The Vulnerable Humanitarian: Discourses of Stress and Meaning-Making Among Aid Workers in Kenya

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: …………………………………………………

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SUMMARY

This thesis makes an important contribution to current debates concerning power and agency in the aid sector, and increasing concerns about the security and wellbeing of staff, by investigating how aid systems, policies and structures influence the behaviour of aid workers and how they respond to stress. Drawing on findings from one year of ethnographic research in Nairobi and Turkana in Kenya, and departing from the majority of development studies literature, it explores the motivations, beliefs and lived realities of national and African staff, comparing these with the dominant narratives of white, western aid workers travelling from a situation of privilege to a situation of poverty.

The thesis investigates the different contexts of aid work in Kenya – from the emergency environment of Kakuma refugee camp to the regional head offices in Nairobi - and considers the ways in which the challenges and emotional upheavals of my informants are determined by the particularities of the sector; including its organisational culture, its moral and humanitarian agenda and its securitised spaces and structures. Through my ethnographic material, I demonstrate the importance of cross-cutting dimensions of identity and positionality, such as nationality, race, gender and religion; all of which have implications for how aid workers approach their jobs and how they are treated in the workplace. I highlight the false universals that are applied to the sector regarding stress, and the motivations and values associated with aid work, and offer alternative conceptualisations of emotional experiences and meaning-making among aid workers. The thesis questions the specific organisational structures and practices that shape and at times restrict the private lives of staff, and proposes diverse methodologies that deconstruct, and reimagine, aid work and staff wellbeing.

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For the completion of this thesis I am indebted to the many individuals who gave me their time over the course of my field research in Kenya. I am particularly grateful to those who not only agreed to an interview, but played a crucial role in the advancement of my research by putting me in touch with others, or by hosting me; special thanks in this regard to those who hosted me in Turkana, and who helped to organise the stress management workshop in Nairobi. Others have continued to support my research and offer me advice since I left Kenya, and lasting friendships have also been established. I will always remember this with great warmth and appreciation.

Although I was unable to include every informant's story in the pages that follow, they have all contributed in some way to the richness of what is contained within this thesis. It is my sincere wish that what I present here will have use and meaning to the aid workers I met in Kenya, and the broader sector.

Heartfelt thanks also go to my supervisors Elizabeth Harrison and Anne-Meike Fechter. They have provided consistent and engaged support over the last four years. I appreciate their dedication to my research topic, their encouragement and their understanding during some of the more difficult periods of my doctorate.

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And finally thank you to my mother Judith Houldey. You left this earth before we could celebrate the completion of this thesis, but your joy, love and friendship remain in my heart forever.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALNAP – Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action

CAR – Central African Republic

CISP - Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppor dei Popoli (Italian Committee for Solidarity between People)

DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo

DFID – the UK Government Department for International Development

FBO – Faith-based organisation

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

(I)NGO – (International) Non-governmental organisation

MSF – Médicins Sans Frontières

ODI HPG – Overseas Development Institute Humanitarian Policy Group

R and R – Rest and Recuperation

PTSD – Post-traumatic stress disorder

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

US – United States

WFP – World Food Programme

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Suddenly I'm bombarded with unfamiliar and distressing images and stories without any time to process them, or try to make any sense of them. No sooner have we left one horrific incident behind, we are faced with another, whilst at the same time struggling to find our purpose; to somehow justify our presence as human rights defenders, although there is nothing tangible we can offer to ease the grief that is felt by the victims we meet.

Had I forgotten that this is what it is like to do this kind of work? No; I am simply more conscious of how challenging it is. How NGO workers push themselves beyond their limits in the hope of finding some way of addressing these cruel injustices they're witness to. They push and they push – storing up all those upsetting and distressing images, unable to show any emotional reaction lest this offends the victims or betrays a vulnerability or weakness that may question their capacity to do this work.

[Diary entry, 12 May 2013]

The passage above is a diary entry from when I was working for an international human rights NGO in Kenya. The first paragraph depicts a scene that many aid workers[1] are confronted with: human suffering on a massive scale, where the possibilities of making a meaningful difference can seem remote. In this instance, I was documenting a forced eviction in a slum in Nairobi, where armed men had arrived to dismantle the small, fragile, corrugated iron structures where inhabitants had lived for many years. Every person I spoke to was in a state of fear and despair, having had their homes and some of their possessions destroyed, and not knowing where they would go next. I was led by a group of Kenyan activists to an elderly woman sitting in her shelter. It was one of the few shelters that hadn't been dismantled by bulldozers and the men who had been hired to carry out the evictions. She sat in the small space with her few belongings scattered around her, unable to move and clearly in a state of shock. I sat with her and wrote down what she had to say, whilst one of my Kenyan colleagues – another slum dweller volunteering with my NGO – translated for me from Swahili to English. The woman told us about how much

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[1] I will be using this term broadly, to include any individual working for an international humanitarian, development or human rights organisation. I will present the rationale for this broad interpretation in the methodology chapter.

physical pain she was in, and that she didn't know where to go. She also asked if I could get her something to drink. A strict protocol at the NGO I was working for was that we never buy any food or drink for informants, unless we are sitting together to have a meal. This was to avoid accusations of bribery, where information may be given out of expectation of material gain. It was an extremely hard protocol to stick to when faced with this sort of suffering. In the panic of the eviction taking place around me, and without knowing where to go and find something to drink for the woman, I left her there waiting, she said, for the police who were going to assist her in leaving her shelter.

Having worked in humanitarian and human rights NGOs for over 15 years, mainly in East Africa and Palestine, this sort of scene – and the feelings it provokes – is familiar to me. Although the main work of human rights NGOs is often documenting what they witness, and using the material to lobby governmental bodies and other relevant stakeholders – rather than directly assisting communities - the problems I discuss in the diary entry are fairly common in other NGO settings. In Uganda, Palestine and other places I worked as well as Kenya, there were organisational rules and protocols I was expected to follow as part of the humanitarian endeavour, as well as specific project goals and objectives from which I was not to deviate. This immediately implied a certain relationship between me and the people I was helping: I was the aid giver, they were the 'victim' or 'aid beneficiary,' and the relationship rarely went further than that. Even sharing a meal together or buying someone a drink may be seen as overstepping these clear boundaries.

In addition, there were often these awkward, unsettling moments where it was clear that what my organisation had to offer – whether this was global awareness raising or material assistance such as food and shelter – would do little to help the person in front of me, whose life had been torn apart by war or extreme poverty. So whilst I listened to many horrifying stories of displacement, violence, torture or solitary confinement I was often acutely aware that in spite of my own anger and sorrow at such injustices, what I could do to improve the lives of the individuals, families or communities affected was considerably limited. As I indicate in the second paragraph of the diary entry, in a working environment that is so focused on bringing positive changes to the lives of those seemingly far worse off than ourselves, our emotional responses to these realities fade into the background.

The silencing of the personal in aid work is a theme that is central to this thesis. Inspired by the experiences I have illustrated in the opening paragraphs, I set out at the beginning of my doctoral research to understand how an aid worker's hopes, desires, doubts and disappointments can affect their approach to the jobs they do, their career choices and ultimately their decision whether to stay in or leave the sector. When I wrote the diary entry I had already been through many instances where I doubted whether to continue a career as an aid worker; on two separate occasions culminating in exhaustion and disillusionment, and a break of more than a year from the sector. It was during the second break that I really began to question why such feelings had been given so little attention.

