



Absurdities in Aidland
Development encounters in DRC

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Disclaimer:

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¹ 'Aid work' and 'aid play' are a world play on the expression 'work and play'.

List of Acronyms

DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo

ISS – Institute of Social Studies

ONL – Oxfam Novib

ONA – Oxfam Novib Academy

SRHR – Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights

VAW – Violence against women

FARDC – Forces Armées de la République Démocratique de Congo

MNC – Multinational Corporation

FGD – Focus group discussion

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Abstract

This research paper is a case in reflexive practice. It tells the story of paradoxes in aidland seen and felt through the experience of a gendered, racialised development worker (who is also the researcher) visiting aidland in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, as an insider in a famous development organization. It uses intersectionality, reflexive ethnography and constructive complicity as its frameworks to delve into and examine the experiences of this non-white, non-local, young, female expatriate development worker in a predominantly northern white-expat-development arena (in DRC). This inquest unveils the various paradoxes that lay underneath the orderly and often noble façade of aidland. The purpose of this exposure is to first acknowledge these paradoxes and inequalities as part of aidland and second to question how it can overcome these contradictions so that development practice can be more than just well meaning attempts to make a change.

Keywords

Reflexive practice, Critical Ethnography, Paradoxes, Aidland, Development workers, Aid Work, Racism, Gender, Intersectionality, Constructive Complicity, Oxfam, Better World.

Preface

This research paper that was written for the completion of my MA in Development Studies at the International Institute of Social studies is more than a research paper.

It is journey, one that began many years before this paper was finally written and continues even after. It is a reflection from someone passionate about change, someone who thought that she had found a means to *make a change*: through International development. However, soon after she took her first steps into this complex messy world of Development she saw that it was not all she that had dreamt of. There were days when she was full of inspiration and saw the change in the distance while there were others when she wondered if she was wasting her time. With these baggages and hopes she came to the one of the most critical academic institutes' in development studies while simultaneous gaining an insider position in an influential and mainstream development practice organization. While this paper offers a tiny glimpse into the complex relationships between development academia and practice it primarily tells a story of development projects in "*aidland*"(Apthorpe 2005) that are actually "'travelling rationalities' with general applicability in which the universal(is asserted over the particular, the travelled over the placed, the technical over the political and the formal over the substantive' (Craig and Porter 2006: 120 as cited in Mosse 2011: 4), in which processes take over from places and categories from relations." (Mosse 2011: 4)

In its original conception, the paper was intended as an auto-ethnographical account of my '*adventures in aidland*'(Mosse 2011) however as I started writing it I found myself falling into the ever-so-often warned about pitfalls of auto-ethnographic writing. In order to theorize about my experiences I had to distance myself from them but this was more difficult to do than I imagined. Given the short period of time in which this paper had to be written and the burden/blessing of 'keeping it academic' I resorted to inspiration from Raymond Apthorpe (2011) and created a character called 'S', much like Apthorpe's '*Alice in Aidland*'². Alice journey's with him (allegorically) through aidland seeing things that are 'visible but often made invisible'. Not with the aim of critiquing development and aidland but "to situate aid practices in a sort of a *sociologie totale*, so that broader, indeed the broadest contexts are given their due. (Apthorpe 2011: 200) Similarly 'S' becomes one of the subjects in this

² Apthorpe, R. (2011) 'Coda : With Alice in Aidland : A Seriously Satirical Allegory', in D. Mosse (ed.) *Adventures in Aidland : Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*. Berghahn Books.

ethnography who *sees* underneath the surface of what development practice claims it stands for, and *feels* its emotional repercussions. These are the narratives that I build on and use to theorize about my position as an ever changing social being interacting/negotiating with other social beings in a complex web of different intersecting structures at different moments (spatial, temporal and embodied).

The aim of this paper as Mosse (2011) argues in the introduction to his book *Adventures in Aidland: the anthropology of professionals in international development*, is not to question whether development works but rather to explore how it works (Mosse 2011: 2) and to unveil the 'paradoxes' that exist in aidland (Roth 2015) seen and felt through the experience of a gendered, racialised and structurally embedded social being. The purpose of this is to first acknowledge these paradoxes and inequalities as part of aidland and second to question how it can overcome these 'paradoxes of aid work' (Roth 2015), so that development practice can be more than just well meaning attempts to make a change.

Srushti Mahamuni
The Hague, October 2015

Chapter 1

Situating the research - Introduction

1.1 Situating Aidland (within the bigger development paradigm)

Aidland is the world of development workers. It comprises of development organizations, development workers (both paid and unpaid), living and working in places close to or far away from their places of origin.³ In making an allegory with Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, Raymond Apthorpe created the term 'Aidland'⁴. 'Aidland [. . .] is the trail (to use a word that usefully is both verb and noun, and about both process and place) of where foreign aid comes from, where it goes, and what then. Stepping into Aidland is like stepping off one planet into another, a virtual another, not that this means that it is any the less real to those who work in or depend on or are affected by it in other ways' (Apthorpe 2005: 1). Much like Alice in Wonderland, those in aidland may often be detached from the realities what lies around them.⁵ "There can be something fantastical about the workings of much aid work; it can appear to be sealed and separate – a 'bubble', with its own rituals, symbolism and language. It is also parochial, nostalgic, imbued with 'good intentions', but often riven by self-doubt, and fear, unspoken racism and hypocrisy." (Harrison 2013: 264) Often this hypocrisy can arise from the fact that aid is not seen in its entirety. As Rosalind Eyben (2014) reminds us, aid also includes values, flow of ideas, norms of institutions and a dynamic nexus of discourses encompassing an array of different organizations employing thousands of development practitioners. In order to do deal with the underlying issues we⁶ must first be ready to acknowledge them, because unless we acknowledge that something is amiss, we fail to ask ourselves how to make it better. "Not owning up to what we know - therefore failing to ask ourselves what we should do about that knowledge - is a major obstacle to justice." (Eyben 2014: 15) This paper attempts to uncover some of these underlying issues, some paradoxes that need to be acknowledged and then dealt with so that aidland can be more than just well intentioned attempts to bring about social change and justice.

In recent times there is a growing body of literature on the lives of aid

³ Fetcher and Hindman 2011

⁴ Harrison 2013

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 'We' refers to the world of development workers, both practitioners and academics, that I consider myself to be a part of.

professionals.⁷ This literature is informed by the thesis that ‘individual agency’ is important in the conceptualization and implementation of aid work. (Eyben 2014: 12) Despite that, as Stirrat states : “we probably know more about the missionaries and colonial servants of the 19th and early 20th centuries than we do about contemporary development workers.”(2008: 407) and therefore we’re ‘missing knowledge’ (Verma 2011) about the social, political and other dynamics that of actors that shape aidland. This paper will attempt to uncover some of these social and political dynamics that occur in aidland, through a snapshot of aidland operating in Eastern DRC. This snapshot is seen through the eyes of S, a character that was created to tell this story.⁸ What makes S’ story rare is her gendered, racial, ethnic position within a predominantly ‘white’ world of development expats in Eastern DRC. Through process of ‘identification and disidentification’ (Ahmed, 1997) she negotiates her multiple identities often succeeding and sometimes failing ‘to belong’ but always revealing some of the paradoxes underlying the ‘noble’⁹ and glamorous surface of aidland.

1.2 Situating ‘S’ (within her contexts and within Aidland)

S is a 25-year-old woman, brown skinned, petite, attractive, talkative, smart, and assertive. Born and raised in an upper class, upper caste, urban, non-conservative Indian household she received private English medium, co-ed education, learnt to speak fluent French through language classes provided by the French ministry of education and spent few of her late teenage years in France – through cultural exchanges with French families and teaching English in French schools. From a young age she was exposed to and showed interest in American pop culture, boys bands and fashion trends besides mainstream Bollywood. Raised on an equal footing with her younger brother¹⁰ she didn’t ‘experience’¹¹ inequality in the household but outside the home and this fuelled her interest in gender justice that led her to study development. *“At home I was treated exactly like my brother, but at school, on the playground, and everywhere else I was treated as a “girl”. I saw that my place in the world at home was different from my place in the world outside home. This contradiction lay the seeds for the fight for gender justice in my heart.”* Growing up she was very passionate about equality, always fighting for ‘rights’ for herself and others around her. This is what led her to Development studies. She believed that change is possible if we

⁷ Stirrat (2008) Mosse (2011), De Jong (2009, 2011), Fetcher and Hindman (2011), Fetcher (2012), Eyben (2014), Roth (2015) and others.

⁸ Preface explains why the character was created.

⁹ Development work is often (falsely) considered noble or altruistic in nature (Fetcher 2012) More on this in the conclusion.

¹⁰ 4 years age younger than her.

¹¹ ‘Experience’ is put in quotes because, maybe she didn’t realize it, but does not mean it did not exist. What we see and don’t see depends on our subjectivities and what we call inequality.

just tried hard enough. With this naïve, overtly optimistic view of the world she started her Masters in Gender, Culture and Development at a Women's Studies center run by a Marxist Ambedkarite feminist woman who had a strong influence on the S. The two years in this Masters opened up a whole new world and a whole new perception to the naïve hopeful young S and as she began to understand the structures and complexities of the society around her she also realized how difficult it would be to change these structures. In fact, she started questioning this change she envisioned. Why do the structures have to change? How do they have to change? Who decides in what way they must be changed? This was the beginning of her journey of critical questioning towards mainstream development paradigms. By the end of her masters she had changed from the naïve hopeful optimist to a cynic with little hope for change¹². With this background S came to the Netherlands to study International Development at the Institute of Social studies, a development school that has a reputation for being critical and questioning mainstream paradigms.¹³ Even though ISS was not as critical of the mainstream development paradigm as imagined by S, she continued to explore post-development thought through discussions groups with like-minded people¹⁴. In the course of exploring a research topic for her master's thesis, S was granted the opportunity to be part of Oxfam Novib Academy¹⁵ with the aim to write a research paper for Oxfam Novib that would also serve as her master's thesis for ISS¹⁶.

1.3 Situating Oxfam Novib (within Aidland)

In 1953, the Netherlands experienced severe floods that killed over 1800 people. During this time other countries " including much poorer countries, such as India"(Oxfam Novib, n.d) provided the Netherlands with emergency aid. "This display of generosity inspired Father Simon Jelsma to want to return the favor"(Oxfam Novib, n.d), and thus in 1956 he and others founded the Netherlands Organization for International Assistance (Novib). Novib became

¹² The women's studies professor who was largely influential in S' beginnings in Development studies succumbed to cancer that year – she had confessed in private a conversation to S that her work life often demanded a lot from her physically and emotionally, and many times she neglected her health due to lack of time ' there is so much to be done'. After her demise, S angrily questioned the often unspoken emotional/physical consequences of dealing with the everyday contradictions and struggles of working in development.

¹³ According to ISS website – www.iss.nl

¹⁴ Critical Knowledges Dialogues Otherwise was one such group that conducted discussions in ISS once a month.

¹⁵ Oxfam Novib academy is an internship scheme to bridge the gap between academia and practice. Refer to section 1.3 (Situating Oxfam Novib).

¹⁶ Along the way, the research for Oxfam and that for ISS became completely different and ended up at two research papers. This points out to the gaps between academia and practice but would require further research to say anything substantial.

one of the country's first politically independent and non-religious development organizations.¹⁷ It soon established itself as an entity in 'Dutch public consciousness'¹⁸ and started tackling poverty on different fronts through supporting projects in developing countries as well as through influencing governments, businesses and international institutions. In 1996 Novib became an affiliate of Oxfam International and in 2006, they changed their name to Oxfam Novib. With a mission to achieve 'a just world without poverty' (Oxfam Novib 2012) Oxfam international is a rights based confederation consisting of 17 organisations working in 94 different countries.(Oxfam International 2013) According to Oxfam, one of the ways to achieve its overall mission is by advancing gender justice and thus Oxfam international is committed to 'putting women's rights at the heart of all we do' (Oxfam International 2013). It is no surprise then that gender equality and women's rights are a central feature of Oxfam organisations, including Novib. Oxfam Novib structures its programs under five aims - (Aim 1) Right to a Sustainable Livelihood; (Aim 2.) Basic Social Services; (Aim 3.) Life and Security; (Aim 4.) Social and Political Participation; (Aim 5.) Identity: Gender Justice¹⁹ (Oxfam Novib 2014).

