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Women's Empowerment

A discourse analysis of the women's empowerment concept within UN Women

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Abstract

The concept of women's empowerment is subject to much debate within the development field. This thesis seeks to uncover the meaning of the concept by examining the prevailing discourse of women's empowerment within UN Women. Several historical and contemporary theorists within the empowerment debate, such as Naila Kabeer, Srilatha Batliwala and Amartya Sen, are touched upon and applied in the analysis together with a critical theoretical view from postcolonialism, building on thoughts of Ania Loomba and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. The use of a methodological approach emerging from poststructuralism has enabled a discourse analysis of the women's empowerment concept, applying discourse analysis theory elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. By applying their key elements as tools in the analysis, the meaning behind the prevailing discourse is revealed. The discourse analysis has been conducted on representable documents published by UN Women; their earliest annual report after their first full year of work published in 2012, and their annual report published in 2016, right in the division of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era of work and in the beginning of the new strategy with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The somewhat unexpected findings indicate signs of the beginning of a turn in the definition of empowerment, going back towards a more historical meaning concerning social norms and self-worth, after a period of heavy focus on economic growth and individuality.

Key words: *Empowerment, UN Women, discourse analysis, Laclau and Mouffe, postcolonialism, poststructuralism*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Women's empowerment has evolved into a widely accepted assumption and is a concept still receiving increasing attention within the development field. There has historically been much debate on what the concept actually entails and how it should be used in development. In 1994, Srilatha Batliwala described empowerment as:

> '*the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power'* (1994, p. 130).

Several scholars have argued for their view on how the concept of women's empowerment should be defined, Jo Rowland's focus on self-perception and Sarah Mosedale's 'redefinition of gender roles' to mention a few (Rowland 1997, p. 14, Mosedale 2005, p. 252). Despite the difficulties that this diversity may suggest, perhaps it also should be seen as a benefit since diversity would imply a certain level of democracy in the evolvement of the concept. In 1993, in her *Empowerment of Women in South Asia: Concepts and Practises* Srilatha Batliwala cited an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) worker who said '*I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so it gives us breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means'* (1993, p 48). This quote demonstrates how positive it can be for a concept such as empowerment to have a relatively vague definition. However, this vague definition has also enabled associations with a wide spectrum of meanings; from desires of social change, to that of Eurocentrism and warnings of a new form of imperialism. Some actors coming from the theory of postcolonialism have expressed how the concept of empowerment is merely a new way for the Global North to control the Global South (McEwan, 2001, p 5). This is one important reason why I find it necessary to connect the issues of

development and women's empowerment into a discussion of postcolonialism in an intersectional approach within the fields.

The women's empowerment concept has been subject to substantial criticism during recent years. Srilatha Batliwala, mentioned above, is one of many scholars who recently have criticised the transformation of the empowerment concept. She argues in her work *Taking the Power out of Empowerment – An Experiential Account* that the concept of empowerment has been hijacked by opposite political terrain and that the concept has lost its original meaning. Emerging from a political ground of social movements, such as feminism and black power, empowerment has been a way to further social change and redistribution of power. Lately, she argues, it has transformed into a buzzword focusing on an individualistic process of development (2007). She has not been the only one putting forward this criticism. On a similar note, Sardenberg argues that the empowerment concept has entailed a conversion from 'liberating empowerment' to 'liberal empowerment' (2008).

This thesis is inspired by the critique against the evolvement of the women's empowerment concept. I will situate this thesis broadly within the debate, inspired by the historical perspective on empowerment put forth by Batliwala; '*the process of challenging existing power relations*' and also '[the process] *of gaining greater control over the sources of power*', quoted above. The thesis aims to uncover the meaning relying within the women's empowerment discourse as it prevails today, and fill a conceptual void by providing a contribution of the critical stances found in postcolonialism to the discourse.

This will be conducted by looking into one of the most central actors within the field of development; the United Nations (UN). The UN's definition of empowerment includes a wide range of aspects; according to UN's '*Guidelines on Women's Empowerment*', it leads as follows:

> '*women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities*

and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally' (un.org).

A commonly held view within the social sciences, and by the UN itself, is that the organisation is key to the overall promotion of sustainable development in world politics (Björkdal in Gustavsson, Tallberg 2006). Hence, the UN plays a leading role in development and by extension is central to women's empowerment. Professor and political scientist Jim Whitman argues in his *The Role of the United Nations in Developing Countries* that *'the UN is a political organisation, not a developmental one'*. An implication of this is that the priorities of the UN are determined by the *'more powerful member states'* (Whitman in Desai and Potter, 2008, p 555). Being composed of 193 member states the UN has been given the mandate from almost all of the world's states, which implies significant power.

Up until recently the UN's overall aim within development has been to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), a process that was ended in 2015. MDG number 8; *Promote gender equality and empower women* was then the main concern of UN Women. UN Women was created in 2010 in order to within the UN put a special emphasis on the issue of gender equality and empowerment of women. UN Women refers to itself as '*a global champion for women and girls'* (UN Women annual report 2016). Following the termination of the MDG's in 2015, a new overall focus has been formed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with an end date in 2030 (Agenda 2030) where UN Women has its primary focus in number 5 – gender equality.

I have selected the UN as a focus for this thesis because of the central role that the UN has in development together with the recent transformation from the MDGs going into the era of SDGs. Furthermore, since UN Women is the UN's vindicator

for women and girls, the focal point will be on UN Women's particular definition of women's empowerment.

1.2 Problem description

A trend within the social sciences is the employment of discourse and text analysis in conducting qualitative research. An analysis of the discourse can reveal dilemmas and representations of problems in the evolvement of debates within a particular field such as women's empowerment. This position is in line with the contention of this thesis, as the aim is to uncover the definition of women's empowerment with an addition of the perspective of postcolonialism. As discourse analysis will be the methodological foundation for this study, the aspect of language will be of particular significance. Discourse analysis derives from the theoretical base of poststructuralism and allows the analyst to view language as key in understanding the social reality in which we exist and to deeper understand the reasons behind the meaning of particular concepts. Consequently, an analysis of the language figuring in publications issued by UN Women will be conducted. By looking further into how UN Women use language to define women's empowerment and its role in development I hope to display the prevailing discourse of women's empowerment and, through the critical engagements of postcolonialism, to investigate its implications regarding the women's empowerment work done by UN Women.

To enable this analysis I will look into two key documents published by UN Women; its first annual report covering a full year of work, published in 2012, and the last annual report still focusing on the MDG's, published in 2016. I will examine the language and search for what I choose to call *conceptual instruments* that can uncover what the discourse actually entails.

In order to understand the main research question and the sub questions, it is necessary to be acquainted with two terms from the discourse theory that will be

used in this inquiry. These terms are; *chain of equivalence* and *nodal points*.[1] The chains of equivalence constitute the connections of signs which within their particular discourse create meaning by revealing central themes of the discourse; these central themes are in turn called nodal points. The purpose of this study is to uncover the meaning within the discourse of women's empowerment as it prevails in UN Women and I aim to enable this by finding the nodal points of the discourse. Furthermore, as will be explained further in the methodology chapter, as discourse is dynamic, it is productive to investigate possible evolvement over time. Hence, the research question that will lead this analysis is:

- Which conceptual instruments are developed in UN Women's discourse to further women's empowerment in development?

To answer to this main research question I will make use of the following sub questions, all of which are emerging from the theory of discourse analysis:

o Which are the most significant chains of equivalence in the prevailing discourse?

o Which are the most significant nodal points in the prevailing discourse?

o   To what extent have the chains of equivalence and nodal points of the discourse changed over time?

1.3 Disposition

This study will begin with a display of the historical legacy of the empowerment concept, continuing to the more recent debates regarding women's empowerment in development. I then move onto describe how empowerment can be linked to postcolonialism in particular by its critical stances on prevailing power relations. In the following chapter I will lay out the methodological framework that will be used in the analysis together with data selection, aspects of limitations and validity. This will be followed by an analysis divided into two parts; one focusing solely on the discourse and the second displaying the meaning of the revealed

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[1] Chains of equivalence and nodal points are terms developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* published in 1985. These terms will be further explained and elaborated in Chapter 3.3.3: Discourse Analysis by Laclau and Mouffe.

discourse from the perspective of postcolonialism. This division aims to first use the tools from discourse analysis apart from postcolonialism, and in a later stage analyse the outcome of the discourse analysis with a postcolonial perspective and that way add this critical view to the debate on the women's empowerment discourse.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical outlooks

This chapter takes off with a historical summary of the empowerment discourse as it has emerged through the past decades. Subsequently, some of the current interpretations and critical stances against the approach will be presented before the methodological framework will be outlined in the following chapter.

2.1 Historical overview of women's empowerment in development

Women's empowerment has been present in the field of development for a period long enough for us to think of it as an obvious part of the development paradigm. It has however not always been a self-evidential part of development. One of the first appearances of empowerment in development was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968, in English 1970) where he wanted to reach a form of critical consciousness among the people in rural Brazil, for them to become aware of their position in society. The era of women's empowerment in development emerged in the transitions of the different stages of Women and development (WAD), Women in development (WID), Gender and development (GAD) and Women, culture and development (WCD), developing different perceptions of how to incorporate women in the field of development in the most constructive manner, as laid out by Shweta Singh in her article *Deconstructing gender and development for identities for women* (2007). Empowerment has become a prioritised aspect in development work because of its proven positive outcomes of development; as women having their own income seem to be more likely to spend their earnings on the health of their families. Educated women have shown to take better care of their children as well as fertility rates has proved to be reduced as a result of so called 'investments in women' (Mehrotra, 2012, p. 11).

The big break for empowerment within the UN organisation occurred in 1994 on the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Ruth Dixon wrote in her paper *Female Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo* (1998) on this subject, that women's empowerment despite all of its positive outcomes in other areas should not be seen as means to an end but instead be looked upon as a goal in itself. Dixon says women's empowerment is *'both a process (that of gaining power) and a condition (that of being empowered)'*. She talks about the essence of empowerment as *consciousness*; of injustice, of the entitlement to equal treatment, of a capacity to challenge injustice where and when it occurs. She says further that empowerment entails a struggle for alteration of current circumstances and requires access to social and material resources in order to gain power.

As this brief outline of the history of the empowerment concept shows, there have been several actors who have given their opinion on the concept. Many of them have been critical towards the lack of a clear definition. As Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès writes in her historical overview on the empowerment concept '*Without any clear definition, empowerment has become a vague goal, a fashionable term that is impossible to implement in the field*' in her contribution *Empowerment: The History of a Key Concept in Contemporary Development Discourse* (p. 9 2009). This expresses the negative aspects that come with the vagueness that was appreciated by the NGO-worker quoted by Batliwala earlier, and also shows how significant the definition can be on how empowerment is used.