Studies suggest that trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are fairly common in the aid sector (Connorton et al., 2012), and can arise as a result of being directly involved in a security incident (Eriksson et al., 2001; Musa and Hamid, 2008) or by sitting at one's desk reading accounts of human rights abuses (Dubberley et al., 2015). Burnout is also believed to be an increasing problem (Ager et al., 2012; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012), and is attributed as much to the pressures of the office environment and poor management (Pigni, 2016; Wigley, 2005) as it is to the more obvious difficulties that come with emergency deployments and regular exposure to extreme poverty and suffering. The media has picked up on this issue, with a survey by the Guardian newspaper's Global Development Professionals Network claiming that nearly 80 per cent of aid workers have suffered from mental illness (Young, 2015).[2] Yet my own experiences in the sector, and discussions with friends and colleagues, indicated to me that there was very little recognition at institutional level of the existence of these conditions. In my post-deployment briefing sessions with managers there was rarely a mention of my personal mental health or wellbeing; the discussion was focused on what I had achieved and what else needed to be done. As I indicate in the diary entry, the organisational environment was not one in which I felt comfortable discussing my own vulnerabilities.

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[2] The majority of respondents for this survey were female international aid workers, raising the question of what degree these findings can apply to the entire sector; a problem I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.

At the same time, I was aware that the discussions that did take place around staff wellbeing were largely among my European colleagues. The problems we shared with each other were often associated with our positionality; we would talk about the difficulties of travelling to and working in unstable, unfamiliar environments in developing countries, far from friends and family, or our troubles in reintegrating back to 'normal life' in Europe when our deployments were completed. My position as an international aid worker ultimately had its benefits as well as its disadvantages. In my case, I am from a middle-class background that has given me the privilege to study in an elite university, and to travel abroad to explore new places and 'find myself'. I have been able to return to this middle-class lifestyle as a source of security for me when I could no longer cope with the work I was doing in East Africa or Palestine. Living and working in a disaster area or a situation of abject poverty is likely to be difficult for anyone; however, only some have the option to leave.

My national colleagues, from the countries where the organisations' programmes were implemented, were often closely tied to the people receiving our assistance. They tended to stay employed within the same organisation for many years, whilst it was common for me, and many of my European colleagues, to leave after a couple of years. Our living arrangements and lifestyles were also different. For example in Nairobi, where I lived in 2005/6, my apartment – paid for by my employers – was situated a short drive away from my office in a wealthy suburb that was popular with the expatriate community. With my rent paid for, and with no family responsibilities, I could easily afford weekends away at the Kenyan coast or a similar tourist attraction. My salary allowed me to save up sufficient money so that when I left East Africa, I could go travelling and take a break from the sector. My Kenyan colleagues, on the other hand, were often on lower salaries, did not receive extra benefits such as having their accommodation costs covered, and were usually supporting dependents. These factors were likely to affect the options they had available to them, in terms of changing jobs, or taking any other action in the interests of either career progression or wellbeing. In contrast, my capacity to move on and to make choices about my health and about my career, was partly due to my status – as a European who could easily cross borders, who had no marital ties or children affecting my decisions, and had sufficient disposable income to seek support or set up home elsewhere if needed.

These nuances are only recently being given the attention they deserve within the aid sector, with increased efforts to standardise pay structures and localise the work force in countries where aid organisations operate ("AGENDA FOR HUMANITY," n.d.; McWha-Hermann et al., 2017). These efforts come on the back of a legacy of aid discourse and practice being formulated and controlled by social actors from the northern hemisphere; primarily Europe and the United States.[3] As postcolonial theorists argue (Baaz, 2005; Escobar, 2012), aid workers may be viewed, much like the colonisers and missionaries that came before them, as "white saviours", celebrated for their civilising mission; a mission which largely ignores the subjectivities and agency of local people, usually referred to only as 'aid beneficiaries.' This reading may be extended to national aid workers; they comprise an estimated 90 per cent of the sector's workforce (Egeland et al., 2011), yet in the publicity materials of aid NGOs it is often the white aid worker from the global north who is seen taking centre stage in helping the seemingly powerless victim (Malkki, 2015). This begs the question: Does a European's desire to help populations in far off, unfamiliar lands have different consequences for them than those who are born into those lands or are from the same part of the world?

The traditional imagery, lexicons and discourses associated with aid work are at the heart of the problems of stress within the sector. They lead to certain expectations about how aid work should be done, in ways which are written into aid policies and structures. They also result in particular forms of emotional embodiment and behaviour. It is these discourses and practices which I problematise and interrogate in this thesis. Acknowledging that "the personal" is an essential part of understanding "the professional" in aid work (Fechter, 2012a), my thesis will investigate how the working conditions and organisational cultures that are particular to this sector, and a person's positioning in the workplace and in wider society, affect the ways in which stress is understood, talked about and managed. My research site, Kenya – more specifically, the capital city Nairobi and its poorest county, Turkana – may be viewed as Aidland[4] in microcosm. The country is a

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[3] There have been changes to this dominance in recent years, with other emerging economies such as China and India wielding influence and an increasing number of south-south aid initiatives, for instance between Brazil and Mozambique.

[4] Aidland is a popular term in academic studies (Hindman and Fechter, 2010; Mosse, 2011), coined by Raymond Apthorpe in a bid to highlight the complexity of the sector's aid practice, location and personnel, with "its own mental topographies, languages of discourse, lore and custom, and approaches to organizational knowledge and learning." (Apthorpe, 2011a: 199)

magnet for a variety of aid interventions, and for NGOs wishing to establish regional head offices in Africa. Whilst Nairobi is where much of the decision-making power of aid agencies is situated, Turkana is one of Kenya's most aid dependent counties, owing to its remoteness, its levels of poverty and the fact it hosts one of Kenya's two main refugee camps: Kakuma. The thesis thus presents stories from Kenyan and international aid workers[5] in Nairobi, Kakuma and Turkana's county capital, Lodwar. My methods for collecting these stories were largely ethnographic; involving interviews, conversations and observations in an array of different settings including NGO offices, their project sites – particularly in and around Kakuma refugee camp – and social spaces such as cafés and restaurants. I will discuss the research site in more detail in the methodology chapter.

In recognition of the complicating factors concerning stress in the aid sector, which I have outlined above, my original research question was:

How does positionality shape the way aid workers understand and manage stress?

This research question sought to highlight two key points. First, that personalities and emotions – and the way these are performed and articulated - matter if we are to gain meaningful insight into why aid workers behave the way they do. And secondly, that the work-related difficulties experienced by aid workers may have a lot to do with their social and professional positioning – within their society and within their workplace.

I found positionality a helpful analytical lens because it recognises that identities cannot and should not be homogenised and to do so ignores the varied social and environmental contexts in which they are constructed (Alcoff, 1988).

