

Feminist Bastards

Toward a Posthumanist Critique of NGOization

Introduction

The Women's Manifesto for Ghana (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004), an important political document produced by a coalition of Ghanaian organizations and feminists, has been celebrated as having transcended the limitations of NGOization (Mama, Tsikata, Mensah-Kutin, and Harrison 2005; Tsikata 2009). Praising it, the Ghanaian scholar and activist Dzodzi Tsikata highlights the successes of mass mobilization and coalitional work: "The Women's Manifesto project is a showcase of how broadbased political processes and partnerships involving mass membership organizations can enable small organizations to transcend their limitations, maximize their resources, create a productive division of labour and, most significantly, to give their projects legitimacy and grounding" (2009, 190). Feminist scholars will likely recognize the positive value attributed to coalitions, seen today as some of the most productive forms of politically engaged feminist organizing (Mohanty 2003; Butler 2004; Swarr and Nagar 2010). But what exactly is so dangerous about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that their limits need to be transcended? And do coalitions such as the Ghanaian Women's Manifesto indeed usher in a new era of political feminist organizing?

I take these questions as a point of departure for a critical engagement with feminist criticisms of NGOs, which I call the "NGOization paradigm." I will analyze the logic of this paradigm

and trace its theoretical genealogies in order to probe, in Joan Scott's spirit of critique, the "blind spots that insure coherence and stability" (2008, 7). The NGOization paradigm now organizes feminist knowledge about NGOs, often constraining the space of analysis and critique. I suggest that it obfuscates power relations in feminist organizing as much as it reveals them, and that we need to pay close attention to the tropes of failure, fall, and contamination that haunt it. By bringing theoretical analysis in conversation with an ethnography of the Ghanaian Women's Manifesto (hereafter "Manifesto"), I attempt to think "*otherwise*" (Wiegman 2002a, 3) about new feminist formations and anti-institutional critiques.

In feminist scholarship, NGOization is defined as a "steady increase in the number of women's non-governmental organizations" and is understood as a dominant trend in feminist organizing (Jad 2007, 177). NGOization is not a descriptive, but an evaluative notion: it does not simply refer to the boom in NGOs, but understands this phenomenon as harmful for feminism. Critics of NGOization claim that NGOs have enabled the depoliticization of social and women's movements, their appropriation by donor-driven agendas, and a neoliberal co-optation of feminist practice. They understand NGOs as a fall from Eden—a teleological decline from an idealized age of revolutionary feminist activism to the contemporary era of professionalized organizations that function as donors' peons. Their arguments, I will contend, hinge on a valorization of earlier women's movements, producing a nostalgic and Eurocentric revision of feminist history and resuscitating an uncritically humanist vision of feminist organizing.

The NGOization paradigm has become institutionalized as a master narrative and now serves as a normative theory that structures the feminist field of knowledge about NGOs. We see the operations of this referential normativity in a range of recent historical and ethnographic analyses of regional women's and feminist movements. Scholarship on feminist activism, organizing, and NGOs is increasingly framed by the questions of whether NGOization happened and whether it affected feminism positively or negatively. We thus have examinations of NGOization in various countries and regions: Israel (Herzog 2011), Romania (Grünberg 2000a), the Czech Republic (Kapusta-Pofahl, Hašková, and Kolářová 2005), the former Yugoslavia (Bagić 2006), Bangladesh (Nazneen and Sultan 2009), and the Americas (Markowitz and Tice 2002). This paradigm now also structures entire ethnographies of NGOs, in which the question "Is the professionalized feminist NGO the most *appropriate* form of feminist po-

litical practice?" (Murdock 2011, 5; my emphasis) serves as the central point of analysis.

The normativity of the NGOization paradigm is also evident in feminist scholarship that disagrees with its assumptions and conclusions. Scholars seem compelled to address the NGOization paradigm to make their work intelligible, even when this paradigm restrains the nuance and reach of their analyses. Julie Hemment's ethnography of Russian women's organizing, for instance, attends to it by trying to "refuse the dichotomy of success/failure" (2007, 145) and arguing against the assertion that bureaucratized NGOs have stifled the wider participation of grassroots women in the newly professionalized world of feminist organizing.¹ Similarly, Sarah Phillips's study of Ukrainian women's social activism addresses the charges of professionalization and elite formation while arguing that a critique predicated on these terms prevents us from understanding the complexities of NGOs (2008, 140).² Of note here is that these scholars have to position their contextualized analyses in reference to a paradigm that is prefigured as universally valid.

I take issue with the NGOization paradigm because it hinges on an anti-institutional critique, while having itself become a stable and closed circuit of truth claims. Critics seem to know that NGOs are detrimental to women's movements and feminist politics. In their analysis of transnational feminism, Linda Peake and Karen de Souza thus write that it is "well documented" that "NGOs have become corporatized, acting as arms of the state and playing an active part in the downloading of labor and costs from the state to local communities" (2010, 110). Consensus about the depoliticizing effects of NGOs has been reached, but not on the basis of historicized or contextualized analyses in postcolonial or transnational contexts. Most notably, the NGOization paradigm disregards an entire field of ethnographic scholarship that offers substantive critiques of NGOs (Weisgrau 1997; Fortun 2001; Riles 2001; Magno 2002; Hemment 2007; A. Sharma 2008; S. Phillips 2008; Murdock 2008).³ These scholars examine the articulations of NGOs, women's movements, and feminist organizing critically, but not in the evaluative and binary terms set by the NGOization paradigm; rather, they analyze the sociocultural and political life of NGOs, their forms, and their contradictory effects. The refusal to engage with this scholarship has contributed to the stability and impermeability of the NGOization paradigm. Bringing ethnography to directly bear on this paradigm, I suggest, opens new analytical spaces for feminist scholarship.

The NGOization Paradigm and Its Genealogies

The work of two critics has been central to the initial formation of the NGOization paradigm. Sabine Lang and Sonia Alvarez formulated the idea of the *shift* from collective and political women's movements to professional bureaucracies. Lang defined NGOization as a move from movements to projects: "NGOization entails a shift away from experience-oriented movement politics toward goal- and intervention-oriented strategies" (1997, 116). Alvarez marked bureaucratization and institutionalization as defining features of NGOization, writing about an "increased professionalization and specialization of significant sectors of feminist movements" (1998, 295). Subsequent critics have relied heavily on Alvarez, and in doing so, have singled out her negative assessments of NGOs and ignored her larger arguments.⁴ NGOization becomes a "hazard facing mass movements" (A. Roy 2004, 41) that has depoliticized feminism: "Issues of collective concern are transformed into projects in isolation from the general context in which they are applied and without taking due consideration of the economic, social, and political factors affecting them" (Jad 2007, 177).