Currently Oxfam Novib is undergoing reorganization due to budget cuts by the Dutch government. Although, still part of the strategic partnership, Oxfam Novib's funding was reduced by 80%. Despite these changes ONL is determined to keep up the quality of its programs. With this aim in mind ONL piloted Oxfam Novib Academy(ONA) in January 2015. Placed under the Knowledge Innovation and management strategy, the goal of ONA is "to produce effective and measurable research to ensure content, programmatic and methodological expertise."(Oxfam Novib Academy 2015a) The target participants for ONA are students at a Master's level who are looking to create more 'applicable research' for the field of international development.²⁰

This is how S comes to join Oxfam Novib. She is selected to be one of the participants in the first batch of Oxfam Novib academy and owing to her background and interest in gender studies; she is placed with the Gender Justice department under the supervision of the Women's Bodily Integrity advisor at the time²¹. Her tasks in the 10 month internship involved conducting relevant research on an Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights(SRHR) program called

¹⁷ 'Oxfam Novib - about Us - History' (Last updated 2013). Accessed 13/11/15 2015 <<http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/history.html>>

¹⁸ "Through programs such as 'Guest at your table'(1963), Food for India(1966) and Sahel(1975) that invited Dutch public to contribute the cost of a meal for a day for someone in a developing country." (Oxfam Novib History, n.d.)

¹⁹ Why gender justice comes under right to an identity? Needs critical questioning and has scope to be explored in further research.

²⁰ Oxfam Novib Academy, Progress Report, 2015

²¹ This advisor changed in the course of the internship, because the former advisor left her position at ONL.

Women on the Move (along the road in the internship the focus of the research changed to engaging men to improve SRHR services), identifying lessons learned from evaluations and other resources to help develop better programs on SRHR and develop an applied research methodology for SRHR. Besides that she had other everyday 'intern tasks' such as support for Skype calls, organizing public events and or workshops. In return she benefitted from access to a network of forerunners in SRHR and "experience in applied research with societal relevance". (Oxfam Novib Academy 2015b)

As part of providing relevant research on SRHR, S is summoned to do research on masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Within SRHR she would be looking specifically at violence against women (VAW)²² and in relation to masculinities, especially at the men engage movement. Oxfam Novib believes that VAW is "a human rights violation and a barrier to development." (Oxfam International 2012b) It endorses the United Nations definition of violence against women. It aims to end violence against women by rallying efforts and support towards advocacy for women friendly laws, providing support for victims of violence, leading campaigns for change in societal norms and behaviors, empowering girls to stand up for themselves through education and income trainings, engaging men and boys to end VAW, ensuring protection of women's rights in times of humanitarian crises, mainstreaming VAW prevention in other sectors of development work and promoting women's leadership.²³ These interventions are carried out using Oxfam's rights based and transformative approach. This is a multilayered approach that promotes change on four levels – individual, collective, legal and social.

²² This incited quite a discussion among S' supervisors in the Institute of Social studies, as to whether violence against women should be grouped under Sexual, reproductive health and rights and reignited the old debate of 'academic language' and 'development practice jargon'.

²³ Oxfam International 2012b

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Women and girls learn to end violence in their own lives and to claim their rights</p> <p>= <i>individual empowerment</i></p> | <p>Policies, laws and their implementation prevent and punish VAW, and ensure survivors obtain the support they need</p> <p>= <i>well implemented laws and policies</i></p> |
| <p>Associations, movements and other social groups defend women's and girls' rights to a life in safety</p> <p>= <i>collective empowerment</i></p> | <p>Societies say no to gender-based violence</p> <p>= <i>change in social norms</i></p> |

Figure 1: Oxfam's strategy of change (Oxfam International 2012b) ²⁴

This participatory approach recognizes that everyone “has the right to shape their own development and public decisions that affect them.”(Oxfam International 2012b) The approach underlines the importance of creating holistic change on all levels, ‘it recognizes that one size does not fit all’²⁵(Ibid.) and that all the actors in the picture of change – the beneficiaries, legal systems, economic systems, society as well as development world are accountable for change.²⁶

1.4 Situating the WECAN campaign (within Oxfam)

One such attempt to end violence against women was a campaign called WECAN, originally implemented in South Asia in 2004 for six years. The goal was to reduce social acceptance of VAW in the six south Asian countries that Oxfam works in.²⁷ The campaign believes that change is the responsibility of the individual and the individual has the power to change. But change is also a social process therefore it works on both individual and social level to reduce VAW. One of the central strategy's of the WECAN campaign was to create ‘changemakers’ – ‘Changemakers are ordinary men and women from society, who are invited to make a public undertaking ‘ not to commit or tolerate violence and discrimination in one’s own life, and to encourage at least 10 others to do the same.’ (Oxfam International 2007) The aim of creating changemakers is to encourage men and women to identify violence in their own lives and find ways to address it through changing their own attitudes and behavior. The basis of the

²⁴ Figure 1 taken from Oxfam International (2012) 'Ending Violence Against Women: An Oxfam Guide' Oxfam.

²⁵ Even though this is clearly stated in its report, Oxfam often uses the one-size- fits-all approach, as we shall see with the WECAN campaign that originally began in ‘South Asia’ and was then applied to DRC among other African countries.

²⁶ Oxfam International 2012

²⁷ Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal.

changemakers strategy is to put the onus of change on the men and women who are affected by the problem. Change is stimulated through thinking about VAW and understanding why this is wrong. While changemakers are not encouraged to impose actions on others, they are required to promote alternatives to violence and support women who are experiencing violence. What these change makers receive in return is support through campaign alliances and communication material as well as opportunities to exchange information and deepen their understanding of VAW. (Oxfam International 2007)

This campaign was extended to the Democratic republic of Congo in 2008. 'Nous Pouvons '(as called in Francophone Africa) was launched in Nord Kivu, Sud Kivu and Maniema provinces in October 2008 and in Kinshasa in January 2009. Despite ongoing conflict in the regions of Eastern DRC, more than 200 organisations registered as alliances and more than 5,000 people as 'change agents' (changemakers are called change agents in DRC)²⁸. In the research that S carried out in Eastern DRC she explored the views and attitudes of men who were 'change agents' amongst others to get an understanding of attitudes regarding gender equality in Eastern DRC. The aim of the research was in no way, to evaluate the We Can campaign but to research the present attitudes towards gender equality in Congolese society.

1.5 Contextual background: Democratic Republic of Congo²⁹.

Located in central Africa, The Democratic republic of Congo is a country the size of Western Europe, the second largest in Africa and the 19th largest in the world. Boasting of an ethnic diversity of more than 250 ethnic groups and more than 240 different languages it is the one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse countries in the world³⁰. Despite being one of wealthiest countries in the world in terms natural resources, a majority of its population continues to be economically and politically marginalized³¹. An ex-colony of Belgium, its 'historical injustices contingent on the greed and manipulation of leadership structures' (Ahere 2012, ACCORD), a legacy of colonial rule that spilt over into post-independence agreements, continue to cultivate and encourage suspicion among different ethnic groups. DRC has been mired in (and continues to be) brutal conflicts since the 1990's. Extreme violence, resource driven nature of conflict, massive displacement, sexual and gender based violence, involvement of

²⁸ We Can Global Network Secretariat 'WE CAN End all Violence Against Women: South Asia Regional Campaign'. Accessed 17/11/2015 2015
<<http://wecanendvaw.info/global-we-can>>.

²⁹ Situating Congo (DR) within the bigger sociopolitical dynamics of the world with the aim of explaining why aidland exists in Congo (DR).

³⁰ Van Reybrouck 2014

³¹ Ahere 2012, ACCORD

neighboring countries and multinational actors characterize the very complex conflicts in DRC. ³²

The conflict began in part as a result of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. During the genocide an exodus of people fled from Rwanda into DRC. Most of the people were crossing the border at Gisenyi, entering Goma in eastern DRC. It is estimated that at the end of 100 days of the genocide about 12,000 refugees crossed the border per hour³³. Camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) were often sites of horrible atrocities such as rape and killings that continued well beyond the end of the genocide. Soon after, the Rwandan armed forces infiltrated DRC and neighboring countries, giving birth to the Great African War or the Second Congo war in 1998. Coupled with poverty and inequality the war led to the rise of more than 20 armed groups with diverse political, economic and ethnic interests. The deadliest war in Africa, by the end of 2008, it had led to the death of more than 5.4 million people and many more displaced. In 2009, a peace agreement was signed in Goma and several of the armed groups were integrated into the national army of DRC (FARDC³⁴). However, the peace was short lived. Owing to a weak government a group of ex-rebels deserted the FARDC and started a mutiny in April 2012 called as the M23 rebellion. Lasting for a whole year, this rebellion forced more than 140,000 to flee their homes. The M23 ended in November 2013³⁵ but not before reigniting relatively dormant groups such as the Mai Mai and the FDLR among others. These groups took advantage of the weakened government and began another wave of conflict, which is presently ongoing in parts of Eastern DRC. The different phases of the war in DRC were also known to be fuelled and supported by various Multinational corporations (MNC's) that had vested interests in obtaining mining concessions or contracts in the country that would have been more expensive in countries that were stable³⁶. MNC's mineral exploitation strategies ranged from developing networks with key political and military and business elites to trading with rebels who set up financial and administrative bodies upon gaining control of minerals to earn revenue. The rebels and armed groups then used this revenue to 'to fund their participation in the conflict and to enrich themselves' (Ahere 2012) adding more complex facets to the conflict in DRC. The United Nations peace keeping forces have maintained themselves in DRC since 1999, and have reportedly spent more than US\$ 8.73 billion to keep up the peace keeping effort. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) concluded that the crisis in DRC threatens peace and security in the entire Great Lakes regions and thus it has to be resolved at the earliest. However

³² Ibid.

³³ Slegh, H. et al. 2014

³⁴ Forces Armées de la République Démocratique de Congo.

³⁵ Ahere, 2012, ACCORD.

³⁶ Ibid.

despite attention from African and global actors, DRC continues to experience immense violence and insecurity.³⁷ DRC ranks amongst the last countries on the Human Development Index with less than 2% of paved roads and with no access to potable water, for less than half of the population. Further, poor healthcare and high incidences of HIV AIDS causes high mortality with 56 years as the average life span of a Congolese person.³⁸

The society is highly patriarchal and bound with traditions and customs that often treat women as second-class citizens.³⁹ Sexual violence was often used as a weapon of war during these conflicts. A study in 2010, showed that approximately 24% of men and 40% of women had experienced sexual violence during the conflict in Eastern DRC alone⁴⁰. Although exacerbated during the war, sexual violence existed before it and continues to exist inside and outside the home⁴¹. It stems from acute gender inequality and inferior position of women in the society. The recent gender index report from the OECD development center indicates that women in DRC are still facing inequality through discriminatory family and legal laws. They have restricted physical integrity as a result of rampant domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment at the workplace, limited access to sexual health and reproductive rights (SRHR) and no access to abortion. They also face restriction in terms of access to resources and assets such as land. Further inequality impedes civil liberties such as political participation and unlimited access to public spaces. Additionally, is a 'son bias' in society that limits girl's access to education and nutrition. The United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report, 2014 illustrates that DRC ranks amongst the worst five countries when with least favorable conditions of living for women⁴². An extremely high maternal mortality rate, low gender equality index and high adolescent birth rate show that healthcare facilities and sexual reproductive health services need to be strengthened and developed in the country. Low levels of female literacy, and labor force participation as well as lack of political participation point out the need for programs that encourage female education and political empowerment. Thus, it can be concluded that DRC is a rich site for development work and development organization to provide assistance and aid. Oxfam is one such organization.

1.6 Situating Oxfam within DRC

Oxfam has been working in DRC since 1961; today it has approximately 450 staff members and targets 800.000 beneficiaries. Working in 5 provinces it provided

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Oxfam International (Last updated 2012) '*Democratic Republic of Congo*'. Accessed 17/11/2015 2015 <<https://sumus.oxfam.org/node/30355>>

³⁹ '*Social Institutions and Gender Index: Democratic Republic of Congo*'(2014) ,OECD Development center.