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[5] Throughout this thesis I will for most of the time be using the term "international" rather than "expatriate" aid worker. The latter term falls foul of reinforcing certain hierarchies of knowledge, power and agency in the aid sector which I discuss throughout this thesis; it is a term largely used to describe people travelling from high to low income countries, and whose status commands certain treatment and benefits which are not afforded to those travelling in reverse (from low to high income countries), who are largely described as "immigrants." The implications of being given, or being denied, the "expatriate" status is discussed in some development literature (Kothari, 2006a; MacLachlan et al., 2013) and by African writers (Koutonin, 2015)

What emerged through my data, however, was less about specific identities and how they influence emotional experiences, and more about how the behaviour of different aid workers is determined by structural restraints and inequalities. These structural factors also influence the degree to which problems are articulated as 'stressful' and how the concept of 'stress' is understood; and, conversely, what challenges are silenced or given little attention in the aid environment. In this respect, the thesis became more about discourses of stress, and how these are socially and culturally constructed, and contested. Departing from the research question's suggestion of a causal analysis of identities and stress, the central argument I propose is that the way aid workers discuss their experiences in the sector is often framed by their positioning within their society, in the workplace, and in global hierarchies of privilege and power. To understand this argument more deeply requires further probing into structures and cultures that shape the experiences of this particular group of professionals, and this analysis can be found in the pages and chapters which follow.

I will be drawing on postcolonial and feminist literature (Baaz, 2005; Heron, 2007; Mohanty, 1984; Wilson, 2012) to argue that the experiences of aid workers, and how they perceive those experiences, are influenced by social and political systems and structures both internal and external to the sector. By taking this approach, I am also problematising two common tendencies in some of the institutional and policy papers concerning staff mental health (McKay, 2007; Porter and Emmens, 2009; Suzic et al., 2016). Firstly, the experiences of international humanitarian workers travelling from the global north to emergency settings are often foregrounded and used to universalise concepts related to stress in the sector such as 'burnout', 'PTSD' and 'resilience.'[6] Secondly, this literature suffers from an absence of adequate analysis of cross-cutting themes such as nationality,

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[6] People in Aid and Interhealth's *Approaches to Staff Care in International NGOs*, for instance, focuses primarily on likely psychological factors affecting staff pre- and post-deployment and when they return home and experience 'culture shock' (Porter and Emmens, 2009). The Headington Institute's online resources for aid workers ("Headington Institute | Online Training," n.d.) also focus on the stress associated with being in unfamiliar environments, including 'social and cultural dislocation', and the risks of traumatic stress to those travelling from the 'developed world' to the field. See, for instance, *Understanding and coping with traumatic stress: Online Training Module* (McKay, 2007).

gender, age and marital status, which affect the positioning of staff and how they experience their work; instead often dealing with these factors in isolation.[7]

My research also considers the relationship between the material environment and human agency. In this respect my findings are framed by literature that focuses particularly on the 'aid industrial complex' (Duffield, 2012; Smirl, 2015; Fechter 2017) and its mutually constitutive relationship with the people working there (Smirl, 2015: 86). It is a framing inspired by Bourdieu, as Smirl demonstrates in her reading of the concept *habitus:*

> The most important element to note is that it questions the privileging of human agency over material form. The place(s) surrounding the individual need to be considered for how they structure the thoughts, actions, dispositions and preferences of individuals and, in turn, attention needs to be given to how surroundings can be changed through individual action.
>
> (Smirl, 2015: 85, citing Bourdieu 1984)

The term 'aid industrial complex' in fact has a wider usage which is relevant for this thesis (Cole, 2012; Fechter, 2017); it can be viewed as referring to "the established aid system comprising large international NGOs, multi- and bilateral aid agencies and donors and the particular work practices and experiences that they engender," and which entail specific hierarchies, bureaucracies and professionalisation (Fechter, 2017: 271). This terminology is helpful in bracketing some of the features that are common to the sector, regardless of an individual organisation's identity and focus; features including policies, customs, lexicons, social and professional relations and also infrastructure – the spaces and structures that are often exclusive to aid professionals. The term 'aid industrial complex' has been useful for me in distinguishing international aid agency staff – the focus of this thesis – from other groups whose activities also support vulnerable or impoverished populations but whose movements, spaces and infrastructure are less professionalised and exclusive, such as women's movements. The qualities of the 'aid industrial complex'

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[7] In its report, *Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health at UNHCR* (Suzic et al., 2016), findings are disaggregated according to specific socio-demographic variables such as gender, international/national status and type of contract. However, these are largely treated separately, and without further disaggregation within categories such as international/national to clarify country or region of origin.

are given particular attention in Chapter 4, where I evaluate the working conditions of the humanitarian compound that is common to multiple emergency interventions around the world.

There is also an assumption that is made about emic descriptions of a workforce, particularly the 'aid sector', and that is associated with the motivations that drive staff. In the case of aid professionals, these are assumed to be the desire to help populations affected by war, poverty or natural disasters without the expectation of huge material gain for doing so. Such motivations are derived from humanitarian principles that are the very foundation of aid operations. Nevertheless, the pursuit of common terminology that seeks to bracket aid workers in this way is problematic; it runs the risk of pidgeon-holing people and overlooking that there is in fact huge diversity in the sector, with many different personalities, beliefs and motivations. In this thesis I recognise the common terms and assumptions and how they are applied – by aid professionals and by the wider public – but I also problematise them. This is particularly relevant when I consider the racialised and gendered public persona of the aid worker and their assumed qualities of heroism and altruism in Chapter 5.

The remainder of this introduction will investigate the following themes, drawing on literature that will be expanded upon in the findings: I will first assess some of the common tropes associated with aid work, the problems these tropes present, and the implications this has for understanding the personal elements of aid practice. I will argue that a narrow reading of who the aid worker is has implications for how stress within the aid sector is studied in academia and managed by organisations. Finally, I will refer to literature that attempts to challenge centralised discourses of emotional experiences and consider what this could mean for aid practice, particularly how staff approach personal health and wellbeing. I will show how these themes form the structure of what is to follow in this thesis, by providing a detailed outline of the subsequent chapters.

Who is the Aid Worker? Problems in Aid Discourse and Practice

Media coverage in Europe of humanitarian operations is often focused on aid workers from western countries in the midst of natural or human-made disasters, pulling people out of the wreckage or providing them with food or medicine in refugee camps, as Malkki points out (Malkki, 2015). This does not tell the whole story of who the aid worker is, where they come from and how they got to be filling one of thousands of varied roles within the sector. The aid sector is forever expanding and evolving, with "a cast of 100s and 1000s" (Apthorpe, 2011b: 194); many of whom are far from a disaster area, and instead can be found at their desks in a city in Europe or Africa or Asia, writing strategy papers or donor proposals and reports.