More recent theorizations point to the rise of NGOs in the global South and stress their imbrications in the development apparatus and neoliberal reforms. Tsikata characterizes NGOization "by the lack of a mass base, connection and accountability; donor dependence; the substitution of NGOs for civil society and mass movements; the prioritization of a professional technocratic approach over politics because NGOs cannot be overtly political or partisan; and a short-term project-based approach and the favouring of magic bullets over long-range broad agendas in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality" (2009, 186). Sangtin Writers and Nagar take the criticism further by casting NGOs as hegemonic organizations that prevent feminist oppositional politics. Because of NGOs, "development ideology is reproduced in the resistant spaces of political action—through homogenization, through the politics of funding, through the articulation of universalizing discourses of the modern state" (2006, 146). Rather than critiquing the development apparatus, in this view, feminists have been co-opted by it and have become antipolitical. Arundhati Roy states pithily: "The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in" (2004, 45).

Though not completely overlapping, the above definitions of NGOization share both formal and substantive features. For the critics, NGOiza-

tion is formally distinct because it entails an alleged historical shift from collective movements to organizations. As we shall see later, the differentiation between earlier anti-institutional women's movements and contemporary formalized NGOs is a defining feature of this paradigm. At the substantive level, this scholarship brings together concerns about professionalization, the proliferation of donor-driven agendas, and the dominance of development ideologies, all of which are understood as stripping away progressive political agendas from social and women's movements.

Critics of NGOization point out NGOs' imbrications in the nexus of discourse, power, and expert knowledge. Through the so-called gender mainstreaming and gender and development paradigms operationalized by states, donors, and NGOs, feminism is said to have become a gender technocracy (Alvarez 1998, 312; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006, 146). Critics see NGOs as stripping "gender" of its radical content and instead producing bureaucratic expert knowledge geared at population management (Alvarez 1998, 308; see also Hemment 2007, 83). The story is one of the contamination of originally progressive and autonomous feminist politics by the modernist and developmental state. This contamination is seen as having depoliticized and professionalized feminism, thus disempowering nonprofessional women. Critics are concerned about the formation of new elites, NGOs' lack of broader social base, and their stifling of grassroots women's voices (Jad 2007, 178; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006, 143). NGOs are said to have reformulated feminist goals, replacing sociopolitical transformation with complacent policy making. For critics, NGOs address only culturally and politically acceptable questions (Alvarez 1998, 306) and advocate for mere reform of the state—reform that might extend state power over women's lives and create new forms of dependence and regulation (Lang 1997, 112). Some critics also draw attention to the interstices between NGOs, the retrenchment of the welfare state, and the processes of privatization and liberalization, as well as the operations of NGOs as agents of the ostensibly democratic reforms imposed by the United States (Jad 2007).

To understand the logic and power of this paradigm, it is useful to trace some of its genealogies. The NGOization paradigm stands on the shoulders of three important strands of critical theory: critiques of the development apparatus, critiques of feminist affiliations with the neoliberal and masculinist state, and critiques of the institutionalization of women's studies and the field's concomitant failures. First, the NGOization paradigm extends Foucauldian analyses of power knowledge from development to

feminist NGOs, building on Arturo Escobar's critique of developmental conjunctures of power and knowledge about the Third World. The development discourse, Escobar wrote, has "fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people—the development professionals—whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task" (1995, 52). James Ferguson also argued that "the 'development' apparatus" (1994: 15) propagates the "governmentalist" (1994: 36) dogma—the notion that the state can and will benevolently shape economy and society—while in fact expanding state control. To do so, the development apparatus constructs its own objects of knowledge and ways of knowing, reposing political questions in technical language (1994). By constructing poverty as an outcome of ostensibly inadequate local knowledge or "backward" rural traditions, for instance, it erases considerations of historical inequalities, transnational labor migration, and class and race relations. For critics of NGOization, women's movements have become just such an apparatus.

Another genealogy is what Robyn Wiegman calls "the late-twentieth-century feminist tradition of critiquing the state as the end logic of political reform" (2008, 51). Inspired by Wendy Brown's critique of "feminism's turn to the state to adjudicate or redress practices of male dominance" (1995, ix), this scholarship questions feminist alliances with state institutions, and in particular the turn to legal reforms that do not challenge state order itself. As Wiegman puts it, feminists identify "with social movements whose profound political force had a great deal to do with their ethos of anti-institutionalism" (2008, 54). The rise of human and women's rights paradigms and liberal feminism changed this dynamic in the 1990s, fostering demands for state protection, funding, and legislation. Brown articulated the concern about this shift, poignantly demanding that we pay attention to "the perils of pursuing emancipatory political aims within largely repressive, regulatory, and depoliticizing institutions that themselves carry elements of the regime (e.g., masculine dominance) whose subversion is being sought" (1995, x–xi). Consequently, critics of NGOization see NGOs as vehicles of state-oriented, reformist politics.

This poignant critique has a blind spot: its appeal to the universality of feminist dispositions leaves the issue of politics of location unaddressed. Meanwhile, the question of the feminist relationship to the state was long a point of conflict among feminists worldwide. Historically speaking, feminists based in the United States and Western Europe did not collabo-

rate with the state, and took issue with women in socialist countries who did. Opposition to the state, then, has a particular valence in the global North but is not a universally privileged form of feminism. As we shall see later, African feminists do not see collaboration with the state as a betrayal of feminist principles.

Finally, the NGOization paradigm resonates with the critique of institutionalized academic feminism (Wiegman 2002; Joan Scott 2008). As feminism moved from street to university, in one account of the origin story (Wiegman 2008, 60), it began to suffer from the double binds of its successes and lost some of its “critical edge” (Joan Scott 2008, 6). Wiegman asks:

Has academic feminism betrayed its radical political roots, substituting abstraction for action, legitimacy for risk? Have the emergent generations of professionally trained feminists abandoned their foremothers’ tradition by making of feminism an academic career? Has our success, in short, engendered failure, transforming grassroots social movement and anti-institutional ethics to prototypically liberal and hence reformist, not revolutionary, ideals? (2002a, 3)

The NGOization paradigm mirrors critiques of academic institutionalization but lacks the latter’s historicized analyses and more nuanced (and charitable) hermeneutics. Instead, when feminist scholars analyze the institutionalization of activism, failure is the dominant trope. Using NGOs as the mirror, then, allows academic feminists to deflect concerns about failure and the danger of professionalization onto the other institutionalized feminists, those working with NGOs.