⁴⁰ Johnson, K. et al. 2010

⁴¹ Slegh, H. et al 2014

⁴² Human Development Report 2014, United Nations Development Program.

long-term development assistance as well as response to emergency.



Figure 2: Oxfam Team in DRC, 2012⁴³

Oxfam works on four key domains in DRC – Economic justice, Essential services, Rights in crisis and gender justice.(Oxfam International 2012) The different affiliates that work in DRC include – Oxfam Great Britain, Oxfam Novib, Oxfam Solidarite (Belgium) and Oxfam Quebec.

S was interning with Oxfam Novib in The Hague and hence was put in contact with Oxfam Novib in DRC that operated from Bukavu. This is where she lived and worked for most of her time in DRC. The research she conducted for Oxfam aimed to explore if engaging men in programs to change attitudes about gender equality⁴⁴ empowers women and to what extent? This was done through

⁴³ Picture accessed from Oxfam International (Last updated 2012) '*Democratic Republic of Congo*'. Accessed 17/11/2015 2015 <<https://sumus.oxfam.org/node/30355>>

⁴⁴ "Gender equality denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere." (Reeves, H. and S. Baden 2000) - Oxfam uses this definition of gender equality.

interviewing men who had participated in a men engage program (The Oxfam WeCan campaign men's forum) and interviewing other relevant groups such as young men and women in a youth organization and journalists, minister of gender and family to map out the present condition of gender equality and thus women in Eastern DRC.

Thus, after having situated the parts of the puzzle in their own contexts and the larger contexts that they are embedded in, the research will delve deeper into analyzing the different stories that take place within these levels. The next chapter will set the scene by explaining the conceptual frameworks used for analyzing the findings of the research. Chapter three will explore S' experience of aid 'work' - exploring the findings of her research on engaging men as well as unveiling some of the paradoxes that exist in aid work that come forth through her lived experiences in the Oxfam offices. Chapter four will unravel S' social interactions as part of her life in aidland and reveal the absurdities of life and play in aidland. While conducting this research and during her stay in DRC S negotiated and renegotiated her multiple identities through 'processes of identification or of disidentification' (Ahmed 1997) in order to 'belong'. Often the very processes that led to excluded her in her social interactions with other expats were the same that gave her more of an 'insider' view during her research or at her workplace. What do these experiences reveal about aidland and specifically the everyday contradictions of living and working in aidland? The conclusion will tie up these strings from the previous chapters and while questioning the idea of the aidland bubble in itself it will offer suggestions to S and those others who care about development and change on how to create a development practice that is more reflexive and critical of its own pitfalls and paradoxes, so that these contradictions can be worked through and not just pushed under the rug as one of the side-effects of development. (Eyben 2014)

Chapter 2

Setting the scene – Conceptual Frameworks

2.1 Research question and objectives:

Main question:

- What are the everyday lived paradoxes in aidland seen through the eyes of a gendered, racialized development worker in Eastern DRC?

Sub questions:

- What are the assumptions underlying development projects in a particular context?
- What are the social interactions that take place in aid world? What are the everyday paradoxes and contradictions that take place in aidland?
- What the links between development practice and the social interactions?

Objectives:

- To add to the upcoming genre of literature on the lives of development professionals with the assumption that “individual agency matters in conceptualization and implementation of aid work”. (Eyben 2014)
- To explore and unveil the paradoxes of the everyday realities in aidland and disturb the ‘normalcy’ of these paradoxes through reflexive practice⁴⁵.
- To question assumptions underlying the conceptualisation and implementation of projects and programs of development practice.

2.2 Theoretical framework and methodology:

This research uses multiple theoretical frameworks to analyze different parts of the research. Each subsection will explain the framework and how this research aims to use it. The different theoretical frameworks are as follows:

Intersectionality, Constructive complicity with Reflexive practice and Theory of Planned behavior.

- **Intersectionality**

Coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 intersectionality is the study of the overlays and intersections of structural categories and variables that vary according to social contexts that create different oppressions. (Crenshaw 1989) Intersectionality is supported by a few important cornerstones – 1.

⁴⁵ Eyben 2014

“different dimensions of social life cannot be separated into discrete or pure strands”(Brah A 2004, as cited in Hankivsky et al 2010)⁴⁶ ie. That there is no hierarchy of oppression and that, categories cannot just be added onto one another. 2. “social divisions are constructed by, and intermeshed with each other in specific historical conditions”(Yuval-Davis 2006 as cited in Hankivsky et al. 2010) and 3.intersectionality “recognizes the multidimensional and relational nature of social locations and places lived experiences, social forces, and overlapping systems of discrimination and subordination at the centre of analysis.”(Hankivsky et al 2010) Intersectionality emphasises the importance of context, it uncovers layers of ‘disadvantage, under privileging and exclusion’ (McCall, 2005 as cited in Burkner⁴⁷2011) but its also points out to privilege. The theory of intersectionality will help explain the different interactions that S experienced during her adventures in aidland. The research question - What are the everyday lived paradoxes in aidland seen through the eyes of a gendered, racialized development worker in Eastern DRC? – has immense potential for intersectional analysis. The fact that this narrative comes from a gendered, racialised (partial) perspective already sets the stage for intersectional understandings of S’ social experiences. What were the different intersections and variables at play in different settings that created the unique experiences and interactions that unfolded in this snapshot of aidland? How were the different actors involved, disadvantaged, exluded and or priviledged in by the social divisions in the specific temporal, spatial and embodied contexts? These are some of the questions that intersectionality will help explore. Further, the variable nature of intersectionality helps understand variable inclusions and exclusions as experienced by S in the field - “the issue of the variability of intersectionality sheds new light on the social construction of otherness and on the dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion.”(Room, 2002; Barnes, 2005:8 as cited in Burkner 2011) This idea of otherness shifts from place and time and even from actors. While at certain moments S was ‘othered’ by some in the same moments S was ‘othering’ others. Intersectionality can provide a means to understand “the ephemeral or episodic modes of exclusion, which have a complex (i.e. intersectional) origin. In particular, they are able to systematically generate evidence about the dynamic modes of exclusion, which are triggered by the practice of specific milieus or by other context-driven micro-social embeddings of the individual.”(Burkner 2011) This explains why the same intersections that ‘excluded’ her in certain

⁴⁶ Hankivsky et al. 2010

⁴⁷ H.J. Burkner 2011

contexts led to her inclusion in others and why she felt 'more comfortable' in certain groups and not others.

However intersectionality alone does not explain her choices (conscious and subconscious) of identification or disidentification in different settings. For this, I turn to Gayatri Spivak and her idea of constructive complicity (1999 as cited in De Jong 2009) and Eyben's idea of reflexive practice (2014).

- *Constructive Complicity and reflexive practice*
Constructive complicity is the act of acknowledging one's position as 'complicit' and not allowing this to paralyse one from acting but to take responsibility of this complicity act from that position⁴⁸. As will unfold in the upcoming narratives S was not always in a position of disadvantage, in fact often she was in a privileged position and making this position as explicit as possible is important to situate the subject and frame her interactions. As Sara de Jong states in her paper on reflections of NGO workers on their practice (2009) constructive complicity and reflexivity are a matter of acknowledging and making one's positionality explicit. Making this positionality known however does not result into a 'new moral confidence' rather acknowledgement of the fact that 'complicity can never be complete'. (Keenan 2002 as cited in de Jong, 2009)
Acknowledging complicity calls for reflexivity. And much like complicity 'the process of reflexivity can never be completed' (de Jong, 2009). Gillian Rose argues instead for embracing the 'productiveness and the significance of the uncertainties in reflexivity, that neither the Self nor the Other can ever be completely known and understood.' (Rose 1997 as cited in De Jong 2009) Even though these theories of reflexivity and constructive complicity have their roots in feminism and refer to positionality with regards to knowledge production⁴⁹, De Jong(2009) argues that they can be incorporated to understanding aid work "by the fact that due to the nature of the work there is an engagement with the Other, in terms of solidarity, aid and support. At the same time, the organisational aims are based on the recognition that the world is an unequal place with structural injustices. I would make the assumption here that the people working for these organizations and the organizations themselves are embedded in these very same unequal structures." (De Jong 2009) Thus, this research paper will depart from the understanding that S stands in a position of complicity while also remembering that this complicity will always be incomplete. It uses reflexivity as defined by Eyben as ' a deliberate process of becoming

⁴⁸ Spivak 1999 as cited in De Jong 2009

⁴⁹ De Jong 2009

unsettled about what is normal, recognising that there are concurrent realities and that how I personally understand and act in the world is shaped by the interplay of history, power and relationships' (2014) to explore the underpinnings of S' complicity and/or innocence.

The abovementioned theories are used to understand S' position and situate her in a grounded yet fluid context, while they will continue guide the analysis of the overall research, S uses Theory of planned behavior to analyze the research conducted as part of her job in Oxfam Novib (and thus it forms part of the framework). While Theory of planned behavior is a highly problematic 'individual' based, western model of behavior change S uses it in order to create a 'practical' model of behavior change for Oxfam Novib⁵⁰. This theory however leaves out many assumptions in the Oxfam research unquestioned and the research will turn once again towards intersectionality to help tease those assumptions out.

- *Theory of planned behaviour*

With its origins in social psychology, theory of planned behaviour⁵¹ explains how behaviour interventions can bring about change. The theory states that human action is based on three main factors – 1. Evaluation of the behaviour as good or bad 2. Perceived social pressure to perform said behaviour and 3. Perceived capability to perform the behaviour. Behavioural interventions have two objectives – the first is to motivate the behaviour and then to turn it into action.⁵²

⁵⁰ S choose to use this model in particular as she believed that it was best suited to Oxfam's model oriented way of change making also, creating a model for change was one of her internships goals.

⁵¹ Ajzen 1985

⁵² Ajzen, 2011

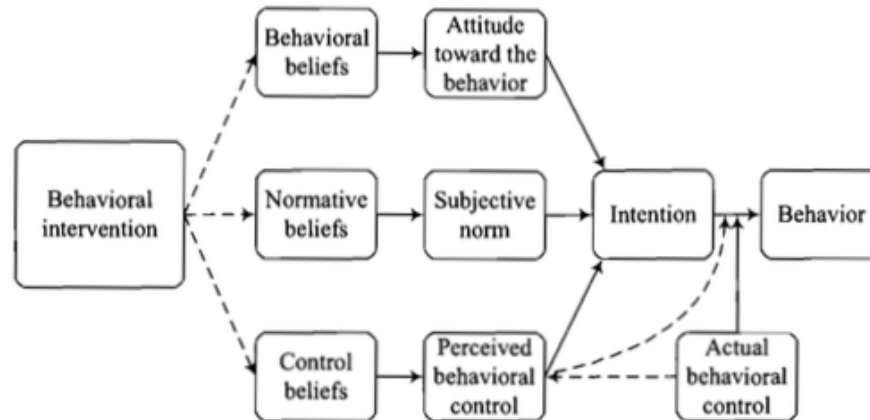


Figure 3: “Expected effects of behavioral intervention in Theory of planned behavior”(Ajzen, 2011)

As illustrated in the figure above, for behavioral intervention to turn into behavior (action) there needs to a strong intention to perform said behavior. This intention is formed through the attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. These are in turn affected by behavioral norms, normative beliefs and control beliefs in a particular society.

However to bring about sustainable long-term change it is not enough to only create the intention. As explained in this excerpt - “ Individuals subjected to an intervention are exposed to new information or experiences that may well change some of their behavior-relevant beliefs and as a result affect their intentions and behavior. However the effectiveness of the intervention is not guaranteed. It is found to influence behavior; its effects should be traceable to changes in beliefs and as a result affect intentions and behavior. If the intervention fails to produce desired change then the theory of planned behavior can help identify the reasons for failure.” (Ajzen, 2011) According to Ajzen (2011), behavioral interventions may fail for two reasons – 1. The intervention has no effect on the desired change in behavior, norm and control related beliefs or even if it has a change in these beliefs, the changes are counterweighed by contradictory beliefs. 2. Even if there is a desired change in intention personal or environmental factors may prohibit the individual from translating the intention into behavior. Thus, it is not enough to only affect intention but also create a favorable environment for the intention to be carried out.