At the same time, the personalities of aid workers are often confined to specific boxes, given particular names: they are "saint and saviour" (Philips, 2014: 26),"mercenary, missionary or misfit" (Stirrat, 2008) "cowboys" (Redfield, 2013: 153; Roth, 2015: 120) or "lords of poverty" (Hancock, 1994) or they are admirable "altruists" or selfish "careerists" (Wigley, 2005: 36). There are two underlying assumptions to these tropes. Firstly, that aid workers are likely to originate from the northern hemisphere, mainly Europe or America, and that their motivations, as seemingly privileged people travelling to poor countries to help others who are far worse off, should be judged accordingly (Heron, 2007; Malkki, 2015). And secondly that they are male; with some studies (Appleby, 2010; Partis-Jennings, 2017; Redfield, 2013; Roth, 2015) and reports by aid workers themselves (Hoppe, 2014) making particular reference to the masculinised environment of aid, where the celebrated aid worker is a heavy drinker and smoker, independent and without family ties, working long hours and "throwing bags of rice around and jumping into this and jumping into that" (Roth, 2015: 120). Women aid workers have commented on feeling insecure, awkward or judged for not appearing sufficiently strong or capable in these environments (Hoppe, 2014). This is described succinctly by one aid worker in *Chasing Misery: an anthology of essays by women in humanitarian responses*, when she is stopped at Nairobi airport on a long journey en route to South Sudan to have her luggage x-rayed because her alarm clock looked like handcuffs.

> Faced with the prospect of my humanitarian career ending before it began I did what any sensible person would do – I started to cry. [...] I was surrounded by other conflict-weary, khaki-wearing aid workers who were mostly men and I feared I had committed a fatal error that highlighted both my newness and my gender.
>
> (Philips, 2014: 25)

The emotional behaviour described by Philips has led some scholars (Read, 2018; Roth, 2015) to argue that women aid workers are constantly performing, attempting to live up to a particular, masculinised gold standard of aid practice: of unflappability and emotional detachment. My thesis will explore these iterations and imagery common in aid practice and how they influence the behaviour of some of my informants. It will expand on the suggestion in some development literature (Fechter, 2012a; Harrison, 2013a; Mosse, 2011) that more attention needs to be given to the personal lives of aid workers if we are to gain a better understanding of the challenges and pitfalls of aid practice, and argue that personal challenges are often shaped by factors such as gender, nationality and age.

The "personal" can be understood in a number of ways. It may include the motivations that drive aid work (de Jong, 2011), or the moral angst suffered by aid professionals when good intentions do not always equate with positive outcomes for target populations (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011; Fechter, 2016). In this respect, the challenges of aid work may be distinguished from many other sectors by its pervasive moral culture (Rességuier, 2018: 65), which governs staff behaviour and is arguably its raison d'etre; the sector's very existence is founded on humanitarian principles that staff must comply with if they are to be viewed as legitimate actors in ending the suffering of others. This becomes problematic when ethical and political questions arise concerning the value or necessity of particular aid interventions (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, 2011; Vaux, 2013); questions which can result in a considerable degree of discomfort and emotional turmoil for aid practitioners (Fechter, 2012b; Redfield, 2013; Walkup, 1997).

The aid professional's increased consciousness of difference – and of their power and privilege compared with those from the communities in which they operate – also emerges in literature addressing the personal in aid work (Baaz, 2005; Fechter, 2012b; Shutt, 2006). This last point is instructive. Whilst scholars recognise whiteness and gender as markers of difference in the aid industrial complex (Baaz, 2005; Verma, 2011), with

implications for how white, western aid workers and women respectively approach their work and their relationships with colleagues and the 'beneficiary' community, there is less written about to what extent these differences exist, and are felt, by national staff from the global south. The personal stories of African aid workers, for instance, are far less known about than their counterparts from the global north, whose experiences are widely recounted in humanitarian memoirs (Alexander, 2013; Elliott, 2013; Thomson et al., 2006).

Studies of western aid workers are helpful in illustrating the "colonial continuities" (Heron, 2007: 16) of aid work and examining where power lies in aid relationships. These studies are part of a wider postcolonial literature which uses the narrative of white saviours, travelling to distant lands to rescue desperate and powerless populations, in order to critique aid discourse and practice (Escobar, 2012; Wilson, 2012). This critique is also present in studies seeking to understand the values that motivate western aid workers (Baaz, 2005; Heron, 2007), and how their desire to help entails a degree of exceptionalism with regard to how they enter the aid sector and how they are treated once there (Heron, 2007; Malkki, 2015; Roth, 2015).

However the focus in this literature on western aid workers' positionality and motivations raises questions: Is one aid worker's motivations or values more worthy than another, because of their position in terms of race, class, geographical location and whether they are coming from a rich country or a poor one? On what terms are aid workers judged for their levels of dedication to the job?

These questions are not given sufficient attention in the studies hitherto mentioned, and in this respect this literature may fall foul of the very same postcolonial critique from which their work is derived: the problem of centralising the white western gaze of aid work, taking this as the canvas from which to understand the experiences of aid workers.

When national aid workers are referred to, it is through the pitying and guilty voice of the white expatriate (Baaz, 2005: 90).[8]

This problem points to the broader tendency within aid discourse and practice to foreground the positioning, language, authority and expertise of the white aid worker (Kothari, 2005) in a way that suggests the sector is racially blind (Crewe and Fernando, 2006; White, 2006, 2002). The dominance of the international aid worker from Europe or America in much of the literature exploring the lived realities of aid professionals also directs attention to essentialising categories – primarily 'national' and 'international' – within many studies (Duffield, 2012; Smirl, 2015) and overlooks the role of race, gender and religion in framing the aid worker's experience.

Inspired by black feminist and intersectional perspectives (Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 2000; Crenshaw, 1990), my thesis seeks to challenge this narrative. Feminist writers such as Ahmed and hooks argue that gender relations cannot be adequately addressed without understanding the mechanisms of oppression – such as colonialism, capitalism and racism - that create social inequalities which affect some women more than others. Highlighting the importance of this perspective when seeking to understand women's struggle and liberation, hooks writes:

> There is much evidence substantiating the reality that race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share – differences that are rarely transcended. (hooks, 2000: 4)

Her concern that the motives and interests of "materially privileged, educated white women with a variety of career and lifestyle options available to them" (hooks, 2000: 4) may be very different from black or working class women is relevant to my interest in

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[8] There are nevertheless a limited number of studies where the voices of aid workers from the southern hemisphere are central – rather than on the periphery – to the articulation of motivations and values within the sector. For instance, *Development Beyond Politics: Aid, Activism and NGOs in Ghana* (Yarrow, 2011), *Disputing Development Discourses: Understanding the motivations and performance of local NGO staff* (Arvidson, 2014) and *Women Development Workers: Implementing Rural Credit Programmes in Bangladesh* (Goetz, 2001).

understanding the particularities of stress within the aid sector and the experiences of both national and international staff. Recognising that I too am a person whose race and background give me privilege, I wish to shine a light on what is shared and what is not in the diverse and complicated personal challenges associated with aid work.

Whilst there has been some effort to highlight these nuances in everyday aid practice (Shutt, 2006), and in Africa in particular (Peters, 2013; Yarrow, 2011), I am aware that there are few African voices that discuss how race and power affect people of colour working in the aid sector (a notable exception is media work by Bruce-Raeburn, 2018). More broadly, personal revelations in the public domain regarding mental health and emotional upheavals related to the profession are largely originating from aid workers from the global north (Elliott, 2013; Hoppe, 2014; Martone, 2002), raising the question as to why African aid workers appear not to be emptying their hearts out in the same way .