Longing for Humanist Sisterhood: NGOization and Feminist Nostalgia

At the heart of the NGOization critique is the juxtaposition between women’s movements and NGOs. As we have seen, the very definitions of NGOization are structured by the claim that feminist organizing has turned collective and political women’s movements into professional NGO bureaucracies. For the critics, NGOs are everything that women’s movements were not. The very concept of NGOization relies on a temporal logic according to which women’s movements have given way, been subsumed under, or turned into NGOs. In Lang’s words, “sisterhood has converged in what I shall call the establishment of NGOs instead of political movements” (1997, 106). Alvarez, in turn, refers to the critics’ mourning the loss of original feminism and its radical character: “the heroic days of bar-

ricades and demonstrations seem to be over” (1998, 305, quoting Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés).

The following table is a condensed and abstract rendition of the NGO-ization paradigm. Although I have tried to interpret the critics’ claims responsibly and include only the language they used, tables cannot render arguments in full or give a complete account of scholars’ claims.⁵ My main purpose here is to reveal the contours of the oppositional framework at the core of the NGOization paradigm and to point out the limitations of the nostalgic imagination that guides the tropes of lack, fall, and contamination.

In this paradigm, women’s and feminist NGOs are understood in reference to women’s movements under the signs of contamination and formalization. Critics see NGOs and movements as antithetical to each other, to the extent that NGOization signals the end of everything in feminism that is politically progressive and radical. In this view, NGOs have led to the loss of “the possibility of forming broader networks and institutions that may indeed have the power to mobilize along central feminist issues” (Lang 1997, 114). This understanding leads to nostalgic laments for the romanticized “autonomous feminist groups or collectives of yesteryear” (Alvarez 1998, 306). Overall, the critics’ assessments of NGOs are structured by a particular economy of value: they idealize women’s movements while disapproving of and dismissing NGOs.

If NGOs have indeed replaced women’s movements and taken the edge off feminist organizing, we can understand why they are depicted as hazardous. Yet at the core of this comparative framework is an uncritical conception of past women’s movements that entails active acts of forgetting. When the critics paint a largely positive picture of the feminist past, they do not portray it as a concrete and historical referent but as a vortex of valued symbolic epithets. They romanticize earlier forms of feminism, invoking essentialized notions of wholesome, egalitarian, and politically unified collectives. In doing so, the critics obliterate feminist crises and the inherent divisions, inequalities, and blind spots of past women’s movements, such as their reliance on women as stable subjects with shared experiences of patriarchy.

For instance, Islah Jad forgoes a sustained analysis of class, power, difference, and representation in earlier Arab women’s movements, even though they were run by “highly cultured and educated upper-middle-class women” who met in literary salons and established charitable societies (2007, 184). Lang’s (1997) and Myra Ferree’s (1997) analyses of NGOization

From Women's Movements to the NGO Apparatus

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS	NGOS
Collectives, organic social networks	Organizations
Feminist culture	Femocracy
Large, fluid, functionally undifferentiated	Small, disconnected, specialized
Broad, interconnected concerns	Issue-oriented, narrow focus
Informal; have cause, mission, conviction	Professional
Experience	Expert knowledge
Militant participants	Paid staff
Feminists	Genderists
Organizing, consciousness-raising	Projects, services, advocacy, interventions
Processes	Measurable outcomes
Mobilizing	Networking
Intimacy, connection, broad social base	Distant from "real" grassroots women
Raise contentious issues, connect the local and personal to the structural and political	Depoliticize gender, work on politically acceptable questions
Gender as a critical, revolutionary concept	Gender as a grant
Autonomous, outside of capital	Dependent on donors or the state
Antihierarchical, egalitarian, shared power formation	Inequitable internal power structures, elite
Antagonistic to the state, leftist politics	Policy-oriented, cooperative with the state
Want to transform culture and politics	Want to reform the state
Face-to-face contact (public mobilization)	Modern communication methods (public relations)
Leftist oppose development ideology, challenge global inequality	"Free-market" feminists promote neoliberalism

and bureaucratization in postunification Germany are marked by a different erasure: they rely on an uncritically ethnocentric and state-organized framework of who counts as a proper subject of German womanhood and women's movements. While lamenting the effects of NGOization on "women as victims of unification" (Ferree 1997, 46), Lang and Ferree see only German Germans as "women" and ignore the women's movements' neglect of migrant women in their midst. Their analyses of encounters between East and West German feminisms presuppose heteronormativity, whiteness, citizenship, and unproblematic gendered subjectivity, leaving invisible the consequences of historical and contemporary feminist organizing on Germany's inappropriate/d others (Trinh 2005).

The idealized conceptions of a properly political and collective feminist past do not readily map onto actual histories. When scholars analyze NGOs in reference to particular histories of women's movements rather than their ideal-typic conceptions, the tropes of the fall and contamination reach their limits. For instance, Alvarez writes that Latin American women's movements subsumed the categories of class, ethnicity, race, indigeneity, and sexuality to those of gender (Alvarez 1998, 300–301). Hemment also questions the idealization of earlier women's movements as egalitarian, showing that feminism in Russia was never in the purview of the popular and undifferentiated masses (2007).⁶

The erasure of concrete historical referents provides an answer to the puzzle about the popularity and normativity of the NGOization paradigm. I contend that the nostalgic rewriting of feminist history has popularized the notion of NGOization by constructing a space for a positive memory making about earlier women's movements. Indeed, this paradigm may be one of few locations in critical feminist literature where women's movements are praised and celebrated. Feminist scholars are otherwise highly attuned to the fact that issues of power and inequality were not adequately addressed by Western women's movements prior to the third wave of feminism, and that they have not been resolved. The NGOization paradigm seems to provide a curious respite from self-critique.

Another problem with this memory work is that it builds on an uncritical humanist and organicist discourse. In constructing movements as collective and identity-based while portraying NGOs as technocratic machines, the NGOization paradigm makes it clear that only the former are valued. Movements are imagined as based on social communities and "the model of the organic family" (Haraway 1991, 151), in which everyone got along just fine. In contrast, NGOs are understood as organizations first

and people second. “Here the constituency is not a *natural* social group,” Jad laments (2007, 185; my emphasis). In other words, the organic women-centered movement has given way to an externally driven machine motivated by neoliberal ideology and directed by states and donors. In this vision, the neoliberal free-market, civil society and gender mainstreaming agendas have taken over feminist organizing. What is the problem with machines? They reproduce a logic that turns political questions into technical problems solvable by machines (Ferguson 1990). For politics, in contrast, we need humans—according to a humanist understanding of political agency.

However, for those of us who question humanism’s single vision and ostensibly all-encompassing inclusion, machines are not necessarily monsters. I find it methodologically and theoretically important to question the ascription of positive valence to the “organic” women’s movements and the ascription of negative valence to the NGO machine. Who counts as human in this paradigm? Who belongs in the “natural” social world of women’s movements? Nature has long served as a boundary marker between citizens and subjects. The benefits of humanism have never been universal, and race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and geopolitical citizenship have organized their distribution.

