus operandi of development that significantly corresponds with God's incarnation and work on earth. Conducting development in a participatory manner means for the development practitioners participating in the work of God on earth.

The second explanation to the problem formulation is informed by the concepts derived from Cooke (2001) - 'participation as coercive persuasion' - and Kapoor (2005) – 'participation as self-empowerment'. Here I argue that the affinity of religious development practitioners to participatory development practice and thinking is rooted in its practicality and sophistication as a vehicle for conducting proselytization. This is due to participation's general co-optability as a method for orchestrating a process of consciousness change.

The effectiveness of participatory development as a means for proselytization is furthermore increased due the religious development practitioners' distinct attitude of self-effacement - reflected in his humble behavior, the focus of giving up power and immersing into the local community, the priority of learning and listening from 'the other', etc. Following Kapoor I argue that the attitudinal and behavioral orientation - distinctly participatory - increases his or her power to exert subtle influence within the manipulative process of participatory development, which can be conceived with Cooke as a three stage process of attitudinal and behavioral change. Furthermore I argue that this self-empowerment of the practitioner through participation receives an even higher quality as it is the result of a process that is conceived by the religious practitioner as form of transformation - linked to the act of incarnation - that brings the religious development practitioner closer to God. This divine self-empowerment of the religious development practitioner it is that lets participatory development be such a sophisticated vehicle for Christian mission.

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