This thesis may help address this question. I will be drawing on relevant literature that examines the role of aid structures and policies in shaping aid worker's behaviour (Duffield, 2012; Redfield, 2013; Roth, 2015; Smirl, 2015) to consider how specific institutional environments and contexts – such as the humanitarian compound, or the restructuring of organisations – affects international and national staff in multiple and distinctive ways. My interest is also in moving beyond these essentialising categories, and considering other forms of difference, including race, gender, class and religion. By taking this approach, a far more subtle reading of stress and its causes emerges than what is contained in much of the literature. Rather than focusing solely on the challenging field environment and its risks and dangers, I wish to draw out the everyday problems faced by aid workers both in the field and at the office. I am interested in finding out how these problems are conceptualised and responded to by aid workers, and what factors may explain these responses.

The next section of this introduction will delve more deeply into these nuances, by considering how the language and culture of the aid industrial complex and its footsoldiers appears to encourage, centralise and reinforce particular forms of behaviour and emotional expression. This has implications for how stress, and more generally personal health and wellbeing, is embodied and performed.

Social and cultural constructions of stress in the aid sector

My ethnographic material will show that although there is an increased interest in the prevalence of chronic or acute forms of stress in the aid sector, such as burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder, the usage of these terms is not necessarily widespread in all aid contexts. The thesis will investigate where control and ownership of descriptive terms related to stress lie, and how relevant they are to different groups of aid workers. I will be drawing on literature where the understandings of health conditions and wellbeing are socially and culturally situated (Eyber, 2015; Honwana, 1998); where no one society is assumed to have a universal standard regarding health, and where measurement is not necessarily the method of conceptualisation (White, 2016b: 2). I am drawn to this literature because it reveals the complexity of human experience and highlights the importance of environment, language and cultural practices, including religion, in framing an individual's understanding of the world and their existence within it.

In addition, returning to feminist theory, I wish to show that there are gendered and racialised aspects to our emotional landscape; in other words, power and agency matter in the way we formulate and articulate our suffering (Ahmed, 2013; Philipose, 2007). There is also a post-colonial critique contained in this claim; as Philipose writes with reference to conceptualisations of the 'good citizen':

> In the framework of colonial knowledge, when Man is invoked as the highest achievement of human life, Man refers to European Man. Further, European Man is propertied, heterosexual, of appropriate lineage, well mannered and in control of his emotions and passions. In this way, the 'good citizen' and 'whiteness' are defined.
>
> (Philipose, 2007: 66)

These claims (Fanon, 1952; Philipose, 2007) emphasise how the exercise of reason and rationality, in philosophy and the social sciences and beyond, has long been a colonial project which treats with disdain alternative realities and ways of expressing those realities.

The colonial structure of knowledge is also relevant to how development research is conducted, as I will demonstrate in my methodology chapter (Chapter 2), and places particular expectations on development practice. A related theme that emerges in this thesis is the sector's obsession with rational, goal-oriented solutions to poverty; leading to practices which, some argue (Patni, 2011), are highly gendered and have an impact on the degree to which aid workers feel able to be themselves, and to fully express their emotional experiences. I will explore in greater detail in the empirical chapters how some of the narratives on what is broadly understood to be 'good aid practice' impact on the lives and emotions of aid professionals. I will also investigate alternative epistemologies of aid (Ager and Ager, 2011; Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003; Scherz, 2013); how these depart from rational, linear approaches, and what this means for how aid workers manage common challenges associated with this profession. These epistemologies are at times grounded in religious beliefs – a factor that features in many of the stories of my informants, as they tried to make sense of their experiences. In this respect, the thesis builds on religion and development literature (Deneulin and Bano, 2009; Salemink et al., 2005) and highlights the importance of faith in supporting aid workers' own wellbeing in addition to the wellbeing of aid recipients. For some of my informants, a belief in the occult, or a greater universal power beyond their material selves, gives them a sense of meaning which challenges Eurocentric discourses that seek rational, measurable solutions to human problems. These beliefs by their very nature also transcend and challenge the rigidity and rationality of the aid paradigm; for some of my informants, their faith helps them feel a sense of value and purpose in their actions in ways that are absent from the goal- and solution-oriented frameworks of aid organisations. I will argue that religious faith cannot be viewed in isolation from a person's understanding of their work and their social experiences; it is in fact a crucial part of some of my informants' identity and how they interpret challenges in their lives.

In Chapter 2 I present my methodology. I will show how my background as an aid worker implied specific concerns and assumptions that both informed, and were disrupted by, my research. I will provide details of the research site, paying particular attention to the specific history and characteristics of aid organisations in Nairobi and Turkana, where I spent much of my time in Kenya. I will discuss the benefits of using ethnographic methods for highlighting the diversity of perspectives concerning the challenges of aid work, and for avoiding essentialising descriptive terms for mental health. The chapter also explores

the challenges that emerged in the research process; particularly in terms of access, and my status as a white, European female researcher and someone who has worked within the sector.

The chapters that follow the methodology will share a similar structure: they will first expand on aforementioned literature to frame the observations and findings that follow from my ethnographic material.

In Chapter 3, Naming and Claiming Stress in the Aid Sector, I will investigate how key descriptive terms related to stress – such as burnout, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder – are used by aid workers. A stress management workshop which I organised among Kenyan, Somali and European staff of an international NGO in Nairobi will highlight the importance of considering gender and religion in personal understandings of stress. I will build on this claim through the accounts of other aid workers I met who discussed their emotional experiences. The gendered nature of the way mental health is spoken about, or avoided altogether, will be examined along with claims by some of my informants of a macho working culture. These observations form an important backbone to what follows in the remainder of the thesis, as the chapter raises specific problems concerning a person's professional status and their perceived positioning within their society, and how this affects their understanding and management of problems in their lives, which are expanded upon in the ensuing chapters.

Chapter 4, Compound Lives and the (de)Constructing of Social Relations will focus on one of my research sites, Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya. The chapter has a particular interest in showing how specific material structures and organisational policies associated with humanitarian settings influence the behaviour of aid workers. Departing from, and challenging, assumptions that stress in these settings is directly associated with the risks and dangers of working in insecure environments, the chapter will discuss how aid workers respond to policies and practices which restrict their movement and their relationships - with colleagues, with aid 'beneficiaries'[9] and with their family and loved

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[9] I use the term beneficiary reluctantly, for want of a better word, being fully aware that the term reproduces well-known neo-colonial tropes suggesting a white, superior self and a powerless, dependent

ones. Comments by my informants indicate a racialised and gendered reading of how aid workers behave in these settings, in terms of their ability and willingness to interact with the local and refugee community, the extent to which they feel at home among their colleagues, and the degree to which they struggle with restrictions prohibiting the accompaniment of spouse and family.