I suggest that Donna Haraway’s metaphor of the cyborg—an early and poignant response to humanism—helps us develop a critical analysis of NGOs. The metaphor, or myth, of cyborgs is constructed in opposition to the humanist vision of the subject of politics and “does not dream of community on the model of the organic family” (Haraway 1991, 151). Unlike the idealized women’s movements, NGOs are “completely without innocence . . . wary of holism, but needy for connection” (ibid., 151). A posthumanist cyborg theory does not draw normative boundaries between movements and NGOs; rather, it confounds them. The very idea of a cyborg is “an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction” (ibid., 150, my emphasis). For cyborgs, distinctions—whether between species or, as in this case, between forms of feminist organizing—are not absolute, but “leaky” (ibid., 152). NGOs, I suggest, also embody “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (ibid., 154).

Like cyborgs, NGOs have ambivalent origins: “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their

fathers, after all, are inessential” (ibid., 151). Who, then, are the parents of NGOs? The critics of NGOization rely on organicist and woman-centered kinship metaphors to depict NGOs as unwanted children of the women’s movement, suggesting that the institutional takeover of feminism has produced illegitimate offspring that did not inherit the movement’s legacy. In other words, if NGOs are the unwanted children of feminist mothers, then neoliberal states and donors are the dominant fathers to whom women’s movements have succumbed. The horizontal feminist “sisterhood” (Lang 1997, 106) has died, and the bureaucratic, top-driven, and masculinist neoliberal state has given birth to feminist bastards.

But NGOs, like cyborgs, are not always faithful to their origins. By studying their practices, we shall see that where NGOs come from and which strange bedfellows they make need not be a dominant concern. Some NGOs transgress boundaries and produce new kinds of political engagements, however tentative and fraught.

I will argue that the emergence of NGOs is a prolifically productive phenomenon. Here, I build on Jean Comaroff’s (2007) take on the Foucauldian notion of productivity. Comaroff invites us to consider spheres of cultural production independently of axiological questions or value judgments. In her analysis of HIV/AIDS related activism in South Africa, Comaroff argues that although few people would claim that the disease is a positive phenomenon, it has nevertheless been productive: “It has given birth to significant forms of sociality and signification, of enterprise and activism, both negative and positive. . . . Such conditions breed desperate forms of inventiveness, representation, and enterprise” (2007, 203). Ghanaian NGOs are productive in that they have breathed new life into feminist organizing, helping foment new spheres of political activism. Yet they are not innocent, and their effects are unpredictable and ambivalent.

Historicizing NGOs and Feminist Organizing in Ghana

I begin my analysis of Ghanaian articulations of NGOs and movements with a brief historical account, as I agree with Sarah Phillips that critiques of NGOs need to be set against the backdrop of specific contexts and histories (Phillips 2008, 140). Historicizing women’s movements from the Ghanaian perspective challenges the master narrative of NGOization in two important ways. First, the history of the Ghanaian women’s organizing teaches us that the term “women’s movement” has never been innocent, and that “movements” should not be celebrated. Ghana has a long history of women’s political activity and organizing,⁷ but the first “women’s move-

ment” to receive that name was far from horizontal. The 31st December Women’s Movement was an organization founded in 1982 by the military government, lending the state a “gender-progressive” hue and a “grand feminist illusion” (Prah 2003, 7) until its collapse in 2000. Although this organization had a mass base and a membership of dozens of thousands of women from all walks of life, it was a state-led structure, directed and controlled by the former first lady, Nana Rawlings. Scholars of Ghanaian feminism have criticized this ostensible movement for monopolizing the space of feminist activism and suppressing other kinds of women’s organizing (Manuh 2007; Tsikata 2009; Viterna and Fallon 2008). This history reminds us that feminists and states rely on the symbolic capital of popular participation for their legitimacy and that the term “movement” is not an innocent category, but also an effect of a political discourse and governmental practice.⁸

Second, a contextual analysis teaches us that an anti-institutional stance is not universal to feminism. In Ghana and indeed across Africa, the boundaries between movements and institutions are porous. African women’s movements are not always grounded in informal groups of loosely associated individuals but in various kinds of formal institutions. These include women’s economic cooperatives, government organizations, and church groups (Mikell 1995), NGOs and women’s associations (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, and Mungwa 2009; Fallon 2008) as well as coalitions (Tsikata 2009). My research also points to the coconstitutive emergence of contemporary Ghanaian feminism and NGOs in the waning years of the Rawlings regime.⁹ Opportunities for feminist organizing increased with the return of democracy, the availability of funding for gender and development projects, and the emergence of international feminists as donors who support projects in Ghana. Among the several thousand domestic, Ghanaian-led NGOs that have women’s empowerment as one of their central projects, there are a few dozen women’s NGOs with politically radical agendas. Some of them, particularly those in large cities, refer to themselves as “feminist,” while others eschew this name; all are directed by women but see men as collaborators, coworkers, and constituents. These NGOs stand out among the organizational structures that produce politically transformative feminist work.

I have seen Ghanaian activists in and out of NGOs get things done by working with, not against, the state. This is the case even when their work involves challenges to the state order or the ruling government (Hodžić 2009, 2010). Ghanaian feminists see no value in being oppositional for the

sake of taking a pure stance. Rather, they attempt to regender the state and further their political agendas through strategic collaborations with specific institutions and individuals. African feminists think critically about these alliances, considering them both dangerous and generative.¹⁰

The Women's Manifesto for Ghana

The Manifesto also points to possibilities immanent in new feminist formations that transgress institutional boundaries. This document, which took Ghana by surprise and attracted a lot of enthusiasm, regenerated political activism against neoliberal reforms and animated demands for a neosocialist transformation of the state.

The Manifesto understands itself as a harbinger of a “movement” (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 70), and its vocabulary bears the imprint of feminism, using notions of “struggle” and “collective action” (ibid., 9) and urging “solidarity” (ibid., 72). At the same time, the Manifesto coalition is a hybrid form that blurs the boundaries between institutions and activists. Initiated and “hosted” by an NGO called ABANTU for Development, the Manifesto brought together an assemblage of individual feminists, NGOs, and organizations ranging from traders’ teachers’ and agricultural workers’ unions and associations that collaborated for over a year. (For the purposes of my argument, note that most of this work took place in Accra, where many of the coalition members are located.) They initially refused funding offered by donors in order to avoid the short-term “project logic” (Jad 2007, 178) and were later able to negotiate the terrains of funding and accountability on their own terms. Porous boundaries and the assemblage of forms marked the making of the Manifesto: it combined expertise and experience, thrived on the labor of paid staff and unpaid activists, promoted both advocacy and political mobilization, aimed at reforming policy as well as transforming the state and society, and measured its successes on the basis of both outcomes and processes.