In his research on the role of theory on HIV prevention, Fishbein takes the theory of planned behaviour a step forward by combining it with other leading theories on behaviour change to create the integrative model.⁵³

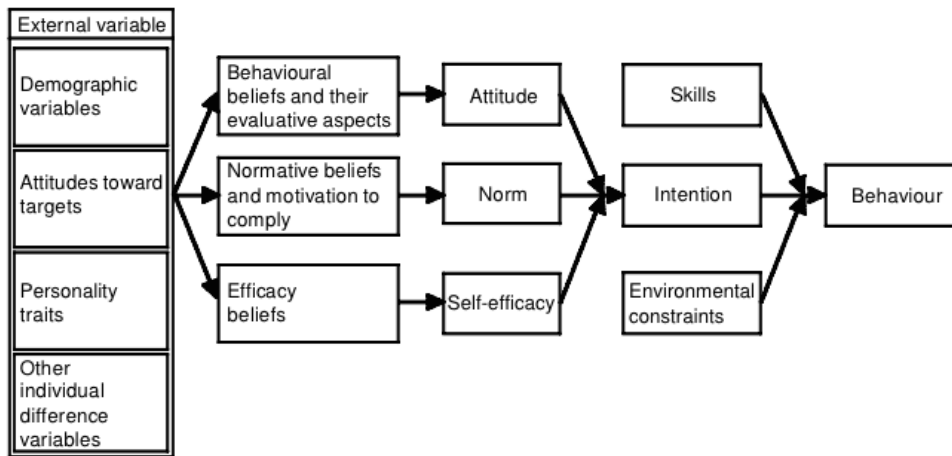


Figure: 3 – “Integrative model” (Fishbein, 2000)

In this model he emphasizes that bringing about sustained change in behaviour requires more than just intention. “ Indeed, if one has made a *strong commitment* (or formed a strong intention) to perform a given behaviour, and if one has the *necessary skills* and the ability to perform the behaviour, and if there are *no environmental constraints* to prevent the performance of that behaviour, the probability is close to one that the behaviour will be performed.”(Fishbein, 2000) (Emphasis added).

Against the backdrop of these theories, the research that S conducted in DRC, attempts to point out the reasons for success or failure of the men engage program (WECAN) in question. The men engage program in question is the behaviour intervention that aims to bring about change in men’s behaviour. Has the intervention created the intention for change in behaviour? If so, are the other factors (skills to perform behaviour and lack of environmental constraints) conducive for this intention to translate into changed behaviour and beliefs?

After exploring S’ analysis the findings of the Oxfam research using the abovementioned model, I will use Intersectionality and reflexivity to further explore researcher – researched relationships - “intersectionality demands that researchers understand how, they themselves and people living and working in community, live at multiple, fluid, and ever- changing intersections. Researchers have a resounding impact on how research is done.”(Hankivsky et al. 2010) These frameworks will help open up questions regarding research responses

⁵³ M. Fishbein (2000)

given to S. Why did the participants say what they said and how did S' identities affect their responses? What multiple, fluid intersections were the different actors negotiating in these interactions? Further the research will also question the assumptions underlying the Oxfam campaign as well their strategy to hire an intern to conduct this research in DRC. All this, aimed towards unveiling the paradoxes and everyday contradictions inherent in aid work.

2.3 Methods

Just like the theoretical framework this research uses multiple methods in order to answer its research questions. While the overall research question (that explores paradoxes) in aid land relies on auto-ethnographical methods such as journal keeping, informal conversations and blogging, the Oxfam research conducted by S (on gender equality) follows more the traditional method of collecting data through semi-structured interviews.

The sample for the semi-structured interviews was chosen through the method of snowball sampling. Point to be noted is that, the leads of the WECAN campaign were responsible for choosing the sample and hence there was a definite bias at play in this research. However, this bias has been acknowledged and used as a basis for analyzing the results of the research⁵⁴.

I use the method of reflexive ethnography to reflect upon S' (my) experiences. As Davies (1998) describes – reflexive ethnographies involve “ the relationships between the ethnographer and the informants in the field which form the bases of subsequent theorizing and conclusions, are expressed through social interaction in which the ethnographer participates; thus ethnographers help to construct the observations that become their data.” (Davies, 1998) It was necessary for me to create the character of S so as to gain some distance in order to be able to theorize about my experiences. In taking note of my social interactions and embodied experiences during my research for Oxfam/ISS in DRC, I was collecting ethnographic material, which I later analyzed through reflexive and intersectional lens.

2.4 Relevance and scope of research

This research paper adds to the recently emerging genre of ethnographies of aidland and lives of aid workers. This is important because individual agency matters in conceptualization and implementation of programs in development⁵⁵ and moreover because development actors play a crucial role in the economic

⁵⁴ It also points out to yet another paradox in aid work whereby aid organizations hire researchers to learn more about their practices and yet the role they play limits how much 'real information' comes out through such researches.

⁵⁵ Eyben, 2014

and political dynamics of developing countries that they live in.⁵⁶ Most of the work done on the lives of development workers until recently has been carried out by Northern aid workers (about other northern aid workers)⁵⁷. Last year Rosalind Eyben (2014) published a book on her own life as development worker. It is a masterpiece in the practice of reflexivity and has been a guiding light for this paper. Unlike Eyben who has spent the last 50 years of life in this field, I am just now, entering (the field of development practice). Although my paper lacks the ripe years of experience and the retrospective depth that Eyben's work brings, what makes it an interesting read is my (rather S') positionality. Being a young brown woman from India, but coming to (DR)Congo from the Netherlands, puts S simultaneously in positions of marginalization and privilege. While her marginality allows her to 'see from different perspectives and encourages a constant double loop enquiry',⁵⁸ privilege allows her to gain 'credibility and influence'⁵⁹ in certain situations. A reflexive text on lives of development workers by someone from the South, going to another country in the South (but where the aid world is made up of predominantly white northern aid workers), opens up a whole new range of experiences and interactions that are very much a part of aidland. It unveils the possibility to explore not only North-South hierarchies but also South-South hierarchies, which are often fluid, even surprising.

This research paper is one story that is embedded in my own subjectivities and my understanding of the world around me and it often aroused my concerns about self-indulgence. However, Patta Scott-Villers (as cited in Eyben 2014) put my doubts to rest, by the reassuring advice that, (sharing one's life story in a reflexive manner) "is about knowing one's positioning, one's world-view and tracking the emotional, cultural and political elements of our own engagements, so that the more 'external' aspects of engagement are put into context. Once a person can see herself, that person can perhaps begin to see others more clearly." (Scott-Villers as cited in Eyben 2014) and Eyben adds " sharing one's life story deepens the process of reflexive enquiry and encourages others to the identify the interplay between the personal and the systemic, exploring the potential for making a difference." (Eyben 2014)

Thus, though the scope of this research paper may be limited to the subjective experience of a researcher⁶⁰ but it is definitely relevant to anyone working in international aid and interested in making a positive change, as it is only after we

⁵⁶ (Verma, 2011)

⁵⁷ Stirrat (2008) Mosse (2011), De Jong (2009, 2011), Fetcher and Hindman (2011), Fetcher (2012), Eyben (2014), Roth (2015) and others.

⁵⁸ (Eyben 2014)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Makes me wonder - 'Aren't all researches (no matter how 'objective') subjective anyway?'

acknowledge what is wrong, that we can take steps to fix it. And as Mahatma Gandhi a great leader from my country of origin states, “Be the change you want to see in the world”- reflexive practice is a step towards being this change.

2.5 Ethical challenges

During the process of writing this research paper I faced a few ethical challenges.

- *Making myself and others vulnerable.*

Reflexive enquiry of ones own experiences requires a high degree of vulnerability and at the same time there is a ‘necessary painfulness’(De Jong 2009) to the process. As Harding remarks - “It can’t be entirely a pleasure to discover the unintentionally racist assumptions that have guided so many of my thoughts and practices” (Harding 1991 as cited in the De Jong 2009). This feeling of being ‘exposed’ in some ways led me create an alibi ‘S’, in not only distancing me from my feelings but also from my reader. In the process of ‘exposing’ myself, I also inevitably exposed others who were part of my story, my interactions and although I do take precautions not to name them, they become the unwitting subjects of my reflexive/reflective practice as well.

- *Being ‘too critical’*

While out in the ‘field’ I was wearing multiple hats not only in my positionality, but as a researcher I was coming from ISS as well as from Oxfam Novib. Conducting research as an ISS student, demanded a certain level of critical positioning towards Oxfam, however, living in the Oxfam guesthouse in Bukavu and being ‘taken care of’ by Oxfam as such posed to me the ethical challenge of critiquing my ‘sponsors’. Even though I was aware and conscious of my full critical autonomy, I couldn’t help but feel a bit guilty about being critical of the organization that gave me this (big) opportunity. However, I resolved this by using critique in a constructive way. As I see it my research is not critical for the sake of ‘being critical’ but rather as mentioned in the preface “to situate aid practices in a sort of a *sociologie totale*, so that broader, indeed the broadest contexts are given their due. (Apthorpe 2011: 200, Mosse ed. 2011).” However, I am just starting out in the field of development practice and very much wish to make a career in it and I was very aware of this paper affecting (positively or negatively) my future career prospects. Walking the thin balance between being critical and being constructive was yet another ethical challenge. In the tradition of reflexive practice, I make these challenges explicit, acknowledge my complicity in this matter as the researcher and use them as my point of departure to find the way forward.

Chapter 3

Paradoxes in aid work – Oxfam report.

This chapter will explore the paradoxes inherent in aid work through a snapshot of the Oxfam research that S was required to conduct in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Alongside revealing the research process and findings, this chapter will also reflect upon the assumptions and contradictions that arise in the course of the research process and its results.

3.1 Preparing for the journey to DRC

Going to DRC was a highly emotional and adventurous experience for S. Owing to the fact that mainstream medias and academics portray a rather fearful and one sided picture of DRC, all she heard and read only added to her fears. However she was very aware that this was a big opportunity that would add value to her CV⁶¹, and hence she was determined to do it. In addition to that Oxfam Novib seemed very calm about sending an intern to DRC. ‘ We have people working there’, she was told when she expressed her concern to her colleague in ONL. Also, she received mandatory security training at the beginning of her internship⁶² and was strictly required to follow security protocol once in DRC. It also helped that the head of the organization in Bukavu responded to all of S’ questions and worried emails promptly and reassuringly.⁶³ So finally, full of excitement and nervousness S made her journey down to the equatorial belt.

While this upheaval and nervousness was taking place in S’ life, the men engage movement that the Oxfam research departs from was going through an exciting time as well. Born out of the field of social work and feminist studies, work with men and boys within development started in the 90’s, the past 10 years saw a tremendous increase in interventions. “During the second wave feminism’s uprising in the 1960’s and 1970’s, concerned men, generally left-wing, organized male groups and outreach organizations, furthermore, there developed an academic genre during the 1980s of masculinity and gender studies within

⁶¹ This also came up often in conversations with colleagues in DRC, about how having done a posting in a dangerous area puts your CV in a different league than those who haven’t and thereby leading to easy access to higher up positions in the professional hierarchy sooner. Some colleagues even seemed to be ‘collecting dangerous places’ on their CV and often spoke about their hardship postings with pride. Further research required to say anything substantial about this very interesting trend.

⁶² Which actually added to her fears than dissipated them.

⁶³ In a conversation later in Bukavu, this person admitted that she realized how nervous S was and almost doubted if S should come to DRC. But having worked in development for many years and having daughters who work in hardship posts in development as well, she was quite familiar with fears of going to a dangerous place and hence was able to reassure S.

sociology, anthropology, psychology and public health. Work with men and boys within development cooperation started in the 1990s, but it is since the turn of the millennium, and especially the last ten years, that has seen a major increase in interventions. Work with men and boys has been integrated by organizations with broader agendas, as well as been the focus of specialized gender organizations.” (Dover, 2014) In September 2014, UNWOMEN launched its famous HeforShe campaign for equality.⁶⁴ Men engage is has also been gaining ground in global policymaking and advocacy. A recent research conducted by World Health Organization states that in order to be effective in changing the state of inequality around the world men engage programs need to be scaled up.⁶⁵ Presently a large number of countries have committed internationally to work with men for gender equality - “Relevant international commitments are embodied in the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review held in 2000, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (2001), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (2004 and 2009), the Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys on Achieving Gender Equality (2009), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Action Framework on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV (2009), and the UNAIDS Operational Plan for Action Framework (2009).” (World Health Organization 2010) Oxfam Novib’s WECAN campaign used the ‘men engage strategy’ through the creation of a men’s forum in Bukavu. The men who were part of forum as change agents, showed other men and their communities that change is possible through their own actions, and S was interested in interviewing these men to investigate their attitudes about equality and women.