In Chapter 5, The Moral Ambiguities of Aid Practice, I will turn my attention to some of the common imagery and tropes that I have outlined in the introduction and which produce a particular idea of what constitutes 'the perfect humanitarian'. The chapter considers the moral dimensions of this archetype, and their assumed positioning as someone who is white and privileged. It also illustrates the gendered nature of this imagery, and the implications this has for women aid workers. Drawing on the stories of Kenyan and international aid workers I met in Nairobi and Lodwar, the county capital of Turkana, the chapter suggests that there is an organisational culture that feeds into and enforces certain expectations about 'good aid work'. This results in emotional turmoil and health problems for some of my informants, and judgements being made by aid workers themselves about the level of commitment of their colleagues. An alternative reading of what drives aid workers is given by some of my Kenyan informants, whose accounts serve to highlight that the problems experienced by national staff often do not feature in the discourses on the challenges of working in this sector.

Chapter 6, Keeping the Faith: Maintaining Passion and Purpose in Aid Work investigates which aid workers manage to transcend or overcome some of the problems mentioned in the preceding chapters. In particular, I will consider what processes some of my informants appear to go through, consciously or unconsciously, in order to make peace with the challenges of their work. The career trajectories of these informants is important, as are their beliefs; particularly their understanding of their role in helping others. Their stories suggest forms of resistance to the common discourses and practices associated with aid and which have been discussed in the preceding chapters; they find ways to be comfortable with and accepting of their identities, and their limitations, as aid workers.

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other. It is also problematic given the uncertainties over whether people who are considered aid recipients or people of concern do indeed benefit from what is offered to them. There is of course much dissatisfaction with the term 'beneficiary' in the aid sector too (Vowles, 2018)

The chapter is informed by all that have come before, and highlights the importance of vulnerability in the aid endeavour and the social and cultural contexts in which emotions are embedded and defined.

The concluding chapter ties all the threads together to argue that greater attention to the diversity of experiences of aid professionals serves to deconstruct problematic assumptions about what constitutes 'good' aid work, and to produce new imaginaries, and intersectional perspectives, concerning wellbeing and purpose in the sector. I will discuss the potential presented by the localisation agenda to reframe what really matters in aid work, and include some examples of practitioners who are already envisaging equality and wellbeing as central to the sector's success.

CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING ACCESS AND INSIDER RESEARCH IN KENYA

I travelled to Kenya in September 2015 and finished field research in October 2016.[10] I chose Kenya – its capital, Nairobi, in particular – as a field site for a number of reasons. I had lived and worked there in 2005/6 and 2013/14, and as my research was to be ethnographic, already knowing parts of the aid community and how to access particular groups within it seemed to me a promising advantage.

I was also aware that Kenya was seen as a regional hub within the INGO sector, with many organisations working in the east and horn of Africa basing their offices in Nairobi. The array of INGOs and programmes there – humanitarian, development and human rights focused – would enable me to explore the multitude of activities, projects and programmes that constitute 'aid work'. Increased localisation and decentralisation within the aid sector was being tested out in earnest in Kenya when I started my doctorate, with a growing number of what were traditionally international positions being taken up by Kenyan nationals. This, I believed, would widen the potential to meet and interact with many national as well as international professionals working within the sector. I chose to focus solely on international organisations as this would give me a better chance of understanding diversity within the sector, and comparing the experiences of international and national staff, than if I was to study national NGOs.[11] I therefore chose to include among my research subjects individuals who work as staff, or on a consultancy basis, for international NGOs and inter-governmental organisations. In making this choice, I also recognise that national NGOs are likely to have their own specific challenges that are not shared by their international counterparts; particularly with regard to funding and the

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[10] I returned there in March 2017 for a month and in June 2017 for a few days, for a holiday and to see friends, and during that time I also caught up with some of my informants.

[11] I am also aware that by pigeon-holing international aid organisations, I may be reinforcing the problematic and elitist boundaries concerning who is seen as 'professional' and worthy of particular attention and status, and who is not. In reality, many of the problems experienced by professionals working for these organisations may be shared by others that aren't traditionally viewed as falling within these boundaries, such as groups within the feminist or women's movement. There is in fact a lot that can be learned from these groups about approaches to stress and wellbeing, as I will discuss in Chapter 6.

impact of limited resources on staff wellbeing, and the risk of greater political interference from government authorities.

It is common that expectations and assumptions made in the planning stages of field research turn out to be mistaken once in the field. This was the case for me, and led me to expand my research site to somewhere very different from Nairobi: Turkana, one of Kenya's poorest counties, situated in the north close to the Ethiopia and South Sudan borders. My struggles with field research were in many respects typical of what a researcher encounters when doing ethnography, but they were also related to the very nature of whom and what I was researching. In particular, the unavailability of aid workers in Kenya, who were often too busy to meet me; and the inequalities and divisions which exist between the lives and livelihoods of international and national aid workers.

The empirical chapters of this thesis will give due attention to these inequalities. This chapter seeks to unpack some of the challenges I went through in navigating my research site and accessing my research subjects. It will start with some brief reflections on my status and background as 'aid worker' and how this informed my research design and methodology. This will be followed by an overview of the research site and examine the changing nature and structure of NGOs in Kenya. I will show that in recent years, Kenya's status as a regional hub for aid work has led to a change in aid worker demographics, so that people from western countries are no longer the obvious dominant presence in most INGOs. I will demonstrate how this had implications for my research. This will be followed by an explanation of my research design; my reasons for choosing ethnographic methods and the activities it entailed. I will discuss who exactly I interacted with over the course of my field research, and go into the specific details, and challenges, of conducting ethnographic research in each of my field sites – Nairobi and Turkana.

Lastly I will provide a deeper reflection on my role as a researcher and how this influenced the difficulties I had in accessing aid workers; in particular, I will argue that my assumptions that I was doing 'engaged' and 'insider' research may in many respects have been misguided, forcing me to change my perspective on how I related to my research participants.

Aid Work, stress and me: situating my research design

This thesis would not exist if it wasn't for my own background in the aid sector, which includes working for well-known organisations such as Amnesty International and Christian Aid, as well as local human rights and advocacy groups in Uganda and Palestine. Some of the stories from my informants echo my own experiences. I entered the sector, and particular organisations or situations, with a passion for the cause and an unshakable belief in my abilities to change things for the better. That faith – a word which is given some emphasis in Chapter 6 - became increasingly diminished when faced with obstacles with which many people in the sector can identify: the power and influence of State actors we were trying to challenge – particularly in protracted situations such as the ongoing occupation of Palestine; the rigidity of institutional donors protecting their own interests; and the continuous struggle for financial resources to continue with the work, often leading to dramatic organisational change and staff cuts. I have been directly on the receiving end of what the sector often calls 'internal change processes' and the disruptive management and toxic atmosphere this often entails. And as an international aid worker from the global north who has lived in Kenya, Uganda and Palestine, I have also navigated the huge socio-economic and cultural chasm between 'the field' and 'home,' and the implications this has for friendships, relationships and finding a sense of meaning and belonging. My interest in studying a PhD about stress in the aid sector came from these recurring problems I'd witnessed in my professional life, and from my own emotional turmoil experienced after leaving a job with a local human rights NGO in Palestine in 2011. I had also witnessed several friends go through prolonged periods of mental and physical illness which they attributed to their work. My passion for understanding and responding to stress and burnout in my sector deepened when I worked on the East Africa programme of an international human rights NGO from 2013 to 2014. It was here that I was reminded again of some of the key problems that aid workers face: being plunged into insecure or remote environments of widespread suffering, sometimes with little preparation or support; interacting with survivors of the most horrific crimes without being able to give them the assistance they need; working in an office where there is little opportunity or space in which to process or talk about the feelings arising from what one witnesses.