2.2 Contemporary outlooks on women's empowerment – a critical account

The concept of women's empowerment seems to have been debated ever since it took place in the development field. Contemporarily, according to the UN's *Guidelines for Women's Development,* the writings on the subject of women's empowerment have increased with the growing interest for women's role in development together with a questioning of the conventional way of doing development work. One strong critic on development work is Chandra Talpade

Mohanty who in her article *Under Western Eyes* (1984) criticised the work done regarding women in the development field. She argues the 'west' has a hegemonic position and grouping together women of the Global South to the so called 'third world woman' in a victimized and helpless way assuming the same problems and desires to all.

Amartya Sen has a similar critique laid out in his book *Development as Freedom* (1999) where he argues for a shift of focus regarding women in development; from the 'patient' way of looking at women to an 'agent' way. Not to say we should reject the previous concerns and challenges of the well-being of women, but rather to encourage agency together with these concerns. This agency is according to Sen a major mediator in both economic and social change and it should be regarded as a key aspect of development, since there have been several proof of its various positive outcomes on important aspects in achieving development (ibid, p.195-198). He goes as far as saying that there is a neglect of women's agency in development and that there is an urgent need for this line of focus (ibid, p. 203).

One of the most important theorists when it comes to women's empowerment is Naila Kabeer, who has written several papers on the subject, one of them being *Empowerment, Citizenship and Gender Justice: A Contribution to Locally Grounded Theories of Change in Women's Lives* (2012). Her interpretation of empowerment is that of inner strength, a feeling of agency and a 'power within'. In her many contributions to the empowerment debate Kabeer is primarily concerned about women's ability to exercise choice. Kabeer argues that for a choice to be meaningful there have to be alternatives; a real possibility to have chosen in a different way. Often women have formal choices, but norms and traditions might stop women from exercising them. Kabeer also elucidates how compliance with norms and values can be of both positive and negative reasons. As will be seen in the following chapters, this perspective from Kabeer is key to this inquiry and will be drawn upon in the analysis of the material. Women can value their way of living and be satisfied with a situation which others might look

upon as negative. Women might also comply with a situation because protesting against their inferior status or to choose an unconventional way can lead to undermining of their economic source of survival or even cause harassment (ibid, p. 4). This corresponds with another important focus according to Amartya Sen who urges to consider prevailing perceptions of 'normal' and 'appropriate' in many societies to be difficult obstacles for women who want to choose an alternative path, such as working outside the home, even if there are no formal bans for them to do so (1999, p. 116).

Another critical voice against how women's empowerment is used in development comes from Joanne Sharp in *Doing gender and development: understanding empowerment and local gender relations,* where she points out the problems with outsiders, often from the Global North, telling women what the problem is and how to solve it (Sharp et al 2003). In order to actually reach empowerment, she says the critique of current conditions must come from within; from the women themselves, corresponding with before mentioned arguments by Kabeer. Sharp says that no person can determine what someone else will experience as empowering (ibid, p. 13). This can, again, be related to Kabeer's arguments mentioned earlier; how conforming to social norms not necessarily must be negative, but can also be of positive grounds for the individual at hand. Sharp adds to this critique, and says that to require women in selected empowerment projects to start engaging in waged labour might be of mostly negative effect for them, since they normally already have full work days as it is; most often having full responsibility of a household and taking care of the family. Expecting these women to add employment or some other income generating commitment would only increase their workload (ibid, p.2). These arguments by Kabeer and Sharp enable a critical interpretation of UN Women's discourse on women's empowerment and will play a central role in the analysis of this thesis. Similar thoughts can also be found in the above mentioned work of Sen, where he argues that a person's level of freedom is for that person to decide; the agent, and should not be for an outsider to determine. An agent according to Sen is a person

who is able to act and bring about change, and '*whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we asses them in terms of some external criteria as well*' (1999, p 19).

Naila Kabeer also puts forth arguments on how outside involvement can have negative consequences. She points out several concrete results from such initiatives as education, wage labour and political representation for women in different parts of the world in her article *Gender equality and women's empowerment: a critical analysis of the third millennium development goal* (2005). She mentions positive outcomes from the work of the MDGs, but also expresses concern and points out negative effects. The core message Kabeer puts forward in this article is that one needs to be careful when investing in things such as education and pushing women to engage in paid labour, which can be strong tools for a person's development, but it can easily lead to results that were not intended, such as strengthening of gender roles, increased workload and exploitation. There are many different social phenomena in action when trying to change societies and peoples' behaviour, and results can differ and consequences may end up being mainly negative if the ones involved are not aware of the peculiarities of each case. Kabeer also points to how the MDGs were missing out when it comes to bringing up important patriarchal structures such as reproductive rights and violence against women. She explains how the only way policy makers can be held accountable for the realisation of the MDGs is through mobilisation of women; in particular poor women, and how this was missing from the MDGs. One particularly difficult aspect according to Kabeer is that the institutions that have been blocking the realisation of these goals in the past – many within the UN – are the same institutions that were supposed to realise them in the MDGs.

In these arguments there is a great deal of critique against both empowerment as a concept but also against the implementation of the policies set by the UN. Srilatha Batliwala was on a similar note arguing how the core of empowerment is supposed to be to leave it up to local stakeholders to choose how to implement it and how it therefore is difficult to apply empowerment as a standardised tool,

which according to her seems to have been the aim in the MDGs (2007). Jane Parpart was in her 2002 article *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World,* similarly arguing how empowerment originally was considered as a strategy to oppose a mainstream development model of 'top-down'-perspective, and that it has transformed into a tool to increase efficiency with less concern regarding social inequalities (Parpart, Rai and Staudt, 2002). This problem is also formulated by Sylvia Chant, who in her quite recent article *Women, girls and world poverty: empowerment, equality or essentialism?* points out how the empowerment concept has turned into an '*instrumentalisation of women in development'* (2016, p. 5). These arguments by Parpart and Chant highlight the wide range of critique against the implementation of the empowerment concept. It corresponds well with the earlier mentioned thoughts of Batliwala and Kabeer, but also relates strongly to the purpose for this thesis; as the aim is to investigate the prevailing discourse on women's empowerment as such, by focusing on the conceptual instruments that are developed in UN Women, questioning these very aspects.

One of Kabeer's major claims in her article *Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: Promoting Women's Capabilities and Participation* (2003) is that the issue of injustice of gender cannot be separated from the question of social injustice. She emphasises that gender is not the only source of injustice, but cuts across all social levels in society. Another concern regarding how the factor of social inequality should be included in the problem formulation came from Chandra Talpade Mohanty together with Sarah Miraglia in *Gendering justice, building alternative futures* (2010). In this article they go as far as arguing how the empowerment concept in itself, as an idea to include gender in development work, has been adjusted to fit a neoliberal agenda; this as a result of the prevailing ignorance regarding social inequalities. They argue that women's empowerment in its current usage is only in a shallow way concerned with equality and resource access, but in practice it rather functions to cover up deeply rooted social and political inequalities. Their argument is that these social

inequalities are what need to be addressed – and they are not through the empowerment approach. In their opinion this leaves the women's empowerment concept itself working contrary to the idea it is supposed to further. This is a key argument that this thesis seeks to build on, and can be compared to those mentioned in the introduction by Batliwala and Sardenberg regarding the meaning of women's empowerment transforming into an individualistic process and 'liberal empowerment'.

This discussion shows several critical aspects against the use of women's empowerment in development, many of them having contributed to the inspiration of this thesis. In particular I am inspired by the critique put forth by Srilatha Batliwala, as mentioned in the introduction, where she questions the focus on individuality and the ignorance of the earlier central aspect of social change. The thoughts of Naila Kabeer have also played an important role in shaping the idea of this thesis, especially her focus on the view of the women at hand, and not to forget the local circumstances and cultural heritage when working with empowerment in development. The heavy critique put forth by Chandra Talpade Mohanty is also significant to the aim of the thesis, particularly her questioning of the empowerment concept working against the idea it is supposed to further. It is in my opinion an interesting view and a productive perspective to take especially working with postcolonialism as a point of departure in analysis.

2.3 Empowerment in relation to postcolonialism

The above arguments can be traced to the ideas of postcolonialism in the sense that they all lay out critique against the way women of the Global South are pictured and/or how women's empowerment is used in a way that does not consider structures of other forms of inequality.

Postcolonialism is thus a relevant perspective to take when looking upon these issues of how to define and how to implement women's empowerment in development. Cheryl McEwan describes postcolonialism in her article *Post-colonialism feminism and development intersections and dilemmas* (2001) as a

way to destabilise dominant discourses within development and question the ethnocentric views that are rooted in European values. An illustrative example of the relevance of postcolonialism can be found in Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998) where she points out the fact that in the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'colonialism' is described as:

> *'a settlement in a new country ... a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with their parent state is kept up'* (1998, p. 7).

Loomba emphasises the absence of some reference to the people who already lived in these places and how domination or conquest is not mentioned as an aspect of what actually took place (ibid). Working with women's empowerment in development, which should include considerations of the relationship between the Global South and the Global North, it seems appropriate to have aspects such as Loomba's example in mind. Loomba writes that we cannot neglect that the history of colonialism has implications on the imbalances in the contemporary world and is thus an important aspect in an analysis of this world (ibid, p.12). Postcolonialism refers to the ways one can criticise the material and discursive heritages of global colonialism (Radcliffe, 1999). According to Cheryl McEwan (2001) postcolonial studies has a main concern in seeking to question the bases on which the world is known and to challenge the dominant discourses in development and how they came into being. Consequently the postcolonial perspective is well suited for this analysis, as to question a dominant discourse is the purpose of the study. McEwan continues regarding postcolonialism and questions further if there is only one single way to development, which the Global North seems to have agreed on; meaning capitalism and economic growth. It has provoked questions as if maybe other values such as reciprocity, communalism and equity could be better ways for some of these differing societies to develop,

or at least to think outside the box of capitalism as the only way forward (ibid). One aspect which is brought up by McEwan is racism, which needs to be given greater consideration regarding women's empowerment, since in many cases women are not only suffering oppression from being women, but also from being of a certain ethnicity. These arguments put forward within postcolonialism seem considerably relevant, and will be drawn upon in the analysis, especially considering the opinions on a capitalist transformation of the empowerment concept mentioned earlier by Baltiwala and others.