The Manifesto was created in response to frustrations with the government's work on gender and development and with donor-hijacked empowerment efforts. Critiquing the depoliticizing effects of the development apparatus, the Manifesto takes issue with the NGOs' financial insecurity that constrains their autonomy and independence and “leaves them open for co-optation by donor priorities and donor-led initiatives” (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 67). It also notes that the effects of “empowerment money” (Elyachar 2002), its far

from transparent distribution, and the ensuing regulation of NGOs have engendered rivalry among NGOs and undermined collaborative processes.

As one of its critical interventions, the Manifesto historicizes the precarity of Ghanaian women. Critical of dominant understandings of poverty and Ghana's neoliberal economic policy, the Manifesto questions the government's foci on privatization, economic growth, and fiscal stability, which have "relegated social welfare, social security, and human development issues to the background in official thinking and action" (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 23). It also places the causes of poverty and disempowerment in historical and global perspectives, linking critiques of inequality to the effects of underdevelopment (*ibid.*, 10, 55). Rejecting modernist development ideology, the term used is "underdeveloped," not "undeveloped," and poverty is understood according to the Marxist view as an effect of politics, the expropriation of resources, and both colonial and postcolonial exploitation. In agreement with a number of Ghanaian NGOs, the Manifesto does not reject the term "development" but resignifies it as an aspiration for economic and social justice.¹¹

Challenging the empowerment paradigm, the Manifesto builds on the legacy of African feminists who have argued that the situation of women in Africa cannot be addressed by prioritizing gender alone (Nnaemeka 1998). African feminists have paved the way for the Manifesto's simultaneous focus on gender and its deprivileging as the dominant category for explaining inequality in favor of contextualized and historicized analyses of power and difference. Nevertheless, the Manifesto holds that Ghanaian women are particularly vulnerable in the neoliberal context: they largely operate in the informal sector of the economy (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 13), are often responsible for both household labor and social provision within households, and are imperiled by privatization (*ibid.*, 24). The Manifesto therefore demands "social security arrangements" for "all working women and men in the formal and informal sectors and in rural and urban areas" (*ibid.*, 15).

Since the Manifesto demands policy changes on the part of the government, it might be misread as a state-centric, "advocacy" document aimed merely at reform. As we have seen, the demands for state action and the attribution of state power over the social and the cultural trouble critics of NGOization, who see demands on the state as evidence of institutional co-optation. Yet the Manifesto aims not at the simple reform of the state or the continuation of the logic of empowerment as charity, but

also at their transformation. Although the Manifesto was in part enabled by neoliberalism, it articulates a set of aspirations that escape the neoliberal “common sense” (Harvey 2005, 39) and formulates neosocialism as its ideological framework.

Moreover, in the Ghanaian context, demanding that the state redistribute resources is a political act in its own right. Scholars credit the Manifesto with fomenting popular disenchantment with neoliberal ideology that individualizes responsibility for social welfare and deflects it from the state: “All of a sudden, people were beginning to ask questions and make demands on the government to provide certain things” (Rose Mensah-Kutin, in Mama, Tsikata, Mensah-Kutin, and Harrison 2005). Aradhana Sharma’s analysis of Indian NGOs also rearticulates the politics of demands: “The use of administrative or governance techniques such as empowerment paradoxically ends up producing a critical practice directed at state agencies; this is a politics of citizenship centered on demanding resources-as-rights from government bodies” (2008, xxii). In direct contrast to NGOization critics, who understand NGOs as doling out as “aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right” (A. Roy 2004, 45),¹² we see that the Manifesto subverts the logic of charity and mobilizes demands for resources-as-rights. Such demands for rights, however embedded in the logic of liberalism, can transcend the logic of reform because they have a social life of their own. The production of the Manifesto, scholars and activists argue, has exceeded the final product: “Collective processes have become much easier, and trust and goodwill have been built” (Dzodzi Tsikata, in Mama, Tsikata, Mensah-Kutin, and Harrison 2005).

Coalition on the Fast Track: An Ethnography of Inclusion

Feminist coalitional politics is not free from effects of power. The following ethnographic analysis of the coalition’s efforts to include NGOs in northern Ghana’s Upper East region will show that feminist organizing was circumscribed by national geopolitics. In this encounter at the cultural and geopolitical margins of the state, the Manifesto coalition reproduced difference, reinforced inequality, and limited the scope of political critique.

On a Friday morning in April 2004, I found myself in an air-conditioned conference room in Bolga, attending a “consultative workshop” on the Manifesto. This coalition-building effort took place against the backdrop of regional inequalities. Due to complex historical reasons that range from economic patterns of trade to warfare, colonial governance by difference,

and neglect by the independent state, northern Ghana has been marginalized—culturally, economically, and politically. As a result, this region has become a vortex of NGO activity, much of it structured under the rubric of development. The several politically engaged women's NGOs in the region are at the fringes of the national women's movement. Few feminists from the national capital address the problem of regional inequality, and when they do, it is under the rubric of donor-suggested, liberal efforts at inclusion. These geopolitical and historical constellations of feminism and development turn inclusion and coalition building into a site of conflict and the "cunning of recognition" (Povinelli 2002).

The coalition-building effort was shaped by preexisting inequalities and donor-recipient relations. Since Accra-based NGOs and coalitions are more visible and have easier access to economic and symbolic capital than northern NGOs, they are often seen as donors. At cross-regional meetings, for instance, northern NGOs commonly ask NGOs from Accra for funding. The Manifesto workshop was marked by more literal donor-recipient relations, as it was convened by an international NGO End to Poverty Ghana (a pseudonym). Although technically an NGO and a member of the Manifesto coalition, in practice, this organization functions as a donor and funds a range of regional "partner" NGOs. As these NGOs were the main workshop participants, other feminists from the region were left out.

The conference room was packed with NGO directors who were bound by obligations to their donor, even though the organizers had knocked on their doors just the night before. I was accompanying Elizabeth, the director of one of the Bolga-based women's NGOs where I conducted part of my research. The workshop was facilitated by Vida, who presented herself as occupying multiple positions: as a committed activist and a member of the coalition, a senior officer for End to Poverty with authority over resources, and a "fellow Northerner" who grew up at the margins of the state. She was joined by Abena, a staff member from another Accra-based NGO. Vida began the meeting by taking credit for the impetus to organize consultations, saying that she had personally initiated them. At first, she explained, the coalition had rested on the notion that everybody was invited and could participate equally. In reality, however, NGO activists from northern Ghana find it difficult to travel to the cosmopolitan cities in the south of the country, as these trips take anywhere from eight to over thirty hours. To remedy this, Vida initiated the meetings in northern Ghana and emphasized her personal commitment to this process: "I wear my official

cap and my Northerner cap. As a Northerner, I felt obliged to do the consultations in the North.” She returned to this point throughout the day, emphasizing her background and her desire to create a “gender network for the northern regions, as our issues are uniquely different.”