These realities were the inspiration behind this thesis. Whilst recognising that trauma and emotional distress arising from exposure to war, violence or acute poverty are part of the

aid worker's experience – and were part of mine at times – I also have witnessed how much of the struggle in this sector relates to the everyday grind of trying to get the work done whilst maintaining a sense of purpose. The times when I have needed to take a break from the sector – what many may label 'burnout', a word I attempt to unpack in Chapter 3 – were related to the pressures of living up to what I believed was expected of me and the difficulty of not feeling able to openly express my emotional pain. The sense of needing to get the job done, and the job being to serve others whilst ignoring one's own problems, are themes that emerge repeatedly in this thesis; as are the role of organisations and managers in exerting specific pressures concerning how staff should behave and what their priorities should be.

These complexities had implications for how I approached field research when arriving in Kenya. Ultimately, I would have to let go of what I thought were universal descriptive terms such as 'stress', 'burnout' or 'trauma' in order to open up a broader conversation about the difficulties of aid work and how these are understood and managed in different ways. This led to far more open-ended research endeavours and interactions than what I was used to in my 15 years experience as an aid worker. The needs assessments, monitoring visits and human rights documentation that I had undertaken over the years were usually very goal-driven and solutions-oriented, with a fairly specific framing of what information was needed and of who the targets were. These 'targets' themselves often were confined within the descriptive parameters of aid organisations; they were either 'victims' or 'beneficiaries' – contained within statistics of people interviewed or assisted – and in this respect they lost part of their humanness. Ethnographic research is an opportunity to break free of the boxes that can confine human experience. It is a methodology through which we can question the terms and vocabulary we use to describe people and situations, in order to bring greater awareness to our ethnocentric assumptions and the possibility of alternative world views. Applying this methodology has helped me to relinquish some of the Eurocentric ideas concerning stress and how it should be approached or managed, and become more alert to different conceptualisations of the human emotional landscape. In this regard, my research and this thesis have been central to my own growth and making sense of struggle or suffering in our lives.

Kenya and the aid sector: NGO-isation, regionalisation, localisation

Kenya is often seen as one of Africa's more successful economies; ranked the 9th largest on the continent and 4th largest in the sub-Saharan region, it now boasts the status of a middle income country (Braganza, 2014).

It is also a country that, since independence in 1964, has been marred by ethnic violence, terrorist attacks and civil unrest. The 24-year regime of President Daniel arap Moi, which ended in 2002, was widely regarded as a dictatorship responsible for widespread corruption and human rights abuses. Post-election violence in 2007/8 left over 600,000 displaced and over 1,100 killed, and the 2017 elections – annulled in August and re-run in October – were also the scene of violent clashes between supporters of the incumbent President, Uhuru Kenyatta, and the leader of the opposition, Raila Odinga. Armed attacks by Muslim extremists have also increased in recent years, with the Somalia based group Al Shabaab attacking Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall in September 2013, in which 67 people were killed, and a university in Garissa in northern Kenya in March 2015, in which at least 148 people were killed.

The Kenyan capital Nairobi is home to Africa's largest urban slum, Kibera, and the slum inhabitants comprise approximately 56 per cent of the country's urban population (UN Habitat, 2016: 46). Rural areas in the north of the country have been regularly hit with severe drought, which has killed livestock and left populations there without food or water supplies.

As a result of these problems, Kenya has a long history of aid interventions. International aid organisations have been operating in Kenya since the colonial period; initially concerned with running their own programmes, in the 1990s interest grew in using 'local partners' and building the capacity of grassroots organisations as part of the INGO's implementation strategy (Campbell, 2008: 254 and 258). Aid organisations were increasingly relied upon to provide social services during the 1980s and 1990s as rigid aid conditionality policies of the World Bank and IMF squeezed the available government

resources, and international concern grew over the corrupt regime of President Daniel arap Moi. What is often referred to as the 'New Policy Agenda' – a neoliberal approach adopted by the US and other major western donors – became one of the main frameworks for funding NGO social service programmes, particularly health interventions (Hearn, 1998; Hershey, 2013); an approach that contributed to considerable growth within the NGO sector and the 'NGO-isation' of Kenyan society (Hearn, 1998). By 1998 there were thought to be 1028 NGOs registered in Kenya, with a diversity of programmes including education, water, livelihoods, pastoralism, health, microfinance, culture and religion, human rights and youth and family (Campbell, 2008, citing the NGO Council of Kenya: 254). Increased interest from the international donor community in funding these programmes did not translate into clear success stories, or the alleviation of poverty to which the programmes aspired, although it did prompt further thinking around how to build local capacities in this endeavor (Campbell, 2008).

Kenya is estimated to have been within the top 20 recipients of humanitarian aid between 2003 and 2012 (Swithern, 2014: 129). There are now over 8,500 NGOs registered in Kenya (NGO Co-ordination Board, Kenya, 2013: ix),[12] with the sector continuing to evolve in its diversity, and in its attempts to increase local capacities. The growth of the NGO sector has been accompanied by the expansion of an educated, middle-class population in Kenya. Many members of this social group can be found working in the aid sector and adopting the jargon or 'Aidlish' (Shutt, 2006) common to aid practice. As Brown and Green note (Brown and Green, 2015), many national NGO staff in Kenya possess postgraduate degrees, are trained in development programming and possess all the trappings - suit, smart phone, memory stick, for instance - of 'the capable, worldly professional' (Brown and Green, 2015: 69); and the same could be said for the Kenyan working in an international NGO.

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[12] The last available figure for registered NGOs in Kenya is from 2013, and provided by the country's NGO Co-ordination Board, which estimates approximately 759 new registrations each year (NGO Co-ordination Board, Kenya, 2013). Of these 8500 registered NGOs, the number that are international – established outside Kenya, but with in-country offices and operations - is not well documented. This figure also does not give the full picture of the aid sector in Kenya, which includes inter-governmental organisations such as the UN agencies, donor agencies and consultancy firms working on a contractual basis for different UN, donor and INGO programmes.

Partly due to a burgeoning aid sector, Kenya has attracted large numbers of foreigners from Europe, America and other parts of Africa. As a result of increased foreign investment from Asia, there is also a growing Chinese population. The international community in Kenya – numbering at least 10,000, according to local media reports (Kajilwa, 2016) - includes foreign government civil servants and security officials, private sector professionals, as well as international NGO and aid agency workers. The capital city Nairobi's appeal for the expatriates lies in its vibrant city suburbs, including its large comfortable town houses and modern apartment blocks, its array of restaurants serving international cuisine and the many recreational activities on offer, including exercise classes, hiking and safaris.