Theorists within poscolonialism, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, have repeatedly called for a more intersectional approach to women's situations around the world, contrary to the feminist movements (of the Global North) that have assumed a universal oppression against women without including other factors to the analysis. Mohanty writes:

> *"Western feminist scholarship on the third world must be seen and examined precisely in terms of its inscriptions in these particular relations of power and struggle. There is, I shall argue, no universal patriarchal framework which this scholarship attempts to counter and resist – unless one posits an international male conspiracy or a monolithic, ahistorical power hierarchy."* (1984, p 3)

Here, one can distinguish a critical stance against how the Global North has simplified how to deal with development in the Global South. She further explains how it does prevail a balance of power in the world and how any analysis of culture or socio-economic conditions need to be situated within this balance. She is critiquing the Eurocentric take on feminism and how it upholds colonial structures and refers to the writings of Anouar Abdel-Malek who in 1981 wrote:

> *"Contemporary imperialism is, in a real sense, a hegemonic imperialism, exercising to a maximum degree a rationalized violence taken to a higher level than ever before—through fire*

and sword, but also through the attempt to control hearts and minds" (1981, p 145-146)

According to these theorists there is a significant need for acknowledgment of prevailing global power structures. This becomes particularly relevant here considering Jim Whitman's before mentioned notion of how the UN is a political organisation rather than a developmental one. The main critique from Mohanty is the victimisation of women of the Global South which has also later been put forward by Kabeer and Sen, as has been elaborated above on their emphasis on agency. Mohanty further criticises simplistic analyses as defining power in binary terms, people who have it (men) and people who do not (women) is not only inefficient in combating oppressions, but it also reinforces binary divisions between men and women (1984, p 12). Mohanty challenges the discourse with new ways of thinking of epistemology where it is necessary to consider power balance and new conceptualisations of ideas of resistance and agency (2003, p. 45). These arguments by Mohanty enable a critical interpretation of the women's empowerment discourse which will be used in the following analysis.

One central aspect which is important to consider on the subject of feminists from the Global North is brought up by Antoinette Burton in her work *Some trajectories of "feminism" and "imperialism"* (1999). She points out how there has been a general misapprehension among feminists of the Global North in terms of a wide spread neglect of the fact that there have existed many women's movements across the Global South before the Europeans and Americans 'came to rescue'. Such information would surprise many feminists of the Global North, which shows the ignorance prevailing in development discourse (ibid). Another thinker that provocatively questioned the feminist discourse of the Global North is Oyeronke Oyewumi who wrote '*The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses'* (1997). In her book she argues that the Global North's categorisation of society is not applicable to many African cultures. As an example she brings up the Yoruba people whose language does not separate people on the basis of biological difference as men and women in the way that is

done in western cultures. There is no hierarchy between genders in this society, but the central aspect in this regard is instead age. Having this in mind it becomes difficult to even talk about empowerment and gender inequality, as there is an absence of the status categories altogether. These are both demonstrating examples of how limited we are inside the established discourse. It also shows the need for critical arguments of this kind to lead the analysis when searching for the meaning within the prevailing women's empowerment discourse.

This thesis is thus an addition to this historical as well as contemporary debate on women's empowerment. However, its focus is to deeply investigate the discourse within UN Women using tools from discourse analysis. Departing from postcolonialism this study will portray the meaning within the concept of women's empowerment using the wide spread critique that exists against the concept. The discursive tools which will enable such an investigation will be explained in the following chapter – methodology.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

In this chapter I will display the selection of material that has been made for this study as well as explain the epistemological assumptions that provide both possibilities and limitations to the chosen approach. Subsequently I will elaborate the background for the methodological foundation on which I will base the analysis and explain the selected research method before the analysis takes place.

3.1 Data selection and collection

Searching for material for this study I wanted to make sure to use contemporary, significant material to demonstrate the prevailing discourse on women's empowerment. As the UN is one of the main actors in empowerment discourse as a result of their major role in development, and UN Women is the main vindicator for gender equality and women's empowerment within the UN, publications of UN Women have been chosen for this study. The UN in general is pleased to be used as a source as their publications are all easily accessed through their online sources, which is why there were no difficulties collecting material for this thesis.

Looking through the publications of UN Women I have searched for a type of publication that can be representative for the position of UN Women. There are surely various documents published by UN Women that could contribute to an analysis of the women's empowerment discourse, such as for instance position papers and project evaluations. However, due to lack of space I have to restrain the amount of material, and according to my research amongst the material, UN Women's annual reports are the publications in which its position and values are best illustrated. The annual reports summarise the work in general without focusing on any issue in particular. Hence, the annual reports should be where I have the best possibility to reveal the conceptual instruments within UN Women's empowerment discourse.

As I will elaborate further later on, discourse is dynamic and discourse analysis shows on *possible changes* in meaning of concepts. In order to distinguish whether or not such changes prevail within the women's empowerment discourse it is necessary to analyse the discourse over a certain time period. This requires an analysis of documents from at least two different moments in time. It would certainly have been contributing to include all published annual reports since the start of UN Women, together will perhaps even additional data, but as I want to go into detail in the chosen documents there is only space to include two reports. Since there is a relatively recent ending of the MDGs focus, entering an era of SDGs, I find it suitable to investigate the period that UN Women has worked towards the MDGs. I have therefore selected UN Women's first published annual report after their first full year of work; published in 2012, together with the annual report concluding the work in the end of the MDGs; published in 2016. This way the beginning and the end of UN Women's focus on the MDGs is covered, and it also allows the thesis to display whether the discourse has changed during this time period.

3.2 Limitations

As in any research there are certain obstacles to handle and so is there in this case. This section will explain the limitations as I see them regarding this thesis' methodological approach and subjectivity.

3.2.1 Validity

Within discourse theory, where language creates reality and what is known depends on the prevailing discourse, it becomes difficult to conduct a study in a conventional manner explaining the operalisation of tools; which issues are investigated and how. However, even conducting qualitative research within poststructuralism it might be worth saying something on validity.

In structural theory at large, the question of validity plays a different role than in positivist studies. Since this form of research involves anti-positivist and anti-realist standpoints, terms of validity and reliability might seem irrelevant. However, it can still fill a vital purpose (Mason, 1996). In a study of this kind, validity means to certify that the concepts can be observed in the way that the study proclaims. I argue that by doing a discourse analysis investigating the UN's definition of women's empowerment, there is a direct examination of the written *language* that is used in key publications. This should be a satisfying indicator on the discursive structures that prevail.

3.2.2 Limitations as a researcher

As will be explained in the following section, the nature of the chosen method and its ontological assumptions proclaims that any form of research will be subjective. Being a discourse analysis, this study will perhaps more than others run the risk of subjectivity. Important to acknowledge here is that I write this thesis from my own position in society within our discourse, as a white European with values obviously founded in the Global North. This is a problem, especially from a postcolonial perspective. To avoid this problem completely, for me, the alternative would have been not to do this study at all. However, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out in regards to her heavy critique on the prevailing Eurocentrism in development in the book *Feminism without borders*; cross-

cultural research is not pointless. Nevertheless, as a researcher one should be aware of the historical heritage and avoid applying theories of universality and generalisations of the Global North to problems of the Global South (2003, p.107).

With this in mind, the aim is to carry this out in a manner with as much awareness as possible. Being from the Global North one needs to consider the limitations of knowledge regarding several aspects of the Global South. This has been put forth by established researchers, one of them being before mentioned Cheryl McEwan, who points out how privilege in power relations and privilege in knowledge often are mistaken by Global North researchers to be equivalents of one another, and how it is important to raise awareness on this. To illustrate the problem McEwan uses an example from an exchange student in Canada, who explained how she was expected to focus on her 'home country's' issues, while *the Canadian students had much more academic privilege and freedom to study and speak about any women's issues in any continent from around the world'* (2001, p. 8). Instead of assuming this as a privilege, a researcher from the Global North should embrace the fact that being from an outside culture implies that gaining certain knowledge to a sufficient extent will be impossible. This is a disadvantage in a situation where you are supposed to understand the context and find solutions to local problems, which is often the purpose of much development and empowerment work, as well as in conducting research on these subjects.

3.3 Methodological framework

As has been briefly described above, this study builds on the theory of poststructuralism, departing from ontological and epistemological assumptions that reality is created by those who perceive it. Consequently, the perceived reality is dynamic. Ontology refers to which facts and truths that are assigned to particular phenomena, while epistemology refers to how knowledge and facts about reality is created. This thesis is thus based on the assumptions that we continuously create the world we live in through our language and communication with each other, which leaves reality as something that is experienced

individually. It relates to constructivism which declares that there is no objective reality that can be reached outside our own perceptions.

3.3.1 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist theory emerged as a response to structuralism, which was an attempt to organise language into a comprehensible system. Proponents of structuralism argued that our language is organised in a rational structure where we gain access to reality through language. This is contrary to the empiricist scientists who see language merely as a tool to present material facts.

According to scholars of poststructuralism, language is significant for the understanding of reality – as it is only through language that material facts can gain meaning and acquire an identity, as Lene Hansen explains in her book *Security as Practise* (2006). Hansen outlines the reasoning behind poststructuralism as '*Language is social and political, an inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference*' (p. 17). Moreover, she contends that language in poststructuralism is not only structure, but also post, which here means that it is an unstable structure as a result of its dynamic existence (p. 20).

Jörgensen and Phillips explained in their work *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (2000) this gaining of access to reality through language with an example of a flood. A flood is by material fact a rise of water level, but it can be perceived as natural phenomena, consequence of the 'greenhouse effect', or by someone it might be interpreted as an act of god. Materially being the rise of water it can mean a variety of things to different people. These different interpretations are parts of different discourses, where assumptions are made depending on perspective. The discourses change over time and thus the discourse we assume change the way we look at the world and what it means to us.

In order to explain the language and its structure, structuralist theorists compared language to a fishing net, where the words we use to communicate are connected to each other as knots in a fishing net, and in that way they create meaning

(Jörgensen and Phillips, 2000, p. 11). Poststructural scholarship means that in contrast to this comparison, one might think of language in the same way as the Internet; where the knots are also connected, but in a variety of ways which can, and do change over time, continuously changing the meaning of things.

With this epistemological point of departure, researchers, the present one amongst them, will only be able to present a social reality as it is perceived in text through his or her analysis which is subjective, rather than observing objective truths or realities (Bryman, 2001, p 347). This is also, as will be elaborated later on, the ontological position of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), who have created the methodological model on which this thesis is based. Every time something is spoken or written, it is created, from the perspective of that particular person. Through communication we create an understanding of the world and as a result, social reality is continuously created. This means that reality is changeable rather than fixed. It does not mean that the physical base for the world changes, but that our interpretation of it changes through our perspectives, since the physical objects in the world gain meaning through our communication. This interpretation is possible to investigate through discourse analysis. Perspectives and interpretations are thus important aspects for this form of research, as will be shown in the analysis using the theory of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism will enable the critical stances of this study, as discourse analysis is a form of critical research where power relations are investigated and the researcher seeks to open up for social change. Discourse analysis is critical to what Jörgensen and Phillips calls 'taken-for-granted knowledge' and sees knowledge as a product of our way of categorising the world.