Vida knew that she would have to appease the local NGOs for turning to them at such a late stage—the coalition had been organized in the previous year, and at this point the final draft of the document was already formulated. To preempt charges of having ignored the northern NGOs, Vida claimed that they had in fact been represented—by proxy. “Were you involved as women from Bolga?” she asked rhetorically, and answered the question herself: “Yes, because your District Assembly women and political parties represented you.” Nevertheless, she stressed that she personally found this level of representation insufficient and that she wanted to have the perspectives of NGO-based activists.

Despite this framing, tensions flared up before Vida even handed out copies of the Manifesto. When Vida demanded that the participants say why the Manifesto was an important document, Elizabeth suggested that perhaps it was not. “We have been working on a similar document here in Bolga,” Elizabeth said, simultaneously revealing the lack of knowledge Vida had about local efforts as well as hinting at the more “local”—and therefore legitimate—character of that document. Vida retorted: “This is a document that comes from the grassroots, not from ‘Auntie Elizabeth because she is who she is.’”

This conflict over the scope of “grassroots” needs to be unpacked. Elizabeth and Vida each characterized the other as elitist and exclusionary, and used the definitional turf of the “local” and “grassroots” idioms to wage their battle over leadership and vision in the Ghanaian women’s movement. While Elizabeth questioned the need for the Manifesto and criticized the coalition for ignoring the local efforts of Bolga activists, Vida suggested that a document coming from Bolga could not be “grassroots” because it would have been directed by Elizabeth, a well-educated expert. By simultaneously acknowledging Elizabeth’s position as an important leader and accusing her of masterminding the local efforts, Vida skillfully shifted the critique away from the Manifesto. Her position as a donor and workshop convener allowed Vida to dictate the terms of debate and to set limits to the critique that others were allowed to voice.

Later in the day, she made it clear that her definition of what counts as “grassroots” was the right one. “When you invite people to a workshop, make sure they represent others,” she said. “A woman from a village does

not mean a grassroots woman. A District Assembly woman from a village does." In other words, grassroots women were those that the Manifesto coalition had designated as such early on.

The very terms of inclusion and recognition of northern NGOs also produced an impasse. The meeting had the common format of a one-day workshop: it was quick and superficial. This format meant that nothing radically new could be debated. Representatives of NGOs were given only one hour to read and comment on a few chapters of the Manifesto, which is written in an academic style. As this linguistic register is not easily accessible to nonelite NGO workers, they were not able to engage with it deeply. Moreover, the Manifesto's underlying paradigm was unfamiliar to most NGOs in Bolga. The Manifesto rearticulates causes of women's problems by pointing to their structural, historical, and global origins and considers neoliberal policies as an impediment to livelihood and economic justice. This radical break with the established NGO discourse was impossible to "popularize" in a few hours. Unfamiliar with this discourse and called on to present "their unique issues," in the ensuing group conversation representatives of local NGOs listed cultural particularities and resorted to the common culture-blaming discourses about patriarchy in northern Ghana.

Diana, one of the well-known women's leaders from Bolga, started off the discussion of the "Women's Economic Empowerment" section by raising the issue of microcredit. The Manifesto criticizes microcredit programs, seeing them as fostering an informal, deregulated economy that leaves women without access to health care and social security. For Diana and others in the group, these criticisms were new and unappealing. They saw microcredit as good—just not good enough for women. "Women can't even access credit because of lack of house ownership," Diana said, adding that "microcredit schemes should be improved." Her vision of economic empowerment was to extend microcredit, not to curtail it. One could argue that her stance was a pragmatic one, based on the situation she observes on a daily basis, since rural and urban women in the region favor microcredit. Indeed, the most frequent complaint I heard from rural women was that they did not get enough loans.¹³ The subsequent conversation made it clear that the Manifesto's alternative vision of economic justice was both unfamiliar and difficult to engage with. Moreover, by coupling her support of microcredit with the issue of "cultural" impediments to economic empowerment, Diana opened the door to the familiar discourse of cultural pathologies, saying that "all cultural barriers to owner-

ship should be removed” and telling a story of a woman who lost the possession of her housing after her husband’s death.

“A widow in Garego was asked to marry her late husband’s brother,” Diana said. “She refused and they burned her rooms.” Others quickly picked up on this story: “Was anybody arrested?” “How did you find out?” “Oh, but the village women don’t report to the police.” The discussion turned to the issue of cultural discrimination against women, without returning to the Manifesto. Eventually, the group representative wrote Diana’s remarks on a flip chart. Later in the day, it became evident that other groups also framed culture as the main cause of women’s problems. Group reports and flip charts highlighted various aspects of cultural discrimination against women and emphasized it as the main impediment to empowerment.

Given the workshop format of the encounter, representatives of northern NGOs responded to the Manifesto in ways that resonated with their idea of what workshops call for. Many NGOs see “traditional patriarchy” as the only kind of power that structures women’s lives in northern Ghana, and culturalism is the dominant governmental framework for organizing knowledge about gender inequality. This discourse is learned and practiced at NGO workshops. The workshop format is a machine that dictates not only how the “business” of NGOs is conducted, but also what is said. Workshop contributions follow a common script, and the resulting flip charts tend to look alike.¹⁴

Neither was the coalition able to learn anything new from the encounter with Bolga NGOs. The very terms of inclusion of northern NGOs hinged on the recognition of their cultural difference and self-identification as the nation’s “others.” Hence, rather than being attuned to the subtext of Diana’s commentary, which addressed the greater precarity of rural women, the coalition learned only what it expected to hear: northern culture discriminates against women and is the main impediment to empowerment. The terms of inclusion, then, reanimated the common discourses about the cultural pathology of marginalized groups rather than articulating new frameworks for understanding gender inequality in northern Ghana.

The encounter also limited the scope of political critique. Despite the Manifesto’s bold self-definition as “a political document” (The Coalition on the Women’s Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 5), at this meeting, Vida refused to engage with local understandings of politics. She censored Evelyn, another women’s leader from Bolga, when she started criticizing regional inequality in the state’s distribution of resources.

"The Women's Ministry has not been decentralized," Evelyn lamented. "In the North, we don't know what she [the minister] is doing. The Women's Ministry is a political office. It belongs to those of the NPP.¹⁵ It's not for everybody. They are there for their own people."