3.2 Oxfam Organizational hierarchies and paradoxes there within

Upon reaching Bukavu and after getting over the initial shock of being there⁶⁶, S started preparing the ground for her research while working out of the Oxfam office. This office consisted of a team of 15 people. All except the director were local staff. The atmosphere in the office was very jovial and family like. The director, an older, white, woman was much loved and respected by the staff. She showered them with a considerate and caring (almost) motherly affection.⁶⁷ At

⁶⁴ UNWOMEN (Last updated 2014) 'Heforshe' (a webpage of UNWOMEN). Accessed 17/11/15 <<http://www.heforshe.org>>

⁶⁵ World Health Organization (2010) 'Policy Approaches to Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality and Health Equity.' France: World Health Organization.

⁶⁶ The scope of this research does not allow me to get into the details of the different facets of being in DRC and this will be left to explore in further research. For those interested, these experiences can be found on my blog – africadventures.wordpress.com

⁶⁷ For example building capacities and skills of the staff so that they could have a better chance of finding a job in the new structural reorganization while she herself was leaving.

the beginning of the week there would be an all staff meeting, which everyone from the director to all support staff (drivers, guards, cleaners) would attend and talk about how their previous week was. This was a great practice of cutting across hierarchies and creating a feeling of connectedness among the staff. Everyone shared what he or she was doing at work and if there was an important personal event, it was shared as well. Often these meetings led to discussions on controversial topics such as homosexuality or women's roles in society and everyone was encouraged to debate and discuss often arousing laughter and jokes from people but driving home a point that made them think about these issues differently. S often wondered if this would all be possible if the director was a black woman? The fact that she was white, older, kind but assertive and most importantly the director put her in a position of privilege, which she could use to advocate about issues that she was passionate about. But the paradox was, this position that allowed her to speak up on 'taboo' issues also limited the issues from being taken seriously. She was able to speak for example at one of the staff member's wedding about children born out of wedlock as children born of love and not of 'sin'. But her position as a white woman also led to statements such as - 'she doesn't know our culture, it is possible in Europe but not in Congo'. Thus, it was a contradiction; a black woman in her position would probably not be allowed to say such a thing and even though the white woman was able to speak up on some issues, her position limited the scope of this act of speaking up. The office was full of such incongruities - for staff members working on gender issues (with radical views and opinions about equality) still had to live within fixed structures such as society and family that were often contradictory to their political engagements. Such paradoxes were a daily reality also in the lives of the individuals S interviewed for the Oxfam research, as we will see in the next section.

3.3 Research process and findings - assumptions and absurdities in bringing about equality

When setting out from the Hague, the aim of her research was to find out how to engage men better to bring about equality but once in DRC, S realized through conversations with colleagues that they wanted this research for another reason; to show that men engage doesn't work but instead takes away attention and money from programs directed towards women. And they were not the only ones saying this - Kristen Woolf, strategy director at the Girl Hub agrees when she says, "Don't lose focus on girls: Very clearly men and boys have got to be a central component of the solution, but we need to tread carefully here not to lose the focus on equality and empowerment for girls and women. Scarce funding is being diverted away from girls to programs that leave them out and directly benefit boys and men (all under the name of gender equality). We must be very intentional in the design of gender-equality programs to not lose sight of the primary goal: leveling the playing field" (Woolf as cited in Guardian UK article,

2014)⁶⁸ While S, unquestioningly went ahead with the research to see what she finds, this further revealed to me the paradox of the differences between head quarters and country offices - they were not even on the same page regarding the purpose of the research. While The Hague wanted to know how to engage men better, Bukavu wanted to know how to bring money back to its projects directed towards its principal target groups - women.

The research questions that S used in the research she conducted for Oxfam was as follows:

Does engaging men in programs to change attitudes about gender equality empower women and to what extent?

In order to answer these questions, the following sub questions were addressed:

- What is the motivation for men to participate in programs that engage men for equality?
- What are the general attitudes about gender equality and gender roles among men/women/girls and boys?
- What does empowerment mean to women in Eastern DRC? ⁶⁹

These questions that were created in the framework of a research required by Oxfam Novib and in consultation with the organization leave a lot of assumptions unexplored. The underlying assumption of this research and of the WECAN campaign is that changing gender roles would bring about change in structures of society thereby leading to gender equality. This link while problematic in general becomes even more troubling in a context of ongoing conflict. Judy el Bushra(2003) explains that often gender roles can become strictly reinforced in times of conflict. Further radical change in society with regards to gender equality requires a 'dismantling of patriarchy' which is not a short term goal and 'requires much dialogue and debate around fundamental values' (Bushra 2003) Additionally, the research forges a direct link between empowerment and equality while evidence shows that often women's empowerment have unintended negative impacts on women such as violence to enforce traditional gender norms.⁷⁰

These assumptions need to be addressed in conceptualizing and implementing projects and reflexive enquiry is required on the part of development practitioners to question where these assumptions come from. Paradoxes in everyday life are a reality especially more so in developing countries and these

⁶⁸ Leach, A. (2014) '#HeforShe : How to Engage Men in the Fight for Gender Equality.' *The Guardian, UK*, adolescent girls - global development professionals network. 23/09/2014, .

⁶⁹ This question was unfortunately not asked to men, it would have yielded interesting results and definitely has scope for further research.

⁷⁰ Hughes, C., M. Bolis, R. Fries and S. Finigan (2015)

paradoxes need to be addressed and built upon to conceptualize projects instead of ignoring them⁷¹.

...

“Puisque nous croyons que si les hommes et les femmes sont égale, le development va suivre aussi”/ “Because we believe that if men and women are equal, development will follow as well.”⁷²

Three focus discussions were conducted with change agents of the WECAN campaign. Most of these agents were men and had been engaged as part of WECAN’s men forum – a strategy to engage men for equality. When asked about their motivations to join the campaign most of them seemed to be particularly moved by sexual violence against women taking place in the different milieu around them. As one participant explained – *“After the war, sexual violence increased tremendously. These cases were not limited to the conflict zones but also entered the family. I am not part of the state or of the international community so I cannot engage with the conflicts on the ground but I can try to reduce the violence in the family.”⁷³* Yet others engaged in the campaign at their university. They explained that the atrocities against young women ranged from the staff asking for monetary bribes to sexual favors. Failure to comply led to consequences ranging from humiliations to refusal to grant the academic degree. Some of the participants in the discussion were women and their motivations to engage in the campaign were similar to the men. One woman who was working with the government explained that the sexual harassment she faced at the workplace was what motivated her to join. While another who works as a community agent in a rural area explained that the condition for women is much worse in rural areas, not only do they face sexual violence and the heavy burden of housework and work in the fields but they are often not even considered as human beings *“There are also restrictions with regards to food. A woman cannot eat chicken, because she is a woman.”⁷⁴* While most participants spoke about their motivation in terms of what they saw around them and hence were motivated to join, some were reflexive about their own practices towards women and admitted that they considered women as inferior beings before becoming part of the campaign. *“Here, in Africa, when a man speaks, a woman does not dare to open her mouth. It*

⁷¹ Roth 2015

⁷² Male change agent #1, Focus group discussion (1) with changemakers, Bukavu, July 2015.

⁷³ Male change agent #2, Focus group discussion (1) with changemakers, Bukavu, July 2015.

⁷⁴ Female change agent #1, Focus group discussion (1) with changemakers, Bukavu, July 2015.

is what we learned."⁷⁵ But after becoming part of the campaign they explain that they changed and now understand the value of a woman. Most participants spoke positively about the changes that the campaign brought in their lives and around them. The participants who had engaged at university to fight against sexual harassment announced that the campaign led to a questioning of the negative practices in university. The young women began to denounce the sexual advances of certain professors and the student body supported them. Due to sensitization efforts, the participants claimed to become conscious about their prejudices against women. While some of them now started helping their wife in household chores, yet other began to open their minds to possibility of women as earners. However, these changes were not consistent as there were many obstacles faced by the men who tried to change. Some of these obstacles involved the women themselves, unwilling to give up their traditional roles (patriarchal attitudes amongst women) while some other involved resistance from older family members (generation gaps).

All participants spoke in extremely positive terms about the WECAN campaign, giving very politically correct responses about women's status and role in society. S wondered how much of this was true. The fact that she came from Oxfam, and that the partner organization's heads were present at the discussions, heavily influenced the responses. Here it is important to mention that when the WECAN campaign began (in 2009) it was implemented by Oxfam through the partner organization HOMMESRDC⁷⁶ where the focus group discussions were taking place, however along the way it was taken over by a new organization that was formed out of the campaign. It was called WECANDRC.org. This new organization was now in charge of the campaign and there was an ongoing struggle for power between the new organization and the old one. Thus, responses of the change agents from HOMMESRDC were also a way for the old organization to convince Oxfam of its competence in managing the WECAN campaign. S was obviously ignorant about this internal complication and it seems that so was Oxfam Novib in Bukavu, until it became an issue later in the research process. This raises many pertinent questions about how development projects are carried out. The gap and lack of information between INGO's and the implementing partner organizations even operating in the same city, show that INGO's are operating in a bubble often delegating projects to partner organizations and then failing to follow up on the process of implementation.

⁷⁵ Male change agent #2, Focus group discussion(2) with changemakers, Bukavu, July, 2015.

⁷⁶ Name changed to protect identity.

Despite the politically correct responses given in the first half of focus group discussions (with change agents) S found that when she asked questions that weren't directly related to the campaign and yet related to gender equality⁷⁷, the responses were very different almost contradictory. This points to the realities of change on the ground. While the responses to the campaign were extremely positive (politically correct), the responses to the questions regarding gender roles and equality gave away the everyday paradoxes of change. When asked what women represent to Congolese society, majority of the respondents saw the primary role of a woman as that of a mother and a housewife - Women are responsible for the household and the family. Their principal roles were limited to the household – cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. While some respondents declared stated that *some women* now a days were capable of taking up roles outside the household to contribute financially, they should be careful about not neglecting their familial responsibilities. When asked what a 'real' man is and what a 'real' woman is the responses circled around a 'real man as a provider' for his family and a real woman is a 'supporting companion of her husband'. While these responses often aroused laughter in the group most of them agreed that despite emancipation of women and giving them a say in decision making processes in the household, the 'man of house' must always have the last word.⁷⁸

After just three focus group discussions and a few interviews S was denied access to these change agents due to the internal politics of the partner organizations. The reason used to deny access was 'failure for following protocol'⁷⁹. As she was not in a position to deal with this she reported it to the director of the organization and chose instead to interview other individuals from varied sections of society to find out their views about gender equality in Congolese society and thereby do a comparative study on those who have been part of a men engage programs and those who have not.

The fact that S was able to 'report this to the director' and move away from the situation points to S' privileged position in the organizational hierarchy. Even though she was an 'just an intern', she was sent from the headquarters and a 'guest' researcher in Bukavu. This allowed her the luxury of not 'dealing with the

⁷⁷ Such as – What according to you is a 'real man' and a 'real woman'? Or what is the one thing that should not change in terms of gender roles of men and women?

⁷⁸ Why did they now suddenly give different (less politically correct) responses? Why was S assuming that their responses were 'politically correct' and why did she assume that the more traditional responses were not? These are some of the questions that arise here, however due to a lack of time they will be left to address in further research.