3.3.2 Discourse analysis
One of the founders of discourse analysis was Michel Foucault, who explained how knowledge is not as it may seem, a reflection of reality, but rather a discursive construction where different regimes of knowledge determines what is true and false (1972). Even subjects are created within the discourse. This is completely different from the Western (Northern) understanding that the subject is

autonomous and a sovereign entity (Jörgensen and Phillips, 2000). Lene Hansen explains how it is significant that discourse is not only ideas, but incorporates both material bases *and* ideas in the creation of meaning (2006 p. 17). Laclau and Mouffe argue in a similar way that the discourse is constitutive of everything and that even the material is part of the discourse. This means that we can never have an aim to uncover the truth 'as it is', since everything is perceived through the discourse. A researcher can only discuss what *could have been* possible if the discourse did not limit us, but even such a discussion would be discursive, according to Laclau and Mouffe, since the researcher is unable to leave the discourse. One aim with discourse analysis it to identify the social causes of certain discursive representations of reality (Jörgensen and Phillips, 2000).

This uncovering of discourse and its social causes is also the aim for this thesis, with attention to the social causes behind the definition of women's empowerment. This thesis has thus no aim to present an answer to how things *should* work, but rather seek for possible reasons to why the discourse prevails in the shape it does.

3.3.3 Discourse analysis by Laclau and Mouffe

In this section I will explain the research method for this study in further detail and describe how it will be used in this particular study. I will provide and account for the theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe based primarily on their main work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) and also on the presentation of their theory described by Jörgensen and Phillips (2000).

The overall idea of the discourse theory presented by Laclau and Mouffe is that everything changes over time and no social phenomena is ever 'finished'. They merge two theories; Marxism and poststructuralism, into a single theory where the social is understood as a 'web of processes' where meaning is created. They argue that all social phenomena can be explained with discursive tools (2000, p. 24). In contrast to the before mentioned fishing net metaphor of meanings in fixed relations to each other; according to this theory meaning cannot be fixed but is changeable over time. Laclau and Mouffe assume both these views and argue that

we constantly try to fix the meanings of things *as if* it was possible to do so, and that social process is the constitution of discourse. The attempt to fix the meaning is impossible because the fixation of meaning is contingent, meaning that it is possible but it is not necessary. '*The aim of discourse analysis is to map out the processes in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalised that we think of them as natural*' (ibid, p. 26).

3.3.3.1 Key concepts

Laclau and Mouffe present some concepts that are necessary to be acquainted with in order to pursue their discourse theory. Four of them are presented in the following quote which also can be found in Jörgensen and Philips.

> '[W]e will call *articulation* any practise establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practise. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practise, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated'. (1985, p. 105, italics in original)

Jörgensen and Phillips explain further that *moments* are all already articulated signs in a discourse, to be compared with the knots in the aforementioned fishing net, and whose meaning has been fixed through relation to other signs. The moments are organised around certain *nodal points*, which have privileged positions within the discourse. An example of a nodal point in political discourse is 'democracy' which is one of the central terms on which we talk about politics. A discourse is constituted as an entity in which signs have certain fixed meanings, excluding all other meanings to be articulated. All these other possible articulations are called the *field of discursivity*. The field of discursivity is thus meanings that each sign could have had, if it was not for the limitation of the particular discourse. Signs that have not yet been fixed by the discourse are called

elements; the meanings of the elements are still multiple and the articulations still struggle to fix their meaning to become part of the unified meaning within the discourse. The discourse is thus trying to convert the elements into moments, and when this is completed the discourse has reached *closure*. However, this closure can never be complete, since the fixed meanings in the discourse always can be undermined by the multiplicity of meanings still existing in the field of discursivity (1985, p. 113).

> *'Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre.' (ibid, p. 112)*

An *articulation* according to Laclau and Mouffe is every attempt to give meaning to signs and change or reproduce the identity of the moments and elements in the discourse. There are also elements that are open for different ascriptions of meaning, and they are called *floating signifiers*. Floating signifiers are signs that different discourses fight to invest with meaning in their own way. A floating signifier can also be a nodal point, but as a nodal point it is talked about within a certain discourse in which the sign has a fixed meaning. A *myth* is a floating signifier that refers to a totality, for example 'the country' can be talked about by different politicians and appear to have a fixed meaning, but the politicians probably have very differing images in mind when they talk about 'the country' and what should be done about its problems (2000, p. 26-29, 39).

3.3.3.2 Theoretical heritage

These discursive processes according to Laclau and Mouffe incorporate the entire social field as they include everything in the discourse. They developed their theory as a critical response to Marxist theory of historical materialism (ibid), where Marx saw two dimensions in society; the base (the economic system and the binary relationship between the worker and the owner of the means of production) and the superstructure (schools, churches, media etc.). In Marxist theory, the superstructure, in this understanding the *production of meaning,* controls the minds of the people who are unable to realise the oppression put upon

them in the economic system. The system appears as natural and the oppressed workers suffer from what is called 'false consciousness' and will only realise the oppression in the revolution when the working class recognises its true interest (ibid).

An addition to the historical materialism was made when Antonio Gramsci (1991) added the concept of hegemony and allowed political elements to the model in order to explain the processes that shape people's consciousness. Hegemony according to Gramsci is best conceived as the organisation of consent; a process where subordinated kinds of consciousness are created without any coercion. The consciousness of people gains autonomy to some extent in this model, and that opens up for the possibility for people to imagine a society that is organised in an alternative way.

3.3.3.3 Fusion
Laclau and Mouffe merge these two theories and construct a new way to interpret the social. They argue that we need to abandon the premise of society as a totality in analysis, meaning there are no objective laws that organise society into different groups (1985, p. 111). They say the groups are created in discursive processes which are political. They do not mean the discourse determines the economy, but merge the two categories of the historical materialism, base and superstructure, into one discursive field where discursive processes create the meaning of everything. In this fused society of discourse, there is no possibility to uncover the 'real' reality (ibid, p. 107). On the other hand, what would be possible to discover is *how* we create the reality we perceive so that it appears to us as natural. The starting point for Laclau and Mouffe is that we construct objectivity through the discourse of meaning. The target of investigation is thus the construction process. Politics is a broad concept in this model, where political acts constitute both reproduction and change of meaning, and refers to the way in which we continuously create the social in ways that eliminate other possible ways. Here a correlation can be made to the poststructural reasoning of Hansen, where she explains this in the following manner: '*To understand language as*

political is to see it as a site for the production and reproduction of particular subjectivities and identities while others are simultaneously excluded' (2006, p. 18f). Further demonstrating the creation of one identity by simultaneously assuming another, Hansen means that there is a relational aspect in the conception of identity, since identity is created by the assumption of something that it is not; to speak of the American is to constitute a non-American; to speak of a barbaric is to constitute a civilised etc. (p. 6).

Laclau and Mouffe argues that the change from this political creation to (perceived) objectivity passes through hegemonic interventions where alternative understandings are suppressed and that leads to normalisation of one particular perspective. This demonstrates what discourse analysis aims to display and how it can work as a way to see the meaning behind what is said, as well as uncover alternative possible interpretations of the same issue. This is what this thesis aims to obtain in the analysis by using a postcolonial perspective on women's empowerment.

As an example of how this normalisation process can be understood; writing this thesis, I find it necessary to state the fact that the epistemological outlook is poststructuralism. If I were to write a thesis relying on positivist foundations, I would probably not feel the same need to state the epistemological ground, as positivism in my understanding is assumed to *be* science and therefore it could be perceived as redundant to state it.

It is in this normalisation process that Laclau and Mouffe apply Gramsci's addition to the theory of historical materialism and uses it in their fusion of everything into discourse. *'All meaning is fluid and all discourses are contingent; it is objectivity that masks contingency and, in so doing, hides the alternative possibilities that otherwise could have presented themselves'* (2000, p. 37). But this is thus only a perception. Laclau and Mouffe argue that society is never completed, but will always constitute struggles of meaning and the structuring of signs will never drain all the potentials for ascription of meaning. Any discourse

can at any time be undermined by articulations outside of the discourse that invest the signs with different meaning than what appears as fixed within the discourse. Thus, by looking into two different moments in time of the particular discourse of women's empowerment, I will be able to apply this way of tracing articulations and investment of meaning in the analysis.

A central aspect within discourse analysis is to analyse the implied truths in society, how it appears that some myths are objectively true while others appear as impossible. Relevant questions can be: Which social actors invest the meaning of a myth? And; how does an actor struggle to make that individual understanding of 'society' the predominant one? (ibid, p. 40). Discourse theory proposes that the researcher focuses on specific expressions; what meanings do they establish and what meaning potentials do they exclude? Jörgensen and Phillips (2000, p. 30) suggest that this can be formulated in two questions:

'What discourse or discourses do a specific articulation draw on, what discourses does it reproduce?'

And;

'Does the articulation challenge and transform an existing discourse by redefining some of its moments?'

An important aspect in answering these questions is to determine the nodal points in the particular discourse and how these nodal points are defined. One can then look to other discourses how these signs (which are nodal point in the discourse at hand) are defined in alternative ways. In doing this it can be observed how struggle takes place over the meaning of the signs depending on the discourse (ibid, p.30). The only way to pinpoint the social consequences of particular discursive constructions, is by continuously investigate what possibilities are excluded from the construction (ibid. p. 38).

3.3.3.4 Antagonism and hegemony

This brief explanation of the functions in Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse analysis describes an ongoing struggle of the fixation of meaning. A significant concept in their model is consequently antagonism. The point of departure in discourse theory is, as has been explained, that reality is perceived, and everything in it (in the discourse) is contingent. Moments in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory can always be undermined by new articulations and become elements, and so what we might have supposed to be objective, what we perceived as natural, was actually contingent. There is a continuous struggle and antagonism.

A *social antagonism* takes place when different identities mutually eliminate each other, when one dismisses the other from being possible. In discourse theory a subject is merely a *subject position* within the discourse, so one individual can occupy several subject positions, or identities, within different discourses (1985, p. 115). This makes it possible for identities to end up in social antagonism, where one excludes the other. An example used in Jörgensen and Phillips work (p. 47 2000) is the case of the 'worker' being the same physical individual as the 'Scot', and the two subject positions in this case might be working out perfectly. But when the country calls this individual to go to war together with other 'Scots' against other 'workers' the two identities becomes antagonistic. This individual's two subject positions, being part of two different discourses, make conflicting demands on the individual's actions within a shared ground and they each make the other impossible. The discourses, constituting the both identities, are part of the field of discursivity of one another and an antagonism is then possible (Laclau, 1990, p. 17).