By criticizing the government's gender politics, Evelyn articulated a common set of grievances about regional inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources that is structured by party politics and individual patronage. Vida and Abena quickly silenced her.

"When you go talk to the women, please don't get political. No NPP, no NDC," said Abena. Vida quickly added: "This Manifesto does not belong to any government, any party. . . . The document is completely antipolitical. Let us not be political."

Evelyn's critique of the government's gender politics and the regional and party-based practices of resource distribution was stopped because it was deemed too "political." Unpacking the discrepancy between the Manifesto's self-representation as a political document and this erasure of politics requires a consideration of the larger context of marginalization of northern Ghana by the state, as well as its spectral reflections on partisanship and politics. Ruling governments are understood as prioritizing the regions in which they have most support, and the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs was founded by the NPP government, which was seen as favoring southern Ghana. In addition, northern Ghanaians often remarked that their marginalization resulted from the state's refusal to "decentralize" its resources.

Although Evelyn's criticism was directed only at the government, it may have been understood as an attack on southern privilege. Her comments were perceived as dangerous because they were performative in the sense that she was saying more than was obvious (Ebron 2007). Evelyn's critique of regional inequalities was perhaps too close to the question of inequalities within the women's movement, and this was not a debate that the coalition was ready to have. Equally important, Evelyn's commentary about resource distribution was grounded in a popular critique of the state that the Manifesto avoids. Although the Manifesto voices an academic and leftist critique of the neoliberal retrenchment of the state, it does not challenge the informal practices of resource distribution that many Ghanaians object to. In other words, the Manifesto coalition wanted to transform the state but was not willing to engage with the critique of the state-as-lived.

Finally, the aftermath of the workshop brings into sharp relief the im-

passes of inclusion that do not challenge larger regional inequalities. Here, End to Poverty played bait and switch with the representatives of northern NGOs. Vida promised them funding, requesting proposals for workshops with local women. Stipulating that these regional consultations should be quick, efficient, and cheap, Vida put a serious strain on local NGOs. In three weeks, they would have to read and understand the Manifesto; write proposals; negotiate the budget; reserve workshop locations; organize lodging and food service; invite workshop participants, both by mail and in person; hold the actual workshop; write workshop reports; and compile receipts and endorsements of the Manifesto. Some workshop participants immediately objected to this time frame. Seidu, a senior official of End to Poverty's regional office, said: "Why are we rushing to have this done by the 15th? You said it's not just for the 2004 campaign." Vida retorted: "The consultations will continue afterward." But Seidu insisted: "But why rushing?" Abena put an end to the criticism: "You're a Ghanaian, I'm a Ghanaian. If we're given a hundred years, we'll never finish."

Seidu knew not to push this topic further, but his colleague from the northern region, Akolbire, returned to the same issue in the evaluation of the workshop, criticizing the limited time for the consultations. It is not surprising that the criticism came from within the organization's ranks, and from two men who are both in senior positions. While representatives of women's NGOs learn to keep their criticism in check in order not to alienate donors, these two men had no such constraints. They felt free to criticize their colleague, who was a woman and similar in rank to them.

Representatives of local NGOs, on the other hand, could only protest "with their feet"—by refusing to comply with Vida's request. Elizabeth did not think that would be wise, however, since they "might not receive money again." Given power relations between the NGOs and donors, declining to hold the workshops was not an option. Hence, Elizabeth put other projects on the back burner and planned the workshops Vida requested. Conflicts emerged when Elizabeth and her colleagues revealed that they did not want to completely follow End to Poverty's plan. Elizabeth proposed an additional workshop for men only, in order to get them on board at the outset. This aspiration reflects a divide between the vision of many northern NGO activists and the Manifesto coalition. The basic premise of the coalition is that gender issues are not a women's question, and that the Manifesto belongs to "all women and men in Ghana who can identify with its demands" (The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004, 70). Yet Elizabeth and representatives of other northern

NGOs say that they cannot wait for men to begin to identify with their demands—they want to bring them on board at the inception of each project.

In the end, Elizabeth's proposal was not approved. Moreover, word came that "there had been a misunderstanding"—Vida had never wanted local women's NGOs to organize further workshops, she said. This attempt at a graceful exit convinced no one, ending the coalition building around the Manifesto in the region for the time being. The northern groups would later take up common projects again, as they are among the NGOs that "cannot afford to assume a purist position" (Hemment 2007, 142).

This bait-and-switch approach was neither the first nor the last time that women's NGOs from Bolga were consulted by NGOs and coalitions from Accra at the last minute, or asked to write proposals by donors who subsequently turned them down. These haphazard attempts at inclusion are not an exception but reflect the order of things. In the course of my fieldwork, I attended a number of meetings at which representatives of NGOs from Accra came to northern Ghana for "consultations," only to reveal that all the important decisions had already been made. Mary, one of Elizabeth's colleagues, resignified the notion of "gender mainstreaming" to critique this phenomenon. "Southern NGOs and donors don't include the North in the project from the beginning," she said. "They do something last minute here, and are then surprised when it fails. It's the same thing with gender—people don't mainstream it into their projects at the beginning, and then they wonder why it doesn't work."

These kinds of criticism are usually voiced in informal conversations and are rarely uttered in the presence of those whom they target. In other words, listening to the subtext of critical remarks, rather than censoring them, would have been the only opportunity for members of the Manifesto coalition to grasp the dissatisfaction of northern activists with the liberal terms of inclusion that end up marginalizing them.

How do we understand this outcome in relationship to the NGOization paradigm? Given the structures of "empowerment money" and Vida's reliance on development forms such as last-minute workshops, it is easy to read the coalition's impasse as evidence of failure of NGOization. I suggest a counterintuitive interpretation. The impetus for this effort as well as the impasse on which it foundered were structured by the same forces: the geopolitical contexts of Ghanaian feminist organizing and the porous boundaries between NGOs and coalitions. Recall that the outreach effort was driven by a donor activist, not by the larger movement. As a person

from northern Ghana and as a donor with experience in this region, Vida was more attuned to regional inequalities than many Accra-based members of the coalition. Her fusion of capital, subjectivity, and experience led the coalition to attempt to broaden its base—but did it also stop her from challenging the sedimented effects of marginalization? A critical understanding of regional inequalities, I suggest, was prevented both by the form of the encounter as well as by the liberal terms of recognition offered to the participants. Northern NGOs were asked to voice their concerns, but the only readily available position was that of cultural difference, and the only shared language that of its impediment to empowerment.