⁷⁹ The organization WECANDRC.org informed S that she was supposed gain permission from the national secretariat of the organization in Kinshasa and as they were in the process of an external evaluation of the campaign it was not going to be possible anymore.

situation'. If she were a staff member at the Bukavu office, she would definitely not have been able to just report the situation and move away from it. Also as a guest researcher from The Hague, S had the luxury of having things arranged for her. Local staff at Oxfam Bukavu arranged meetings with different interview participants and organizations and most times even accompanied her to the meetings. The paradox of this was that, while this made the research process comfortable it also limited the scope of the research. The fact that S would arrive in an Oxfam car, introduced by a local staff member as a 'researcher from the Hague' framed the responses of the participants in a certain manner creating an extra layer of hierarchy in addition to the already existing researched – researched hierarchies that exist in research⁸⁰. However, upon further analysis it can be argued that in this research process her age, race, ethnicity, gender and job status as an intern often diluted some of the researcher- researched hierarchies. For instance S recalls that in an interview with the local minister for Gender, Women and Children (MFFE),⁸¹ at first the minister thought S was a consultant from Oxfam and started aggressively complaining about how Oxfam does not respect the government⁸². But when S clarified that she was not a consultant but a researcher from ISS and here through Oxfam but as an intern, she regained her composure and responded in a more cordial manner. Further often while talking about culture she often referred to Europe as 'ils' and used 'nous' to refer to 'us' - S and her - as 'from countries of the South'. Often interviewees engaged in conversations with S about gender inequality in India, in a way making the discussions and interviews a two way process rather than only one way. During focus groups the discussions turned towards culture and tradition being important but also being obstacles towards gender equality and S was considered to be more insider than outsider in terms of understanding this – “ Tu comprends, tu viens de l'Inde.../ You understand, you come from India.” Thus, S strategically (often unconsciously) used her different positions to make the interactions as comfortable as possible for both herself and her interviewee.

In order to continue her research after being denied access to change agents from the WECAN program, S resorted to interviewing other individuals who were not part of the program to see if there were any differences between them. Among these was a group of young people from a youth organization in Bukavu with the focus groups divided into literate and illiterate youth. The group of illiterate youth consisted of 5 young men and one young woman. The results from this discussion were that, all the men considered women to be inferior (to

⁸⁰ Hankivsky et al. 2010

⁸¹ Ministre de Femme, Famille et Enfant.

⁸² According to her in the past years that Oxfam has been there they have never collaborated with the Ministry and hence they do not respect the authority of the government.

men), with their principal purpose as reproduction. The young woman in the group agreed that women belong in the household and that taking care of children and providing for family was the basic role of the woman. When asked if they help their mothers or sisters in the housework, most of them said no. One young man nuanced his answer by saying that he helps his sister when his mother is not around but cannot imagine doing so in the presence of his mother as she would be very upset with him. The young woman proudly admitted to her brothers helping out when she was very ill, but agrees that men should stay out of the kitchen. The group of literate youth consisted of two women and three men. In reference to the status of women in society today, the group agreed that before, women were considered mainly as mothers and house makers but today their roles have changed. Women are now able to access education and jobs and are getting the respect that they deserve. One of the women participants nuanced this understanding by reminding the group that while this is true, women are still required to do housework and are limited by familial constraints, thus, they have a double burden. "Women are allowed to have a job and their family is proud but then the husband wants her to cook when she comes home, he refuses to eat food prepared by the domestic help or he may not let her travel often."⁸³ One of the men added "it's great that women work but they must not neglect their responsibility towards their family, after all men cannot produce children and women have this gift."⁸⁴ This led to a heated discussion in the group, with one woman getting defensive about this, and another man adding that men should help out with taking care of children. Then the group went on to discussing that some women do become arrogant when they get a job or become highly educated and they all agreed that this was not a 'good quality' in a woman. This group also discussed the problem of lack of political participation by women – "who will further the women's agenda if women are not in politics"⁸⁵, but then they concluded that political participation needs financial autonomy because without money one cannot run for elections and hence what was most important, was to bring about financial autonomy for women. This point was also reiterated by five female journalists that S interviewed. Political participation of women was considered an urgent need of the day but political participation necessitated financial autonomy. Inspired by this idea of autonomy S questioned the women (literate youth and journalists) about the idea of empowerment and what they thought of women's empowerment. The paradox was that, the word 'empowerment' does not exist in French or Swahili. When translated to French, it translates as 'giving the power

⁸³ Female participant #1, literate group, youth focus group discussion (2), Bukavu, July 2015

⁸⁴ Male participant #1, literate group, youth focus group discussion (2), Bukavu, July 2015

⁸⁵ Female participant# 2, literate group, youth focus group discussion (2), Bukavu, July 2015

to' which was considered to have a negative connotation and all women interviewed, rejected the word empowerment and used 'emancipation' or 'autonomy' instead. Emancipation was viewed as women taking charge of their own lives. Most of them were open to the idea of emancipation but pointed out how a lack of understanding of the concept can cause problems in society –

*"Many times when we talk about emancipated women, it seems like some of them are becoming like men, they start dressing like men, start behaving like men, forget their feminine sides and start behaving arrogant. It's important to work with this concept but do it well so that there are no cracks in the society. These are concepts that are good to use but should be used well."*⁸⁶

This quote can provide insights into explore why autonomy was preferred and limited to financial autonomy. The underlying danger in emancipation is that it can create 'cracks' in the society.⁸⁷ Financial autonomy on the other hand was viewed as a requisite for bettering lives of women. *"Autonomisation de la femme est très important parceque tous dépend de l'économie."/ "Autonomy of women is very important because everything depends on the economy"*⁸⁸. Research shows that financial autonomy of the woman increases her bargaining power in the household (Kabeer, 1994) and many respondents seemed to reinstate this point *"In the present context of DRC, women's autonomy is urgent because women have lost their autonomy. Women have always been co-dependent because of backward customs that place them at an inferior position in the society. A woman is considered a domestic worker, a machine to create children. Autonomy is important as it will give women an important place in the family and help them claim their rights."*⁸⁹ Thus, 'empowerment' the big buzzword that is 'high priority' on all gender agenda's in development practice is not even desired by these (literate, upper class) women in Eastern DRC. This once again points out to the gap between local needs on the ground and global development agendas.

3.4 Analysis of the findings and assumptions in aid work

These gaps may exist due to lack of contextualization of development agendas and programs. While some agendas may work perfectly in bringing about change in a certain context it may fail in yet another. S used the theory of planned behavior to analyze her data of this research. She found that even though the change agents of WECAN campaign showed the presence of 'intention' to change⁹⁰, there seemed little change in attitudes and beliefs about gender equality and women. In addition to that they faced environmental constraints such as ridicule from the community or anger from the family. Men who gave

⁸⁶ Female participant, journalist, Interview #25, Bukavu, July 2015

⁸⁷ What are these 'cracks' exactly and how they are affected by emancipation was left to explore in further research.

⁸⁸ Female participant, journalist, Interview #26, Bukavu, July 2015

⁸⁹ Female participant, journalist, Interview #28, Bukavu, July 2015

⁹⁰ By stating that they respect women and willingly help out in the household sometimes

extremely positive responses about gender equality and status of women within the purview of the program, gave very different responses to questions that demanded an interrogation of traditional norms or gender roles. There was not much of a difference between the agents of change and the illiterate youth interviewed in the research. While the latter openly confessed their belief that women and men are not equal, the prior says so indirectly. And while the literate youth are open to the possibility of women accessing jobs and education, the condition is that women must fulfill their 'primary' roles first. The picture that evolves is one of a society deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. And though the behavioral intervention, WECAN campaign has led a step in the direction towards change in behavior this has not occurred due to environmental constraints and lack of abilities of perform said behavior. Thus despite some occasional transgressions, the traditional gendered division of labor remain secure. Certain classes of women have the privilege of accessing higher education and work opportunities but they are limited by constraints such as familial roles and gender discrimination at the workplace. While some men have come to accept women as thinking beings and understanding their value in society, women still have a limited say in decision-making. While there are signs of change with a few women realizing their rights and a few men opening themselves up to the possibility of a more equal society, the process seems to be moving forward at a snails pace.

This analysis, as conducted by S for Oxfam using the TPB model creates a crude and rather simplistic understanding of change in society. It "disabuse(s) the formalist 'delusion that agency can be incentivized to operate independently of political economy'"(Craig and Porter, 2006 as cited in Mosse 2011) It says nothing about gender analysis, or intersectionality or the fact that the model is based on a very individualistic, ahistorical and non-contextual view of behavior and change. It's basic and very flawed assumption is that, change in behavior leads to change in structures of society. "Gender inequality is structured into the organization of social relations in a society as fundamentally as class in capitalist societies, race in apartheid South Africa and caste in India."(Kabeer, 2015) Changing gender roles by encouraging men to help out in the household is not going to dismantle patriarchy. Further the context of DRC as a conflict zone adds to the complexity of gender roles in society.⁹¹An in depth intersectional analysis is required to explore the very rich material that was collected through this research. How class affects equality and opportunities for men and women? Who were the women who are able to access education and jobs and what kind of jobs? What are the inequalities faced by men? How do the different intersections of class, age, and conflict affect their roles both real and 'assumed'? - Are some of the pertinent issues that come up through this research. However, the scope of

⁹¹ Bushra 2003

this research paper does not allow me to go into depth in these issues. What does call for attention, through the Oxfam research and fits the scope of this research however, are assumptions made by development organizations such as Oxfam in conceptualizing this program and implementing programs in different contexts. For instance: In engaging men to end violence against women, men are often framed either as perpetrators or as collaborators in the fight against violence and hardly ever seen as victims of violence themselves. This becomes even more blasphemous in the context of DRC where there have been the highest numbers of recorded instances of GBV against men.⁹² While the WECAN program in DRC, as well as the participants of the research consider men as collaborators for a gender equal society, there is a lack of “reference to men as gendered human beings in their own right, formed, privileged but also damaged by patriarchal rule.”(Reynders, forthcoming)⁹³ According to Reynders (forthcoming) this ‘instrumentalist approach to men’ is also advocated by the UN campaign for equality HeforShe that led too much of an uproar in the men engage movement. Thus, gender inequality needs to be seen as a structural issue and not something that can be solved with a campaign. It requires a questioning of the dominant frameworks of masculinity and femininity that are often damaging to both men and women. Changing these dominant frameworks requires a change in ways of viewing the world by both men and women. For instance as seen in examples above the men who started helping their wives in the house were often ridiculed by the community and even their own wives. Women are as much entrenched in patriarchal roles as men.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter reveals that aid work is swarming with assumptions and paradoxes underlying not only the conceptualization and implementation of projects but also, the everyday interaction and realities of aidland. Professional hierarchies traverse intersections of race, gender, age and place creating space for certain interactions while at the simultaneously determining their significance. The research conducted for Oxfam not only uncovered many paradoxes and assumptions in the way programs are implemented and conceptualized but also harbored a few suppositions in its own conception. Why Oxfam chooses to implement this program in Eastern DRC while failing to take the contexts into account point to a deeper, more wide spread paradox in development practice which is, the lack of context specific projects⁹⁴ which stems from the one –size–fits all attitude of development practice (even though it may state otherwise).

⁹² Baaz, M.E. and M. Stern 2008

⁹³ Reynders, J. (Forthcoming) 'Where are the Men? Reflections on Manhood, Masculinities and Gender Justice', in W. Harcourt (ed.) *Bodies in Resistance: Gender in Neoliberal Times*, London: Palgrave.

⁹⁴ Verma 2011

The obstacles in the research process on one hand highlight the nature of aidland as a bubble, (given the fact that Oxfam was unaware of the internal politics of its implementing partner organizations in the same city) but on the other hand offered a glimpse into the temporary nature of projects, where once the project ends, its fate remains unknown (and uncared for)⁹⁵. The findings of the Oxfam research unveil the everyday contradictions in the complex process of change. As Jan Reynders reminds us “Gender and gender inequality is not a project that can be fixed with money. The problems of the world’s multi-inequalities are very structured and deeply entrenched in our daily lives and hence our responses must also be well structured, but along new lines of thinking and behaving. It means that the language, methods and approached for the transformation to justice must carry the ingredients that are required in the new situation.” (Reynders, forthcoming) And this new situation must be built, by first of all, acknowledging the paradoxes and contradictions in the everyday realities of our lives. In exploring the underpinnings of S’ multiple positions and identifications at different moments in the research process (in the organization and in interviews) yet more paradoxes are exposed to us – Oxfam creates space for the research she conducts in DRC as a strategy to be critical about its own practices (and learn from them), however, the fact that she was a researcher from Oxfam limits the scope of her research and denies it this very ‘critical’ aspect that was the aim of the research in the first place. Of course the research provides enough material to learn from and a critical aspect does come in, through a questioning of Oxfam’s own assumptions about the program however, the responses given by the participants in the research remain heavily tainted by the shadow of the organization. Thus, aid work - with its complex web of development agendas, flow of capital, donors, development organizations, countless employees, target groups and projects driving towards social change and justice - is a world rife with paradoxes and assumptions that need to be acknowledged and tackled for it to make a positive change.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Paradoxes in aid play – (Not so) *social interactions*

Maybe they thought you were just a local Indian girl...