Hegemony occurs when there is a social antagonism between discourses, and a *hegemonic intervention* takes place, dissolving the antagonism and one of the discourses overrides the other and a new hegemony takes over, fixating the meaning. Hegemony is thus similar to discourse, but fills a position in a larger picture (Jörgensen and Phillips, 2000, p. 48). Ernesto Laclau has later added deconstruction to the model, borrowing the concept from Jacque Derrida (Laclau,

1993, p. 281). Laclau means that hegemony is the contingent articulation of elements that might appear as objectivity, and deconstruction is what shows that hegemony is contingent; meaning the elements could have been combined differently. The operation of deconstruction of hegemony can thus be compared to discourse analysis, since it is also what discourse analysis seek to show; deconstruct the structures that are seen as 'taken-for-granted knowledge' and the social consequences it results in.

3.3.3.5 Application to women's empowerment

Jörgensen and Phillips mean that Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is difficult to apply to empirical work because the aim with their work is theory development and hence do not provide concrete tools for analysis. However, I believe their framework is suitable for the analysis in this thesis and I will use their theory in the following manner.

Focusing on the central aspects in women's empowerment discourse, using my first two sub questions looking for chains of equivalence and nodal points, I will indicate the signs that create chains of equivalence within the discourse and how they constitute nodal points which are given central positions within the women's empowerment discourse. Each nodal point will then be analysed according to discourse theory and questioned in terms of possible implications regarding women's empowerment in development. This will be done on the two annual reports which I have picked out for the study; annual report 2012 and annual report 2016 from UN Women. This will show the empowerment discourse prevailing in 2012 and 2016, which will answer the third sub question regarding the possible change over time. This way I aim to answer the research question on which conceptual instruments that are development in UN Women to further women's empowerment.

Chapter 4 – Analysis

This chapter will start with a discourse analysis of the annual reports. In the first section of the analysis, a discourse analysis will be made using tools from Laclau

and Mouffe's theory on discourse; selected parts of the documents will be extracted from the texts in order to demonstrate the pinpointed chains of equivalence which have been found through in-depth reading. The signs creating the chains will be marked in the extractions and put together as chains, and the nodal point created by each chain will be explained and motivated subsequently. This way there will be a description of the creation of meaning that is being articulated by UN Women in the women's empowerment discourse. The outcomes will then be analysed in a second section using postcolonialism as point of departure. The analysis will thus be divided into two parts; one consisting solely of a discourse analysis and the other entailing the postcolonial perspective on the prevailing discourse.

4.1 Discourse analysis

The analysis will be laid out in a chronological manner where I will start analysing the first document being the annual report published in 2012 and afterwards an analysis of the annual report from 2016 will follow. Subsequently some concluding remarks will be made to summarise the results.

4.1.1 Annual Report 2012

The annual report published in 2012 gathers the results of UN Women's first full year of work in 2011. 2011 was a year where the emergence of the Arab Spring was only starting while the relatively immediate consequences of the 2008's economic crisis were at its peak. In this annual report UN Women explain their purpose, aims and what they have focused on to accomplish this since the beginning in 2010. The report is divided into their five focus areas; increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting.

Early on in page 3 the first chain of equivalence can be extracted. There is an argumentation for women taking part in political life in the ongoing Arab Spring

and being part of the recovery of the economy during the prevailing economic crisis.

> "The political, social and economic transformations of the past year have underscored the need for women's **participation** and gender equality. In 2011, our support helped bring record numbers of women to the polls in Egypt, to extend women's **presence** in politics, and to strengthen **women's voices** in municipal affairs. Globally, the UN General Assembly agreed that countries should take and report on concrete steps to increase women's political **participation**."

The signs shaping a chain of equivalence here are: participation – presence – women's voices – participation

Here a chain of equivalence focusing around the need for **representation** of women is revealed. Representation is seen as a nodal point because, as will be shown, it is observed in several places of the text and is a central aspect of the empowerment discourse articulated by UN Women. Interestingly in this early selected paragraph, they express the cause behind the focus on women's representation being not the empowerment of women, but the fact that *"The political, social and economic transformations of the past year have underscored the need for women's participation…"* The reason behind this central attention is thus not women's empowerment in itself, but rather the positive influence women can have in these political bodies.

The nodal point of representation can be seen in various places in the report where UN Women focus in several regards on getting women into parliaments and other political organisations, but also when they focus on getting women represented in peace processes and mediating bodies. Regarding their work on peace building on page 15 the following quotes are selected.

> "Based on successful past experiences with UN Women-initiated annual Open Day on Women and Peace meetings,

where high-level UN officials listen to the **recommendations of women** peace activists, the UN mandated all UN peacekeeping missions to conduct them each year and report accordingly."

"When political conflict and humanitarian crisis affected Mali in early 2012, UN Women supported the successful efforts of a **delegation of women** peace activists to **participate** in political stabilization negotiations. They presented a Declaration of Malian Women urging **attention to their role** in conflict prevention and resolution as essential to the country's future."

"Radio broadcasts and announcements in local markets encouraged women to record **statements** for the commission— nearly 15,000 were collected. Special thematic **hearings** took place for women and children—over 1,000 women **attended**. The process yielded invaluable **insights** into gender discrimination and property ownership, sexual violence and inadequate health care, among other issues."

The chain of equivalence on representation is created by: recommendations of women – delegation of women – participate – attention to their role – statements – hearings – attended – insights

In the mid paragraph regarding the role of Malian women in conflict resolution, the same traits as in the previous paragraph of underlying objective is articulated concerning the positive influence the representing women have, rather than their actual empowerment. This chain also shows the importance of representation in listening to the women involved and the importance of their representation in these instances from which the UN Women draw much of their work. Without women being represented, their voices would not be heard and no actions according to their desires could take place, which should have a substantial impact on both the development of the country at hand as well as for the women involved. This is not articulated as a factor of empowerment in the report.

However, it is difficult to argue against the empowering effects from this, both regarding the work on political representation and representation in peace building processes: Existing in these policy shaping parts of society should empower the representing women, as well as the women who are not themselves taking part but being represented by other women in these important influential bodies. As a marginalised group it should be an empowering feeling both to be an influential actor, to be listened to, and also to see people of your own gender taking part in important discussions and make an impact on society. It demonstrates not only how women can be a part of peace building but also the importance of their experiences.

On page 13 there is a reflection on the results concerning gender based violence and the work that UN Women has accomplished in that area. The following pieces of text can be found.

> "An innovative **campaign** … asked women and men from around the country to share **testimonies** of violence in their lives and recommend ways to move towards a safer world. In three months, nearly 10,000 **letters** poured in, both electronically and through mailboxes in government offices, hospitals, markets and universities."

> "The **campaign** … sparked widespread **public debate**—with **news coverage** reaching over 5 million people. Letters were read on **prime-time television**, and broadcasters donated over US$2 million in free airtime for **campaign** messages. The high **visibility** of an issue long surrounded by silence convinced a group of feminist attorneys to take up a pro-bono case against an important judge accused of harassment."

Here a chain of equivalence is created by the following signs: campaign – testimonies – letters – campaign – public debate – news coverage – prime-time television – campaign – visibility

A nodal point of **awareness** can be pinpointed through the above chain of equivalence. There is a much present focus on raising awareness on issues regarding gender equality and empowerment factors throughout this annual report, which makes it a nodal point: It can be seen in several focus areas how UN Women work profoundly with engaging the public and encouragement to listen to women, often involving campaign work. In the work against gender based violence UN Women show how they strive for attention for these broadly prevailing problems. More examples from page 13 show how awareness raising is used to accomplish changes in often traditional procedures:

> "In the course of the year, it amended a local ordinance to **strengthen action** against sexual harassment in public spaces. Elsewhere in Ecuador, UN Women has helped indigenous people's organizations **introduce procedures** to penalize gender-based violence in **indigenous justice mechanisms** and develop links to the formal justice system for the most serious cases."

> "In 2011, the Caribbean Ombudsmen Association agreed on a protocol for **protecting survivors** of gender-based violence that will be piloted in four countries in 2012. The protocol strengthens cooperation between **ombudsmen**, police and **victim support** services to extend protection and **promote awareness** of the rights and needs of survivors."

> "(In Pakistan) The Criminal Law (second amendment) Act 2011 for the first time levies prison sentences—from 14 years to a lifetime—for acid attacks, which were not **recognized** as a crime until recently. The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act **penalizes cultural traditions** once viewed as acceptable, including forced marriages. To galvanize broader **public awareness** of the new laws and the issues behind them, UN

Women launched a signature campaign mobilizing community members, women's groups and social media users…"

Another chain of equivalence is pinpointed: strengthen action – introduce procedures – indigenous justice mechanisms – protecting survivors – ombudsmen – victim support – promote awareness – recognized – penalizes cultural traditions – public awareness

The nodal point awareness works here as a tool to gather recognition for the problem of gender based violence and act on it. Without recognition as a problem it does not exist as a problem. Awareness here is used partly to acknowledge the suffering that the women are put through, as well as recognition by the public, some who might not have been aware of the existence of the violence, or of the extent of it. Recognition of the crime is also recognition of potential feelings of violation, insult and other harm that the victims might have felt as a result from these crimes and that is the way I argue that awareness should have an empowering effect on these often female victims. If this violence is recognised as a crime it means the victim has a value, rights and possibilities, and the awareness might this way lead to empowerment through awakening in this regard.

Similarly with the nodal point representation, UN Women does not mention any of these possible implications of empowerment as objectives for their work with raising awareness. They do stress the importance of this work but not how it will have an effect on empowerment as such. Regarding their work against violence, many times violence is a part of the culture, as it has been – and still is in both the Global North and the Global South, and to recognise that as a crime I would argue counts as an empowering factor in any society.

As mentioned in the introduction of this section, one of UN Women's five priority areas is economic empowerment. Not only is it emphasised in the section discussing this priority area, but it is a theme mainstreaming the report and seems to be widely regarded as a justification for the very existence of UN Women. One chain of equivalence is extracted demonstrating this, from page 19.

> "Grounded in support for the Government's national development plan, the programme prioritizes education and **economic** empowerment for women and girls, along with measures to end gender-based violence. In 2011, it trained 6,000 women on **business** development and **management skills**, and extended credit and saving services to another 8,000 women to begin or expand **businesses**."