Conclusion: Rethinking NGOization

My aim in this chapter has been to decenter the NGOization paradigm as the organizing structure for feminist analyses of NGOs in order to widen our conceptual frameworks. This paradigm glosses over feminist crises and inequalities in past women's movements, and, I suggest, persists precisely because of its nostalgic valorization of anti-institutional feminist autonomy. We cannot conclude with questioning professionalization of feminist thought and practice; we need to examine anti-institutionalism itself. The NGOization paradigm assumes a universal traction but stops short of situating anti-institutional critique in time and place. By taking note of its location in the global North and in the academy, this essay attends to some of its epistemological and geopolitical implications. Anti-institutionalism also prevents us from recognizing that various organizations have been constitutive of women's movements in Ghana and elsewhere. The possibilities of shifting feminist configurations will remain invisible if we insist on anti-institutionalism as the only proper form of feminist politics.

How, then, do we think "*otherwise*" about new feminist formations (Wiegman 2002a, 3)? My analysis points to the value of historicizing and contextualizing the work of NGOs rather than contrasting them to ideal-typic women's movements. Feminist politics means—and should mean—different things in different contexts. I also suggest that we would be better served by neither dismissing NGOs nor celebrating movements, but by examining the articulation of their forms, as well as their blind spots and productive possibilities. Neither NGOs nor coalitions are pure, and the tropes of purity and contamination are not useful for analyzing emerging feminist formations.

This essay is therefore an exercise in a posthumanist critique of NGO practices that moves beyond Eurocentric anti-institutionalism. Rather than denouncing NGOs as illegitimate offspring of feminism, I have suggested the cyborg as a metaphor that harnesses the productive potential of transgressed boundaries. A cyborg theory does not draw normative boundaries between movements and NGOs; instead, it confounds them. The notion of cyborgs helps us see that the form of feminist organizing (be it movement, NGO, or coalition) does not determine whether its politics are progressive. NGOs, I have shown, are tied to neoliberalism, but they are also constitutive of political organizing that challenges neoliberal discourses and practices. Coalitions are situated in the same milieu and are embedded in the equally problematic structures of capital, power, and inequality. It is these structures, rather than the institutional forms of feminist organizing, that shape the outcomes of feminist politics. The Manifesto coalition reached an impasse because the larger women's movement has yet to address regional inequality outside the discourses of liberal inclusion and cultural difference as an impediment to development.

Like cyborgs, the kind of critique I offer here is not innocent, either. NGO-based activists from northern Ghana may agree with my analysis, but they "make do" and move on. As they consider explicit and public critique of power and inequality neither gracious nor pragmatic, I take responsibility for its dangers and implications.

Notes

1. Hemment counters the "main charges leveled at NGOs"—the depoliticization of resistance, the formation of new elites, and co-optation by donors (2007, 142–44)—while calling for nuanced accounts of women's agency, NGO workers' own critiques, and reflection on the politics of feminist knowledge production. Her solution is to link critique to "constructive political projects" in conversation with Russian women (*ibid.*, 142).
2. See also Yakin Ertürk's positioning in her study of women's political organizing in Turkey (2006, 99).
3. The ethnographic literature is vast, so I have only cited monographs.
4. Critics quote Alvarez selectively to validate their evaluations of NGOization, ignoring her arguments about the productive influences of NGOs on feminist politics and organizing (Alvarez 1998, 1999). Meghan Simpson writes: "Local and global 'feminisms' alike have undergone a process of 'NGOization,' bringing movements to a broader political stage, but also effectively closing the door to a wider participation of women" who are not in the professionalized NGO circles (2009, 144). Amy Lind claims that "feminists from all strands have become

disillusioned to varying degrees by the bureaucratization, 'partyization,' and/or 'NGOization' of feminist struggles" (2003, 197). Jael Silliman writes that NGOization "distanced the priorities and organizing imperatives of women's NGOs and networks from the grassroots concerns of local women" (1999, 40), turning NGO activities into "narrow, state-centric strategies that appeared to respond more to the logic of patriarchal domination than to an alternative feminist worldview" (1999, 47).

5. Here, I focus on the work of scholars who attempt to define and theorize NGOization, including Lang (1997), Alvarez (1998), Jad (2007), and Sangtin Writers and Nagar (2006). Although they do not agree on everything, their work has established a scholarly paradigm that is widely cited and accepted.
6. Russian women's movements of the 1970s had also been the purview of "elites," Hemment argues, and were propelled by educated and urban women (2007, 76). This is neither a celebration nor a lament, but an observation that questions the basis on which we assess the effects of NGOs.
7. Although Ghanaian women's associations and groups were often repressed by colonial and postcolonial regimes (Mikell 1995), women participated in the country's political movements (against colonial economic policies, in the independence movement, and in protests against military regimes and the state's regulation of markets) and were represented in political parties.
8. Ghanaians are well aware of this economy of value: one NGO has recently changed its name from "Widows and Orphans Ministry" to "Widows and Orphans Movement." This NGO expunged the Christian connotations of the term "ministry," replacing it with the word "movement" that appeals to its current feminist supporters and donors.
9. Ghanaian understandings of the term "NGO" are varied. Organizations are formally recognized as NGOs when they apply for and receive the requisite government designation. In popular culture, however, NGOs are differentiated from associations (NGOs serve the general public, while associations are primarily accountable to their members) and community-based organizations (which are registered as NGOs but are based in small, often rural communities, and identify themselves as CBOS). NGOs are also seen as belonging to the larger category of "civil society," which is understood to include associations, unions, and also, interestingly, state institutions.
10. The South African feminist Sisonke Msimang wants to "ensure that feminism is not killed by its diluted sister—GAD [gender and development]" (2002, 13) but sees her professional work as valid and generative: "Many of us are feminists by profession and our 'experience' and analysis comes from having worked on projects that employ the terminology of Gender and Development" (2002, 12).
11. While living in Ghana, I too began to refer to "development" as an aspiration in this particular sense. This experience, as well as my larger ethnographic project, have taught me that we cannot assume that NGO workers uncritically accept development and neoliberal discourses, even if they use the same terminology.

Anna Tsing's articulation of "awkward engagements" captures well the gaps and frictions in global encounters: "Words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak" (2005, xi). Terminology can be resignified, these resignifications can also be co-opted, and working meanings are revealed only in lived practices and specific encounters.

12. Arundhati Roy writes: "NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by a retreating state. And they are, but in a materially inconsequential way. Their real contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right" (2004, 45).
13. The microcredit practices in northern Ghana are run by local NGOs and are neither predatory nor violent like those described by Lamia Karim (2011), which is not to say that they are successful or unproblematic.
14. See also Kay Warren's discussion of frameworks as "selective constructions, conveyed in fields of social relations that also define their significance" (1998, 178).
15. NPP is the New Patriotic Party, which ruled from 2000 to 2008; the National Democratic Congress (NDC) was then in opposition.