During her stay in DRC, S encountered herself as a development worker but she was also granted a glimpse into the so-called expat⁹⁶ bubble encountering other expat development workers. This chapter will explore the under layers of the different interactions she had in aidland to unveil some of the paradoxes of the (not so) social life in the bubble.

4.1 Racism⁹⁷ and paradoxes of place

Even though she had lived in France and Netherlands before she had never 'experienced' racism before.⁹⁸ However in her social interactions with other expats she faced the painful experience of 'not being seen'.

"There was a big group of white people, a small group of black people and I was the only brown one. I was there my new Congolese friend who I had recently met. I tried to interact with a lot of people but it was not always a success. Many times people just looked through me. I was suddenly very aware of the color of my skin. Most white expats were very distant and some even avoided eye contact. This one time I introduced myself to someone (the director of a famous NGO) ' he looked at me with a ridiculous expression and said – look at my face, do you think I understand what you are saying?' and then he says indignantly, "you are from India?" I say 'yes', he smirks and leaves."

Upon further analysis it could be argued that in the circles that she would frequent, in France and the Netherlands were sites where 'being brown' was considered 'being exotic'. In these circles the color of her skin put her in a positive position. In these circles she was seen as educated, young, upper class and *brown* which when seen along with the other attributes, created her identity

⁹⁶ Even the word 'expat' is a racialised word, who is called an expat and who is an immigrant has much to do with the color of a person's skin. Elaborated further in the section.

⁹⁷ I consider ' Making someone feel invisible because of the color of their skin' as racism.

⁹⁸ 'Experienced' in quotes because she didn't see it, but it doesn't mean it didn't happen to her. Although experiencing something is a very subjective process and thus the word is used on purpose to highlight her subjective understanding of her encounters.

as 'exotic'. In Congo, although she was attending an expat party she was there with a local Congolese girl. Her attributes as educated, upper class, 'exotic' were pushed into the background and all that stood out was that she was brown, therefore 'local'. This narrative raises numerous questions – What are the assumptions made in this expat circle (and in this analysis) about the Congolese girl? Does being 'local' automatically translate into being 'not fit to talk to'? According to Roth (2015) race and ethnicity play an important role in the expat bubble. Through anecdotes in her book *Paradoxes of Aidwork: Passionate Professionals* (2015), she shows how the experience of Northern white expats being racist to non-western expatriates is quite common. For instance: A European woman of Asian descent (who was adopted by European parents) had a similar experience when working as a development practitioner in an Asian country. At an expat party, based on the color of her skin she was considered 'local' rather than 'international' and no one spoke to her until she was introduced as working for a UN agency. In yet another example, a woman of African origin, an expat in another African country stated that 'western expatriates kept their distance from non-western expatriates.' This shows that racism and discrimination based on skin color clearly exist in the expat bubble. Further, Roth argues that even the term 'expat' is a color specific term - "the term expatriate tends to be clearly reserved for white Northern aid workers." (Roth 2015) The distinction between expat and local has many inbuilt assumptions in it and even more so when the term expat is reserved for a certain race. The paradox is that, the development industry with its vision for social justice aims to fight against global inequalities (such as racism) but often fails to acknowledge that it often perpetuates these very inequalities itself. Roth observes that racism is a thorny subject in development because development is in fact a racial project – "despite or because development is a 'racial project' race is barely openly addressed' in development." (Roth 2015)

A few days later S met the same person who was rude to her (in the above mentioned narrative) at a social event, but this time she was with the director of the NGO she was working for⁹⁹ and he was very well behaved, polite and extremely interested in her research and work. All of a sudden S was now interesting to talk to, the fact that she was in the company of this white (influential) person, she now also assumed certain attributes (assumptions) that came with this Dutch woman (educated, upper class, employed for a famous organization in the Netherlands) just as earlier with the Congolese girl. Moreover, being the director of a well known organization himself, he now found himself in the company of a (equal) colleague from the field, thereby calling out to his 'work identity' that required him to behave in a business like manner

⁹⁹ This woman was white, same nationality as the man, high job position in an influential NGO

(although informal, owing to the setting.) At this particular intersectional crossing of (privileged) identities, his identity as white, male, with an influential job status interacting with a white, female, with a similar job status creates certain behavior that extends to S who despite not sharing these characteristics directly is benefitted from them.

However he was not the only one navigating identities, S was too. While she was vary of the attention from this person, she was (in some ways) glad to receive it¹⁰⁰ and she not only responded positively but also highlighted her position as being from the Netherlands while talking with person. *"I am originally from India, but I have been living/working/studying/married (to a Dutchman) in the Netherlands for a few years now."* In highlighting her identity as someone coming from the Netherlands she shows a sense of commonality with the man, almost to say, " I am just like you". Even though in an analysis of gender, race, age, class and job position, she and he are very different. Through this narrative we see that different identities come to the surface in different social locations, but it is a question of identification rather than identity. As Sara Ahmed argues in her autobiographical essay on identity (1997), the subject does not have a fixed identity in terms of a demarcated place of belonging rather there are structures of identification, both psychic and social "whereby identities come to be seen as such places of belonging". (Ahmed, 1997)

Although in the aforementioned instance S chose to disassociate with her identity as 'being from India' she would use this in her interactions with Congolese friends as well in her interviews during the research process. *"I sensed a bond of solidarity and understanding amongst the Congolese people and me. Indeed, people seemed to trust me faster and tell me things that they would not tell other development workers. Ranging from ordinary things like inviting me to stay at their house to treating me like 'one of us'. For example: While interviewing the Minister for Gender and family in Bukavu she said, on the topic of NGO workers: "Family is very important to us, you understand. It's not like that with them, so they don't get it." I also felt at home with my Congolese colleagues. We often spoke at length about the parallels between my country and theirs. Often referring to other development workers as "ils" / "they". Even though I was an outsider, I was never called a "muzungu" (foreigner), in a way making me less of an outsider than many others."* She belonged to different places at different times with different people. Constantly negotiating the categories of race and gender with relation to power perceived. (Ahmed, 1997)

Her fluid racial identities also granted S access different groups in the organizational setting, often navigating across hierarchies of race that exist in an international NGO.¹⁰¹ For instance on her first day in the Oxfam Goma office she

¹⁰⁰ This man held an important position in a big NGO, which could be a potential future work option for S.

¹⁰¹ Roth 2015

was invited to the 'office lunch ritual'¹⁰² by a local staff member. However, this ritual seemed limited to local staff. During the two weeks in this office, S went there for lunch almost every day but only once there were 2 non-local staff members who sat there with the rest and ate. One European woman would often buy her lunch here but eat it at her desk, while most others seemed to go to a local French bakery to get a sandwich. One of her friend's, an expat who had been working in this office for three years didn't even know about the ritual. S' racial identity may have been responsible for granting her this access, but the fact that she was new and there only temporarily may have also played a part in this situation. Nevertheless this narrative also brings out that, racial hierarchies are also fluid and not always in favor of the dominant group. As Avtar Brah(2004) argues, "Members of dominant groups do occupy 'privileged' positions within political and material practices that attend these social divisions although the precise interplay of this power in specific institutions or in interpersonal relations cannot be stipulated in advance, may be contradictory, and can be challenged." (Brah 2004 as cited in de Jong 2009) Although the lunch ritual happened in public, one had to be invited to join. In addition to that, the conversations, discussions, jokes during lunch took place in Swahili instead of French. S would often find herself having a conversation with the individual sitting beside her rather than being part of the group camaraderie. Once in while, a she would try to learn some Swahili words, much to the amusement of the group. And the two times that other expats joined the group for lunch, it seemed to dampen the usual jovial atmosphere in the group. The reason why S was more easily accepted in this setting was also probably because she was an intern and not an 'important expat' unlike most other expats in the organization who held higher positions. In the few cases where the expat and the local held the same position, just by 'virtue of being an expat' the expat was paid way more than the local for the same job. Such ambivalences are bound to cause animosity amongst national and expat staff. A study conducted by Car et al. on 'the effects of salary discrepancies between international and national aid workers'¹⁰³ found that wage differences were 'detrimental to the aid process' because low wages (in comparison to expats) 'caused resentment and lack of motivation among local staff, who felt that their work was not adequately rewarded.'(Car et al. 2010 as cited in Fetcher 2012) Even though there are income differences even within international aid workers¹⁰⁴, most aid works have lifestyles that are preposterously different from that of their beneficiaries. This is often an issue that most development workers that S interacted with were very aware (sometimes guilty) of.

¹⁰² The lunch ritual consisted of staff contributing a minimal amount for lunch and a cook preparing hot lunch in the backyard. During lunchtime, the staff would gather for lunch, which was served in the garden.

¹⁰³ Car et al. as cited in Fetcher 2012

¹⁰⁴ Fetcher 2012

4.2 Moving with the better classes, while thinking about the masses¹⁰⁵

A young expat couple admitted that they would definitely not be able to afford their current lifestyle back in their country of origin (at this age). While another local friend jokingly remarked that “expat pets eat better than many local humans.” In Eyben’s recent book about her life as a development worker she shares an excerpt from a letter from her sister in which her sister is lamenting about this issue as well, “One is not a real person here. All the little people who were nobody at home are *bwana mkubwas*¹⁰⁶ here and they have done absolutely nothing to deserve it... There is very little difference in behavior between the old type of colonialists and the present bunch of expatriates here. The big difference is that they were honest and we are not...” (Eyben, 2014) The critique that ‘aid workers seem to be doing well out of poverty’¹⁰⁷ has been a popular refrain of many who beckon the end of aid, but this critique has around since the beginning of ‘aid business’(Fetcher 2012). In his 1967 article in Transition Magazine, titled ‘Tarzan is an expatriate’ Paul Theroux thoroughly critiques the exuberant lifestyle of the expatriate aid worker, two decades later in a scathing poem called *The Development set* Coggins(1988) points out to the contradiction between the aid workers ways of living and doing.

*“The Development Set is bright and noble
Our thoughts are deep and our vision global;
Although we move with the better classes
Our thoughts are always with the masses.”¹⁰⁸*

And while it is evident from the above testimonies and to anyone who has worked in development that there is a difference between the ways in which expat development workers ‘work¹⁰⁹’ and live, this is often a source of much public critique but also of guilt and unease that ‘underpins (much of) development practice and experience’.(Fetcher 2012) The principle reason for this discomfort lies in the notion of development work as an altruistic or noble profession with the (often false) assumption that people get involved in aid work because they are passionate about helping others.¹¹⁰ Fetcher argues that ‘neither altruism and/or self-serving career ambitions’ exclusively motivate aid workers to join the industry. Rather it is often a mix between ‘professional and personal interests’ that lead individuals to choose a career in development and these interests often change over time. (2012)

¹⁰⁵ Inspired by a line in the poem by Coggins(1988) called ‘The Development Set’.

¹⁰⁶ Means ‘Big chief’ in Swahili.

¹⁰⁷ Kanbur 2011 as cited in Fetcher 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Coggins 1988

¹⁰⁹ Here work is used a word that encompasses the kind of work they do – for example poverty reduction.