The signs creating a chain of equivalence in this paragraph are: economic – business – management skills – businesses

Here is a chain of equivalence creates meaning of **economic** importance in empowerment work. The economic topic can be seen throughout the report and is a clear nodal point and it seems to work as a warrant for empowerment work in general because of its quality of driving production, economic growth and other areas of development forward. This kind of argumentation can be found in several places in the document. Earlier in the report, on page 7 the following text can be found.

> "In 2012, the main theme for discussion was the empowerment of **rural women**, and **their role** in poverty and hunger eradication, and development. Constituting a quarter of the world's population, rural women and girls have **major roles** in agricultural **economies**, but **their contributions** have been largely overlooked. The commission shared country experiences and good practices, and discussed a broad range of necessary actions to overcome discrimination and **empower this group** of women."

The signs of this chain are: rural women – their role – major roles – economies – their contributions – empower this group

Here another chain of equivalence of meaning on how women, in this case rural women, play an important role in the development of their economies, and that is

why it is important to empower them. The argument is that since women are so important for the economic development, it is important to empower these women. The argument is *not* the value for these women to be empowered, access their rights or extend their possible choices. This way this nodal point correlates with the earlier mentioned nodal point of representation which is also defended in the report by its positive outcomes in other areas of development and not necessarily for its empowering qualities for the women themselves. The difference here is that the nodal point economy is actually articulated as an empowering factor for the women involved, in the way that they do call it *economic empowerment*.

4.1.2 Annual Report 2016

Here I will analyse the latest report in the same manner as I did with the first one, although with less depth in the cases where the nodal points correlate with the previous report in order to avoid being redundant. Emphasis here will be on in which ways the central themes differ from the earlier report and further analysis on that.

In their 2016 Annual Report UN Women present their accomplishments during the previous year and how they have worked towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); primarily number 5 being that of gender equality, and Agenda 2030 that the UN has developed after the passing of 2015 and the MDGs. Their five prioritised areas of work from the beginning continue to be; increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. A new global context has evolved during the five years of work. The aftermath of the global economic crisis has changed; the in 2012 newly started Arab Spring has in 2016 led to differing outcomes for the involved countries and the situations of women in these countries are naturally affected by it; as well as evolving climate change and the increasingly emphasised focus on its effects.

In the beginning of the report on page 7 the following chain of equivalence can be extracted:

> "Through our ministerial roundtable on women and girls in humanitarian situations, we urged world leaders to commit to the actions required to engender the humanitarian response in line with international agreements including: **involving** women as **leaders** in the humanitarian response; protecting women and girls from gender-based violence; and **providing access** to sexual and reproductive health services. The commitments that emerged reflect our insistent call for all forms of humanitarian action to not only respond to women's needs but to also uphold their **rights**—and represents an important shift away from the current emphasis on protection to one of empowerment and **equal opportunity**."

The signs creating this chain of equivalence are: involving – leaders – provide access – equal opportunity

This chain shows a new nodal point of **agency**. Instead of delivering something to these women, UN Women want to enable possibilities for them to take it themselves; this is especially visible through articulations such as 'provide access' and 'equal opportunity'. In this extracted text UN Women also describe the change of focus from that of protection towards opportunity, which further points to the emphasis being on agency. This new take becomes more visible on page 8:

> "We are making equality a reality around the world by backing constitutions, laws and policies that guarantee women **opportunities to lead**, including through temporary special measures. We assist national stakeholders to manage **gender-aware elections,** whether that means ensuring all women can reach a ballot box or protecting women **candidates** from electoral violence. New leadership skills **equip women** who

serve in parliament, civil society or elsewhere as highly effective **champions of change**."

The same emphasis continues on page 10:

"The Women's Situation Room is a comprehensive citizen **engagement** effort that focuses on the **role of women** and youth in keeping elections peaceful and **participatory** … Eight nationally renowned **women leaders** mediated by engaging political leaders and security personnel to respond. Police and electoral commission officials were stationed in the Women's Situation Room to immediately **resolve** many of the issues that arose."

As well as on page 22:

"In South Sudan, UN Women has partnered with the Council of Churches to train 200 women religious **leaders** in 10 states on **transformational leadership**. After drawing attention to the fact that all members of the faith-based group participating in the South Sudan peace talks were men, they began a successful campaign that resulted in new appointments of women as half the total members. Female religious **leaders** mobilized with a diverse coalition of other women…"

This chain of equivalence consists of the following signs: opportunities to lead – gender-aware elections – candidates – equip women – champions of change – engagement – role of women – participatory – women leaders – resolve – leaders – transformational leadership – leaders

Here is another chain on agency from different parts of the report showing a focus on concepts such as opportunities, equipping; which are pointing to the women taking action themselves and how women take the role of solving problems that occur instead of being portrayed as victims within development. The work of UN

Women here is rather that of facilitating access to these possibilities. There is still a clear focus on the nodal point from the previous report – representation – persisting in this report, but these chains of equivalence illustrate that it is not enough for women to *be* in these political or peace building bodies but now it is more important than before that they are engaged to *act* and that is the vital part in this development which makes it a new nodal point. This swift will be further elaborated in the summary of the discourse analysis.

On page 11 there is a statement from a Colombian woman councillor who shares her experiences being involved in a project led by UN Women. The participant articulates how new insights have been reached in the following quote:

> "UN Women's project gave us **insight** into the reality of women's participation in local politics, through figures and statistics, **highlighting why** there are no women in the Assembly, **why** in the Pasto Municipality Council there is only one and in a number of municipalities in the Department [State] there are none, and **why** we only have one female senator and one representative in Parliament. The different socioeconomic **causes**: fear and that **ingrained sense** of absolute responsibility for the home as if we didn't have partners. These are all **preconceptions** that can be broken"

Signs creating a chain of equivalence: insight – highlighted why – why – why – causes – ingrained sense – preconceptions

In this quote a chain of equivalence creating **awareness** can be extracted. This woman explains how they have received help gaining knowledge on why the status quo remains and through that awareness; gaining the ability to question it. Thus, awareness of the situation and the causes behind it made her able to act. This nodal point correlates with the results of the previous report and shows how awareness is an important part of the work of UN Women regarding empowerment. In addition they emphasise awareness regarding risks that women

face in a greater prevalence than men do. On page 26 a similar chain can be found concerning the spread of Zika virus in Brazil:

> "As the extent of the epidemic became clear, UN Women joined forces with … and national officials to make sure that women had **correct information** to protect themselves, including on the **right to decide** to get pregnant. The campaign began with the mass distribution of social media cards, flyers and posters **urging** pregnant women to **understand the risks**."

Signs creating the chain are: correct information – rights to decide – urging – understand the risks

In this paragraph another chain on awareness is extracted from the document where in this context it works on two levels; both regarding the current risk of a serious virus which affects women in a different way than it affects men, and regarding the right to decide if and when to get pregnant. This way awareness works in an empowering way in the short perspective concerning a direct threat and in a long perspective where women receive important information regarding their rights as individuals and in this manner allows them to make intelligent choices. This awareness also allows them to be agents who can take action based on these choices – in reference to the previous nodal point – agency.

On page 34 another addition to the nodal point of awareness can be traced. Two extracts from the description of the program and in the middle a quote from a participant:

> "Pamela's path to empowerment in the male-dominated world of technology was eased by the Technological **Café** … It **drew together** a host of **dynamic women** entrepreneurs and technology leaders to **mentor** young women…"

> "It is hard to know other women studying technology because there are so few of us. Having the chance to **meet and talk** is

wonderful. There is nothing a woman cannot do; those are myths from the past."

"By organizing **public debates** and **outreach activities**, a **network of women** and girls from the programme **promotes** rural women's involvement in IC."

Signs creating a chain here are: café – drew together – dynamic women – mentor – meet and talk – public debates – outreach activities – network of women – promotes

This chain of equivalence demonstrates awareness in terms of how women who have a relatively unusual interest in technical development get the chance to exchange knowledge and support from one another. This helps them to feel comfortable in their development and that way they get empowered when realising that they are not alone with this interest, as well as it helps them to gain recognition for their ability to develop these skills further.

Moving on to page 16 a new emphasis on how to work with social structures can be noted in the following extraction:

"Our programmes **identify** discriminatory **behaviours**, **attitudes** and **norms** that **foster** violence and work to **engage new ways of thinking** and acting among people, from all walks of life—political figures, men journalists, religious leaders, sports champions and many others."

The emphasis continues on page 17:

"A global conference in New Delhi in 2015 brought together over 140 participants from 24 countries. Based on **accumulating experiences** and evidence of strategies that work, they agreed on a series of recommendations, such as to **include gender** across all public safety and public transport policies, to broaden women's access to technology to prevent and respond

> to violence in public spaces, and to promote **changes in attitudes** and **behaviours** among men and boys."

The signs creating a chain of equivalence in these extracts are: identify – behaviours – attitudes – norms – foster – engage new ways of thinking – accumulating experiences – include gender – change in attitudes – behaviours

This chain shows how there is a concentration on working with change in **social structures** which must be considered a nodal point in the discourse prevailing in this report. Social structures are *mentioned* in the report from 2012 but it is not a fundamental aspect and thus not a nodal point at that moment. In the 2016 report however it has become a more central theme which can be traced repeatedly in several areas and should consequently be considered a nodal point. Here they also embrace men and boys to the work on empowerment where they are involved with altering these norms, which should be the only way to reach a change of an issue of this kind, being deep-rooted norms in community behaviours relying with both genders. The same emphasis, and inclusive manner of work, can be found on page 32 regarding work against the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM):

> "We need to work to **change** people's **mindsets**," she says, stressing that all women and girls should live free from this **harmful practice**. Even her husband is now involved, intent on protecting his own daughter and all other girls in their community. He also attended the training, and **speaks out** in the community and to other men about the damage FGM causes.

The signs that are put together forming the chain of equivalence are: change – mind-sets – harmful practice – speaks out

Here the context of social structures is on how to stop FGM that is a widely used practise in several societies in the Global South and which is harmful in several aspects, with both physical and psychological consequences for girls and women. This focus works in an empowering way because of the reduction of a harmful practice that would take the power away from in this case young girls who have

no possibility to stop it themselves. Changing the mind-sets of the people in these communities seems like the only chance of a change of this practice, as it is difficult to reach the problem in other ways. Changing social structures is a vital part of empowerment seen from a deeper perspective as it means changing the way of things at its core, which is where long term transformation is most possible, and effective.

The most significant nodal point – economy – from the previous report also takes a central place in the 2016 report, as can be seen on page 13:

> "Creating **economic interest** groups has brought women together to manage their **production** and **marketing**, building on collective strengths."

> "Association members—many of whom were illiterate and had barely dreamed of such a possibility in the past—soon saw their **incomes** grow enough to open bank accounts and aspire to bigger plans. After only two years, the Association purchased a second hectare and intends to acquire more to **boost production**. 'Women work hard because they are struggling for a more dignified life'."

Another example is found on page 35:

> "The programme has also helped more than 1,300 women enhance their **productive skills**, while 500 more have found **jobs** or established their own **businesses** through several private sector **partnering** models. Four mobile units were established to ensure continued **technical training** for women"

Signs creating a chain are: economic interest – production – marketing – incomes – boost production – productive skills – jobs – businesses – partnering – technical training

This chain of equivalence demonstrates the continuing emphasis on **economic** empowerment within the empowerment work of UN Women. On page 12 however an interesting change in this aspect can be traced, here shown in the following paragraph:

> "Women make **contributions** to economies, from the local to the global, that mount into the trillions of dollars. Despite this fact, women in all regions continue to be overrepresented in **low-paid** and **vulnerable** jobs. At the current pace, it will take 70 years to close the gender pay gap. In addition, shouldering the bulk of **unpaid care work limits** women's opportunities. Through economic empowerment, women can overcome these **barriers**."

The following signs create a chain: contributions – low-paid – vulnerable – unpaid care work – limits – barriers

This chain of equivalence shows not only how women make contributions to the economic growth creating a nodal point of economy just as in the report from 2012, but also, and importantly; UN Women states the barrier of unpaid care work which limits women in all sectors. This acknowledgment cannot be found in the report from 2012. This concern is also expressed by a female bus driver in Turkey who explains the problem on page 32:

> "This is an incredibly demanding job. We work very long hours and have only one day off. For my male colleagues, their work ends here and when they go home, they can rest. But when I arrive at home, I wash my hands and head straight to the kitchen. I feel like I'm resting more in the bus while driving."

This is simply a demonstration of the problem and not a traced chain of equivalence. The quote does however illustrate the issue on point and is thus a suggestive addition to this discussion. The emphasis on economy remains a

mainstreaming theme throughout also the annual report from 2016 and is the clearest nodal point to be found in both reports.

4.1.3 Results of discourse analysis

To display the results from this discourse analysis of the two annual reports a first summary will be made. Here I will motivate why the nodal points have been indicated as nodal points, analyse them according to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, as well as motivate if, and in that case how, here has been a change over time.

In order to indicate nodal points of the discourse and not only point out the main priority areas which UN Women do themselves, one has to look for the underlying meaning behind the text. The priority areas of course do show the focus of UN Women's work, but what I seek to show are the articulated reasons behind it, what they aim for in terms of empowerment when they focus on violence, participation, economy etc. That is how I have reached the nodal points of the prevailing discourse. The nodal points are naturally occurring in more places in the text than those extracted in this analysis. The selected parts of text are chosen because of their illustrative qualities and hence show more explanation on how the nodal points demonstrate their meaning and their contribution to the prevailing discourse. There are in total five nodal points found in this discourse analysis and I will now motivate them further and analyse if and how they have developed over time.

Starting off with one nodal point which was distinguished early on in the first report from 2012, I find it necessary to motivate why the articulated nodal point is precisely *representation* and not participation, which is what UN Women have named as one of their priority areas. As participation, representation includes direct participation in politics, projects and so forth, where women actively represent themselves and through this gain a feeling of empowerment. In contrast to participation, representation *also* includes the important factor regarding the empowerment of those who are not personally participating themselves, but who are represented by other women and this way gaining a sense of empowerment. It

has been shown how representation is an important part of any work with changing underlying structures that shape our society, both in the Global South and Global North, which is why I believe it is necessary to point out this important aspect in this central theme – nodal point – of the discourse on women's empowerment.

The change of representation that is indicated in the report from 2016 shows an interesting shift in the direction to agency, which is stressed by scholars as an important part of empowerment in the previous theory chapter. This change is an example of how according to the theory of Laclau and Mouffe meaning is never fixed, but can, and does, change over time. As has been displayed in the theory chapter, there are several actors that do try to change the prevailing discourse; to invest the concept of women's empowerment with other forms of meaning. This seems to have resulted in a slight change of the discourse; in terms of this nodal point leaving representation, staying in the same conceptual area, but evolves into agency. The reasons behind these changes will be elaborated further in the following section entering upon postcolonialism.

The second indicated nodal point in the 2012 report – awareness – is just as representation not articulated as an empowerment factor in the report, but is presented as part of the core in UN Women's work on empowerment. Awareness works as a way to make people acknowledge women's inferior position in society and to see that as a problem in need of solving and has thus the role of empowerment in the way that women are encouraged to speak out and that society is urged to listen. From what can be indicated by this analysis, this nodal point has remained throughout the UN Women's six years of existence. That way it has evolved into a moment in Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, where there is not significant struggle of meaning but it seems the nodal point is nearer to have reached closure.

The stable nodal point of awareness which has been indicated in both reports touches upon another central theme that only in the later report is indicated as a

nodal point of the discourse – social structures. Social structures is a theme that becomes central to empowerment work since it acknowledges structures that keep women from developing as individuals, something that similar to agency has been pointed out by several scholars in the theory chapter. Changing social structures works in reducing social obstacles for women, and men, who all suffer from these constraints. Since men are also affected by these structures it should be obvious for UN Women to involve men and boys as well in this line of work. It has also been noted that the nodal point social structures has taken over the main concern of the work on ending gender based violence in the 2016 report, from being a central aspect for the nodal point awareness in the first report from 2012.

This result points to a change in time. What would be interesting to look into here would be to study where in time social structures became such a central theme in the women's empowerment discourse. From this study there is merely the conclusion that is has evolved into a nodal point during these five years of work by UN Women. During this time, in accordance to Laclau and Mouffe's theory, some actor/s in the discourse have invested this element with more meaning which has made it more significant to the discourse of women's empowerment. Deeper elaboration on this will continue in the following section.

The third nodal point in the 2012 report; the fifth counting both reports, is that of economy. The economic focus is, as has been mentioned earlier, mainstreamed through both annual reports and takes a very central place in the discourse, both when discussing economic empowerment as such; which notably is the only nodal point which is actually directly articulated by UN Women as empowerment, but is also present in other areas of work. Similarly to representation, economic empowerment is primarily mentioned in both documents as a tool for development: It seems these aspects of empowerment are extra important not because of their empowering qualities and the possible improvement that it can result in for the women at hand, but rather because of their productive qualities in other areas of development, and that is why they are given such a central position

in the work. A deeper analysis of this fact will also be made in the following section.

In the first report published in 2012 economic empowerment is repeatedly used as a defender for empowerment work in general. This remains a fact in the 2016 report but is not as visible as before. A new addition regarding economic empowerment in the latest report is that of concern regarding unpaid care work, together with other forms of unpaid work in the home, which remains a fact for women in the Global South – as well as in the Global North, one might add. This connects to the previously mentioned nodal point of social structures which have a big impact on this issue as well. However, UN Women do not elaborate on how to get around this problem in much detail but merely states that it is a concern.

Economic empowerment remains a clear nodal point in both documents, but still seems to evolve towards a more inclusive approach involving social structures, and at the same time moving away from the earlier significant focus on economic empowerment as a defender for women's empowerment in general. Because of these signs I would argue that economy, besides being a nodal point, also is an element in the discursive terminology of Laclau and Mouffe. As a result of these slight changes it seems the concept is still invested with meaning from different angles and that means it cannot yet be stated to have reached closure.

According to this analysis it seems UN Women has evolved into taking a wider grip on their work on women's empowerment; including social structures is one signal of this, the involvement of several key concepts to solve complex problems is another. This shows a visible change over time which will be further analysed in the following section including postcolonialism. As for now, I state that a change over time is visible in this analysis, and UN Women's discourse on women's empowerment has evolved in this more inclusive form of work, where different nodal points are used in their approach on several issues, such as; changing structures to end violence against women, to develop women's representation and agency and to take a broader grip including issues of social

structures in their work with economic empowerment. These are however slight changes which are visible through in-depth analysis using discursive tools, and not something that is apparent by simply reading the documents. In terms of discourse theory, I would therefore argue that there is a fixation of meaning of women's empowerment *as it is experienced* in each moment in time and can be thought of as natural, which is the goal for the social processes creating the discourse according to Laclau and Mouffe. However, the alteration among the nodal points that has been indicated here, shows how there is an ongoing struggle over meaning of women's empowerment and that results in this slight alteration.

4.2 Postcolonialism – a critical analysis of the discourse

In this part of the thesis I will critically explore the findings emerging from my discourse analysis above. This will be done drawing on the different theorists presented in the theory chapter using insights from postcolonial theory. This will be followed by a short summary of the findings. Subsequently I will wright a conclusion that sums up the results and answers the research question.

4.2.1 Consequences of the discourse

Regarding both analysed reports' most apparent nodal point – economy – it is easy to see the critical stances from a postcolonial perspective, as it culturally connects to the Global North's central focus on economic growth and increase of productivity as a sign of development as such. This refers both to the above mentioned scholars on empowerment and postcolonialism; Sharp, Kabeer and Mohanty, as well as more pure postcolonial thinkers such as McEwan and Loomba, who all criticise the intense emphasis on economic factors in development work in general.

Apart from obvious positive outcomes from economic empowerment such as the satisfaction from providing for their families, increased income and the freedom for many women to move outside the home, there are also negative factors to take into consideration. Joanne Sharps argument (2003), of how women who are already working full time with existing tasks might be rather exploited than

empowered by taking on waged labour as well, despite the empowering aims behind such encouragements, is relevant here. Kabeer laid out similar assessments in her critique of the MDGs (2005). I believe this ongoing exploitation of women of the Global South very well can be compared to the historical exploitation of the Global South as such, which constitutes the core of postcolonial theory. This further emphasises Kabeer's argument of the need of taking into consideration the desires of the individuals at hand both in work on women's empowerment but also in development work in general. It also brings back the thoughts of McEwan (2001) who questioned the Global North's perception of economic growth as the only way to development.

Considering here Laclau and Mouffe's social antagonism of individuals' identities, I would like to raise the question: What might this lead to for women who in addition to already existing work – one social identity – are encouraged to also take up waged labour or start a business in order to get empowered and to develop their society; that way taking on another social identity – that of provider. I do not argue this to be a social antagonism in the same sense as Laclau and Mouffe's, where one identity eliminates the other by pure existence, but rather it is a social antagonism that is forcing the physical individual to impossibility.