¹¹⁰ Fetcher (2012), De Jong (2011)

4.3 Conclusion

Thus, this chapter demonstrates that aid workers (particularly expat aid workers) live in a world of contrasts. While development aims to fight inequalities and bring about social justice and change, it often fails to recognize inequalities within itself. Racism, unequal professional hierarchies, discrepancies in salaries, and lavish lifestyles (with public money) are all realities in aid land. These realities are often paradoxical to the notion of 'doing good' that development workers and development work is often associated with. (Fetcher 2012) Much of this contradiction arises from the assumption of aid work as altruism, when altruism often informs only a small part of development practice. While the scope of this research does not allow for delving into development as altruism or selfishness, it serves only to point out the many paradoxes that exist in aid land with the purpose of encouraging critical and reflexive practice¹¹¹. These contradictions when unacknowledged, often not only continue to perpetuate inequalities but also aggravate them. Those who work in development often have to face the fact that "development institutions sustain more inequitable power relations than it succeeds in changing." (Eyben, 2014) However, reflexive awareness amongst development workers as a political practice has the power to affect development practice as a whole.¹¹² Thus in acknowledging the paradoxes of the everyday in aidland, aid workers can change the way development practice operates.

¹¹¹ This is not a naïve suggestion of encouraging people to 'think about their behavior' but rather a political statement about 'management of contradictions' as Eyben states – "reflexivity's destabilizing effects creates an awareness of the political choices to be made in practice." (Eyben, 2014)

¹¹² Eyben, 2014

Chapter 5

The bubble reconsidered - Conclusion

This research paper has been a journey, one that was part of a bigger journey that began with my initiation into the world of Development. While on one hand it gave me an opportunity to delve deeper into sources of my discomfort with the world of development, on the other hand it raised a whole new range of questions to be explored. Through (the eyes and emotions of) my alibi 'S' I was granted a glimpse into the complex world of development practice where processes are more important than places and categories, more important than relations.¹¹³ In the course of this paper I critically scrutinized S' narratives and experiences to unveil the assumptions and paradoxes that plague the everyday reality of aidland. The purpose of this disclosure was not to criticize development and development workers but to discover the underpinnings of the everyday interactions in development practice in order to tackle the inequalities that development (or development workers) often (unintentionally) perpetuate.

The world of development is rife with paradoxes and assumptions when left unquestioned they multiply and trickle down to the core of development practice often generating new contradictions on its way. Insofar as we live in a 'state of denial'¹¹⁴ we may never find a way to deal with the contradictions. As Eyben points out " A state of denial is a matter of hypocrisy; it is more serious because much harder to deal with. Not owning up to what we know- is a major obstacle to justice." (Eyben, 2014) Thus, owning up to the 'contradictions and complicities'¹¹⁵ is the only way to tackle them. So what are these assumptions and what are the different levels of absurdities that this research points out to?

The first level of absurdity is the grand project of development in itself. International aid and development were born out of the Empire, in choosing to ignore this fact development creates its first and biggest paradox - that it is an altruistic venture.¹¹⁶ " International aid, child of last days of Empire, was brought up by parents who chose not to recognize their child's origins and ignored that, after four hundred years of European expansion into the rest of the world they the parents were in decline. Amnesia is the enemy of reflexivity." (Eyben 2014) In remembering and acknowledging the roots of international aid,

¹¹³ Mosse 2011

¹¹⁴ Eyben 2014

¹¹⁵ This statement also recognizes that the process of acknowledging one's contradictions and complicities may never be complete and thus always ongoing, because even the act 'of acknowledging a contradiction or complicity' creates yet another one.

¹¹⁶ Fetcher 2012

development practice must become conscious of the power inequalities that sustain it and use this complicit position in a constructive manner¹¹⁷ that does not disguise 'development as a gift' (Fetcher 2012), but rather as a political, economic and social mission.

The second level (which is embedded within the first) is that of development organizations¹¹⁸, in acknowledging the roots of development practice, it is evident that development organizations "constitute a field of power which is shaped by and continues to shape North-South relationships which reflect and result in global inequality". (Roth 2015) Further, as shown in this research, professional hierarchies (expatriate vs. national), discrepancies in salaries, and difference in head office vs. country office results in a power struggle even within organizations.

The third level where paradoxes unfold is at the level of programs/projects implemented in aidland. These projects are often rampant with assumptions about the needs of a community and devoid of the contexts where they are implemented. "The work of (development) professionals of all kind is precisely to establish (against experience) the notion that social and technical change can be and is brought about by generalizable policy ideas, and that 'global knowledge' produced by international organizations occupies a transcendent realm 'standing above' particular contexts (cf. Mitchell 2002), and a globalized 'present' that compress historical time. Such notions of scale and temporality are also constitutive of identities in development." (Mosse 2011) This is evident in the Oxfam research project carried out by S.

The fourth level of contradictions arises at level of the beneficiaries themselves. As demonstrated in the aforementioned research project a number of paradoxes were unveiled in analyzing the findings of the Oxfam research. Many of these revealed everyday ambivalences among the beneficiaries of the projects. While most of the men who had participated in the WECAN campaign expressed the intention to treat women with respect, their views on gender equality and women's positions in the society were quite inconsistent. Further the changing contexts (in DRC) intersecting with class, gender, age and other factors create very specific and often contradictory experiences of equality and change, amongst the target audience of the project. Further in problematizing the binary between the beneficiaries of aid and the deliverers of aid Apthorpe (2011) questions "who are the beneficiaries of aid?" When aid benefits aid workers almost more than it benefits its targeted 'beneficiaries' shouldn't aid workers

¹¹⁷ Spivak 1999 as cited in De Jong 2009

¹¹⁸ Taking into account that there are hierarchies embedded even within this world and that 'development organizations' are not a homogenous category.

also be considered beneficiaries of aid? This takes us to the next level of absurdity in aidland namely the development workers.

The (expatriate) aid worker lives in a world of contrasts. “Theirs is the messy, practical, emotion-laden work of dealing with contingency, compromise, improvisation, rule-bending, adjustment, producing viable data, making things work and meeting delivery targets and spending budgets. In doing so, they have to negotiate national identity, race, age or (and) gender. They have to manage personal security, family relations, loneliness, stress and anxiety while shoring up their motivation within moral-ethical or religious frameworks.¹¹⁹” (Mosse 2011) This world is further complicated by an underlying assumption of aid work as an altruistic profession, racism, hypocrisy and guilt, which require a constant negotiation, and renegotiation of identities and identifications¹²⁰ in an effort to belong.

These absurdities illustrate that; the world of development practice is messy, chaotic and complex. In many ways aidland is a bubble that is detached from the world around it, a virtual reality with its own complexities¹²¹ but in other ways it is not a bubble, because ‘processes within the global North and the global South (remain) are inextricably intertwined’ even within the bubble and it is not free from the ‘multiple forms of privilege and disadvantage’ that ‘reproduce global inequalities within itself’. (Roth 2015) S’ multiple interactions within aid work and aid play present a picture of aidland that is very much embedded within these global inequalities of race, gender, ethnicity, age and space (embodied and temporal). A reflexive and critical questioning of S’ positionality revealed the under layers of her own assumptions as well as those inherent in her surroundings. This questioning created S as a victim and as a perpetrator (and multiple roles in between), exposing her marginality as well as her complicity. It was through this reflexive practice that I(S) produced this research paper, a case of reflexive practice, so as to build my future practice upon these (often) paradoxical understandings of marginality and complicity. This was also an attempt to encourage the reader and other development workers to become critically reflexive of their own positions and thereby build upon these constructively, to bring positive change. Because the power we have (assumed or real) can either be used blindly to perpetuate the same inequalities that created it, or we may use our power to ‘challenge’ (these inequalities), ‘question’ (our motives and positionalities) and ‘create’ (new ways of doing development).’¹²²

¹¹⁹ S wonders if this is any different from anyone else working in any other field anywhere in the world.

¹²⁰ Ahmed 1997

¹²¹ Apthorpe 2005

¹²² ‘the power to challenge, question and create’ (Eyben 2014)

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Appendices:

- **Interview Questions:**

For young men – Youth group.

1. Selon vous qu'est- ce que la femme represent pour la societe Congolaise?
2. Quels sont les roles typique aux femmes et quells sont les roles typique aux hommes, et est-ce que ca peut changer?
3. Aider vous votre femme/soeur/ mere dans le ménage? Si oui, pourquoi et sinon pourquoi?
4. Selon vous qu'est- ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vrai femme'.
5. Que pensez- vous des femmes qui ont etudie et les femmes qui travaillent?
6. Selon vous qu'est qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
7. Si vous devrez choisir, quell est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
8. Quel est la situation actuelle en ce qui concernent egalite homme/femme dans votre pays?
9. Quels sont les urgencies actuelles dans votre vie?
10. Decrivez en bref la contexte de votre societe, selon vous.

For young women – Youth group – same as above +

11. Que signifie les mot 'empowerment'/ emancipation/ autonomisation pour vous?

For journalists + Ministre:

1. Selon vous qu'est- ce que la femme represent pour la societe Congolaise?
2. Quels sont les aspects de votre vie que vous aimeriez rendre plus autonome?
3. Selon vous qu'est- ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vrai femme'.
4. Que'est- ce que le mot 'empowerment' signifie pour vous?
5. Selon vous qu'est qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
6. Si vous devrez choisir, quelle est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
7. Que pensez vous des projets pour engager des hommes pour egalite?
8. Quel est la situation actuelle en ce qui concernent egalite homme/femme dans votre pays?
9. Quels sont les urgencies actuelles dans votre vie/ votre societe?

- **Focus group discussion questions.**

Group: Men who have not engaged.

12. Selon vous qu'est- ce que la femme represent pour la societe Congolaise?

13. Quels sont les rôles typiques aux femmes et quels sont les rôles typiques aux hommes, et est-ce que ça peut changer?
14. Aidez-vous votre femme dans le ménage? Si oui, pourquoi et sinon pourquoi?
15. Selon vous, qu'est-ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vraie femme'.
16. Que pensez-vous des femmes qui ont étudié et les femmes qui travaillent?
17. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
18. Si vous devriez choisir, quelle est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
19. Vos filles, vont-elles à l'école?
20. Quels sont vos rêves et ambitions pour vos filles?
10. Dans quelles circonstances vous vous engagez dans une campagne pour améliorer la vie des femmes?

Group: Men who have engaged

1. Quel était la motivation pour vous de vous engager dans la campagne nous pouvons et quels sont les changements principaux grâce à cette campagne dans votre vie?
2. Selon vous, qu'est-ce que la femme représente pour la société congolaise?
3. Quels sont les rôles typiques aux femmes et quels sont les rôles typiques aux hommes, et est-ce que ça peut changer?
4. Aidez-vous votre femme dans le ménage? Si oui, pourquoi et sinon pourquoi?
5. Selon vous, qu'est-ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vraie femme'.
6. Que pensez-vous des femmes qui ont étudié et les femmes qui travaillent?
7. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
8. Si vous devriez choisir, quelle est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
9. Vos filles, vont-elles à l'école?
10. Quels sont vos rêves et ambitions pour vos filles?

Group: Women who have not engaged.

1. Selon vous, qu'est-ce que la femme représente pour la société congolaise?
2. Quels sont les rôles typiques aux femmes et quels sont les rôles typiques aux hommes, et est-ce que ça peut changer?
3. Quels sont les aspects de votre vie que vous aimeriez rendre plus autonome?
4. Selon vous, qu'est-ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vraie femme'.
5. Que signifie le mot 'empowerment' pour vous?
6. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
7. Si vous devriez choisir, quelle est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
8. Vos filles, vont-elles à l'école?
9. Quels sont vos rêves et ambitions pour vos filles?

10. Dans quels circonstances vous vous engagerez dans une campagne pour améliorer la vie des femmes?

Group: Women who have engaged.

1. Quel était la motivation pour vous de vous engager dans la campagne nous pouvons et quels sont les changements principaux grâce à cette campagne dans votre vie?
10. Selon vous qu'est-ce que la femme représente pour la société congolaise?
11. Quels sont les rôles typiques aux femmes et quels sont les rôles typiques aux hommes, et est-ce que ça peut changer?
12. Quels sont les aspects de votre vie que vous aimeriez rendre plus autonome?
13. Selon vous qu'est-ce que c'est 'un vrai homme' et 'une vraie femme'.
14. Qu'est-ce que le mot 'empowerment' signifie pour vous?
15. Selon vous qu'est-ce qu'il faut changer dans les attitudes/comportement des hommes/femmes aujourd'hui?
16. Si vous devriez choisir, quelle est la seule chose qui ne doit jamais changer entre les hommes et les femmes?
17. Vos filles, vont-elles à l'école?
18. Quels sont vos rêves et ambitions pour vos filles?