Regarding this part of women's empowerment I also see a possible investment of meaning into the discourse; where several thinkers, such as above mentioned Sharp and Kabeer, in a constructive manner argue against the work done within women's empowerment. They often criticise the UN, pointing out the difficulties with the current focus on economy while explaining why. Subsequently, according to this analysis, it is shown how UN Women slightly has altered their course within economic empowerment routine and taken into account negative aspects such as unpaid care work in their latest annual report. They have not yet reached an answer to, according to this material, how to overcome these difficulties, but they do acknowledge their existence, which is a sign of a change of direction as a result of this investment of meaning. However, in this perspective it ought to be seen as problematic how economic empowerment remains such a

central part of the discourse despite the acknowledgement of the problem with additional burden for these women.

Postcolonial critique can also be related to the first indicated nodal point in the analysis – representation. As has been mentioned in the discourse analysis, this nodal point has together with that of economy, been justified mostly as a tool to reach aims within other fields of development. This is a notion which corresponds with Sylvia Chant's critique (2016) towards the 'istrumentalisation' of women in order to alleviate poverty when she argues that empowerment is *claimed* in these situations but occurs simply in an ostensible way where the aim is not empowerment as such but rather an improvement of other areas of development where women are to play a useful role. This also corresponds to the critique put forward by Mohanty and Miraglia mentioned above (2010) who argue that empowerment in this way is merely a tool to fit a neoliberal agenda. The justifying articulations of these nodal points pinpointed in this analysis I believe strengthen these critical arguments and that shows how, from a postcolonial perspective, there is still much to work on regarding women's empowerment in development.

Additionally, seen from a postcolonial perspective, it should also be considered that the perception of how women *should* be in these domains, which according to the processed reports seems to be an assumed point of departure for UN Women, is a notion of the Global North and might be something that not all women of the Global South desire. Here Kabeer (2012) is useful as she stresses how the experiences of women of the Global South can differ substantially from the opinions of the Global North in these issues. This is an aspect that is not touched upon in the material and that is why, with a postcolonial viewpoint, it should be stressed that these processes should be initiated by the women at hand, and not applied as a standard that fits all situations.

With regards to the nodal point of representation together with the later indicated – agency – in the latest report, I would argue there is a hidden but yet present

connection to the thought of 'power within' articulated by Naila Kabeer in her discussion paper from 1999. Kabeer argues regarding agency for a *sense* of power rather than merely the act itself. I see this connection in the nodal point representation since it should result in a *sense of power* – empowerment – also for the women who are not participating themselves, but see other women participating; working as an inspiration for the others. I believe representation can play a vital role in women's empowerment here. This becomes present especially when urging women to take on leadership positions in different areas, where they by taking these roles demonstrate their capacities and facilitate for other women to develop in the same direction if that is what they want; illustrating what is possible. In terms of discourse; showing what might be possible, if it was not for the limitations of the discourse. This further relates to the argument laid out by Amartya Sen (1999) who urged for another way of looking at women of the Global South; from a patient way to an agent way – which in turn can be traced in the alteration of this nodal point into that of agency. Having women represented – and acting – in these domains furthermore help changing structures that often stop women from taking part, relating to the thoughts in Sen (1999) and Kabeer (2012) who both emphasise how women despite formal access to choices might experience obstacles of normative form such as notions of 'appropriate', which shows how important a role representation plays in empowerment as such. Additionally, and importantly, as Kabeer points out in the same article; it also needs to be considered how some of the norms looked upon as obstacles for people of the Global North might not be a negative experience for many of these women who might value their way of living. This further emphasises the importance to keep a postcolonial mind-set when working with these issues and avoid departing from an outsider's perspective.

The focus of social structures has evolved into a central part of the work on women's empowerment which has left it a nodal point of the discourse in 2016. It is visible primarily in the work against FGM and other forms of violence against women. It is also touched upon regarding economic empowerment and the

structural obstacles that women suffer from in this regard. The evolvement into a new focus on social structures allows this discourse to take a more foundational course towards empowerment as it is perceived by some of the scholars mentioned in this thesis; for instance Srilatha Batliwala (2007) who talked about empowerment as a way to reach social change and redistribution of power. This turn further illustrates another shift in the discourse of women's empowerment, as it slightly redirects the focus from the results of discriminatory behaviour towards the reasons behind it – often involving social structures, which determine how society looks upon women. Here Kabeer's (2012) argument on how to consider the women's own view on their way of life, is equally important, as it can be easy for an agency such as UN Women, or any outsider, to fall into the trap of Eurocentrism and assume a norm to be negative, but the individual at hand might have another perspective. The evolvement of social structures as a nodal point shows how the discourse has been invested with meaning, which can be traced in the theory chapter, expressed by postcolonial thinkers such as Mohanty (1984) as well as Kabeer (2003) who both emphasise how social inequality is relevant in order to be able to reach change in gender inequality issues.

The new focus on social structures shows a new way of working with the nodal point that according to this analysis seems to have remained through these six years of UN Women – awareness. Awareness works as an eye-opener for people regarding several aspects of gender inequality, as testimonies in the analysis have shown. Awareness was given a broader area of use in the later report working with ability to see obstacles and how to act on them, to see capacity in women, recognition of the women's right to decide over their own bodies as well as information regarding direct threats. Awareness as a part of empowerment can seem difficult to critique from a postcolonial perspective as it merely opens people up to the possibility to see and question aspects of society which they might not have been aware of before. However, to create awareness as an outsider can also be problematic, as the actor creating awareness is also determining *what* should be called to attention. This creates a difference in power balance between

the outsider and the receiver of the intervention. This aspect also shows how postcolonialism is important to have in mind in empowerment work. If these difficulties are considered, awareness can be a constructive way of avoiding Eurocentrism, as it leaves the acting to the participants themselves; such as the female councillor in Colombia who expressed gratitude for the ability to formulate the insights of prevailing power structures. This is in my opinion an expressive sign of how awareness can work progressively in women's empowerment.

The analysis above shows how the women's empowerment discourse has been invested with meaning and how that has changed the course of women's empowerment discourse within UN Women during these six years of existence, despite the fact that they have the same formulation regarding their priority areas. The visible investment of meaning during these years indicates that there is a historical change over time. This particular change of direction is according to this analysis a result of having *partly* incorporated a postcolonial perspective and included articulations by scholars also from the Global South into the creation of meaning in the discourse.

Chapter 5 – Concluding discussion and future research

This thesis has sought to answer which conceptual instruments are developed in UN Women's discourse to further women's empowerment in development. This has been done by investigating two annual reports containing the central themes of the named discourse. Through the discourse analysis model developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe I have sought the discursive use and meaning of the concept of women's empowerment. Moreover, I have as a result of reading the aforementioned key texts identified ways in which the discourse has changed over time. Furthermore, I have added postcolonialism as a critical theoretical platform enabling me to identify colonial practises within UN Women's discourse on women's empowerment.

According to the outlined analysis, it seems that development towards women's empowerment according to UN Women cannot happen without what they define as 'economic empowerment'. The financial dimensions to women's empowerment are recurrent in the discourse as it has been observed how the economic focus keeps mainstreaming the discourse during the whole investigated period.

With the outcomes of this analysis in mind, I would like to argue for a substantial change of terminology when the concept *women's empowerment* is used as a way to boost economic growth and to further other areas of development. When the objective is to make women part of boosting economic growth, it should not be called 'women's empowerment'. To use the words of Sylvia Chant, this use is an instrumentalisation of the empowerment concept; so that women's wellbeing becomes an issue of economic growth rather than emancipation of the women in question. Moreover, a contention of mine is that empowerment, in theory and practise, needs to concern itself more with the reduction of global inequalities and gendered social structures. This is necessary in order to avoid the exploitation of women. My take on social antagonisms, where two social identities becomes impossible for one physical being to endure, illustrates the double burden that is put upon women. This happens not only in the global South but in the Global North as well, although in the Global North leading to less consequence thanks to a higher standard of living in general. Thus, this line of work should not be continued without a stronger focus on change in the social structures that uphold the division of labour between the genders. If women are to take up the burden of breadwinning for the family, a parallel step should be for the men to simultaneously take on the burden of house work. As long as this norm is absent, there will continue to be widespread exploitation of women as a result of the continuing focus on 'women's economic empowerment'. Here I believe that the Global South could learn from the Global North, where this development has occurred on very uneven terms; where women are working as much as men outside the home (often making significantly less money), but still take on the

overall responsibility of the housework. This issue is successfully demonstrated by the female bus driver in the latest analysed report, who said she went home to her next job after work. This should be a warning to development workers globally if we actually want equal development and true empowerment for women.

Yet, postcolonial scholarship made many constructive and critical contributions to the evolvement of the women's empowerment discourse, taking into consideration the views of the individuals at hand in development work. Moreover, this postcolonial line of thought has also added more emphasis on issues such as social structures and women's agency to the discourse. This transformation shows how the discourse, even if it is experienced as fixed, does evolve. In the 2012 report women's empowerment needed to be justified by economic terms and women of the Global South, seen mainly as contributors to development and economic growth, were encouraged to take on additional burdens in order to improve their societies. This view corresponds well with traditional values from the Global North, where economic wealth has been seen as *the* indicator of prosperity. In the 2016 report, themes such as social structures and the perspective of the Global South play a more significant role in shaping our perception of what women's empowerment entails. This evolvement shows how postcolonialism has begun to influence UN's take on women's empowerment.

To answer the research question: 'Which conceptual instruments are developed in UN Women to further women's empowerment in development?' I conclude that the conceptual instruments consist of what in this thesis have been portrayed as nodal points in accordance with the discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe. The conceptual instruments that are developed in UN Women to further women's empowerment are thus; economy, representation, agency, social structures and awareness. Moreover, postcolonial scholarship and practise have impacted on UN Women's empowerment discourse and there has been a visible change in the discursive framing of key UN documents over time. To further develop upon the empowerment concept it is, as noted above, necessary to move beyond economic

growth alone – and include aspects such as social structures, gender orders and hierarchies in the analysis. If this evolvement continues, the empowerment concept might be heading towards the meaning that Srilatha Batliwala was arguing for in 2007; that of true social change and redistribution of power.

The future evolvement of key discourses of women's empowerment will no doubt be intriguing. One of the most interesting questions here is whether the development of the discourse continues further along the postcolonial track that has been indicated in this thesis, or if other global actors might take over the discourse and change the course of direction of the women's empowerment concept. That would make the conceptual sphere outside the empowerment discourse increasingly interesting for qualitative research, where our language might develop other concepts calling for a shift in power balance. It does seem that through history there will always be social forces trying to overthrow the prevailing power structures; however societies seem to find a way to repel these forces quite successfully.

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