Kenya as regional hub

Kenya is the preferred site for INGOs operating in the east and horn of Africa to base their offices, due to its relative security, ease of regional travel and the capital city Nairobi's favourable housing options. Many aid organisations based in Nairobi thus have regional programmes covering Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia, as well as Kenya. For some aid agencies, Kenya is their base for operations in countries further afield; the regional office of Danish Refugee Council, for instance, manages programmes in Yemen as well as Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti. The United Nations also has its Africa Headquarters in Nairobi; a sprawling mini-metropolis on 140 acres of well-tended gardens next to Nairobi's largest forest and wealthiest suburbs, and employs approximately 2000 staff from different UN agencies.[13] Staff support agencies have also recognised the value of establishing a regional office in Nairobi in order to access aid workers operating there and in neighbouring countries; in 2014, Interhealth Worldwide, a UK not-for-profit organisation offering counselling and occupational health support to the aid sector, opened its first regional office in Nairobi.[14] The decision by some of the largest INGOs to decentralise their staff to regional offices, or in Oxfam's case, to move their head office to Kenya (Byanyima, 2016), further demonstrates Kenya's perceived superior status as regional hub.

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[13] "Division of Conference Services - UNON," https://dcs.unon.org/node/74) (United Nations Office Nairobi, n.d.) accessed on 21October 2018.

[14] Interhealth closed all its offices in mid-2017 due to financial difficulties.

This status has implications for the staffing of organisations working there, and two examples from my time in Kenya illustrate this. Amnesty International, which established what it calls its regional hub office covering East and Horn and the Great Lakes regions of Africa in Nairobi in 2013, has endeavoured to employ nationals to fill the research and campaign roles for the country teams managed from there. As the office covers Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, this has entailed hiring, whenever possible, nationals from those countries to work from the Nairobi office. Thus, in the case of Amnesty, there is a large inflow of regional staff. In the case of my other example, CISP,[15] an Italian humanitarian NGO, the opposite is true. Its work focuses mainly on Kenya and Somalia, with Kenyan and international staff travelling regularly to Somalia. Kenya has long been perceived as a strategic and safe base for aid organisations operating in Somalia, particularly following the increased attacks – some of them targeting aid agency staff - by the Somali militant group Al-Shabaab. The Somalia NGO Consortium was established in Nairobi in 1999 in recognition of the high number of NGOs based in Kenya that had operations in Somalia; now the consortium has over 80 members, many of whom are based in Kenya but travelling frequently to Somalia.

It was thus not unusual during my time working and conducting doctoral research in Kenya to meet Kenyans who travelled regularly to Somalia, and also South Sudan – another country with a proliferation of Kenya based interventions following heightened conflict. Likewise, I often met Sudanese, South Sudanese, Ethiopians and Somalis who worked as programme officers or researchers for their own countries but who were based in the regional office in Nairobi. In other words, there were African aid workers travelling far from their own homes to live and work in unfamiliar, at times dangerous environments; an experience which is assumed to be part of the job for international aid workers from Europe or America, but given little attention when considering other groups of aid workers, including those I have described in Kenya, or others such as Australians, Chinese, Latin Americans or Indians working in Africa.

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[15] Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppor dei Popoli (Italian Committee for Solidarity between People).

The pressure to localise

The increased push within the aid sector to decentralise from head offices in Europe and establish regional offices in Kenya has further implications. In recent years there has been a concerted effort by many INGOs to localise their staff - to make their workforce more representative of the countries in which they work and reduce the number of international positions. My own experience of working in Kenya provides evidence of this. When Amnesty's regional office was opened in Nairobi in 2013, I was invited to reapply for my position – hitherto based in the UK - as East Africa researcher, but was warned by colleagues that I was unlikely to be successful as Amnesty was planning to hire locally for its East Africa team. When I worked in Christian Aid's Nairobi office from 2005 to 2006, the majority of its staff – numbering around 30 - were internationals, particularly those filling programme positions. When I visited their office in 2016, only one international staff member remained. Another one, a man from a neighbouring African country who had been my manager back in 2005/6, had been refused a renewed work permit by the Kenyan Ministry of Interior.

This illustrates another recent development in Kenya which is having a noticeable impact on the aid sector's demographic, and which partly explains the increased drive by INGOs to hire locally. In April 2016 the Kenyan government issued a directive that, according to NGO gossip in Nairobi, it had been enforcing arbitrarily for a couple of years already. The directive states that entry permits for international staff of NGOs will only be issued on the condition that the organisation demonstrates the need for the employee's specific skills; that it is not possible to find a local person with these skills; and that efforts will be made to train a Kenyan to obtain the required skills in order to eventually take up the position.[16] The announcement of this directive in the media by Kenya's NGO Board in June 2016 suggests a growing frustration with what is seen as unequal treatment of international and national staff in INGOs, and a desire to rectify this by increasing job opportunities for Kenyans within the sector (Leftie and Mutambo, 2016). It was followed in May 2018 with a statement from the Ministry of Interior that all foreigners must report to the Immigration Department within 60 days to verify their status within the country, and that anyone found to be working in Kenya illegally would be detained. According to reports,

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[16] NGOs Board, on Twitter, 19 June 2016: The policy requiring NGOs harmonize salary discrepancies between local and expats (NGO Board, Kenya, 2016) accessed on 21 October 2018.

this was part of an effort to "weed out foreigners holding jobs that can be done by locals" (Njanja, 2018). At the same time, there is increasing recognition by international NGOs that they must have a larger, localised presence in the countries they work in if their interventions are to be viewed as legitimate and accountable. This has entailed major restructuring of some of the largest INGOs in Nairobi, affecting both Kenyan and international staff. I thus conducted my research in Kenya at a time of great flux and uncertainty for many of my informants, who were affected by sweeping institutional changes.

Ethnographic research in Kenya

Ethnography provides opportunities to challenge dominant, Eurocentric narratives that are often used to describe human experience, through immersion for extended periods in the communities and contexts being researched. It is through this immersion that casual conversations become meaningful, and that the environment becomes relevant in understanding the language, behaviour and patterns that emerge, and which deconstruct and disrupt common assumptions about what it means to be human. As a methodology, ethnography thus became central to my ability to understand the nuances and complexities of the aid sector. Through participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, as well as action research conducted through a stress management workshop I organised in August 2016, I was able to uncover and probe some of the assumptions that are blithely made about aid workers; particularly regarding their values, motivations and what it means to suffer from stress. Whilst I wanted my research to be a way of showing aid workers that they are not alone in the emotional struggles they experience with their work, I also wanted it to highlight that differences *do* exist, and thus that stress, and ways of overcoming it, cannot be generalised across a sector numbering hundreds of thousands of staff.[17] Immersion in the community that is the subject of

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[17] Official figures documenting staff numbers in the aid sector are hard to come by, particularly when attempting to establish how many specifically work for international NGOs and aid agencies. However, ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System report 2015 provides helpful statistics, sourced from the consultancy group Humanitarian Outcomes, which reflect the high staff numbers. The report estimates that in 2013, there were 783 INGOs globally working on humanitarian interventions, and that there are 249,000 field personnel dedicated to humanitarian operations – although many of these will be working for national, rather than international NGOs. There are also an estimated 56,000 personnel working for UN humanitarian agencies, and 145,000 personnel working for the Red Cross movement. (Taylor et al., 2015: 38).

research also forces a degree of reflexivity onto the ethnographer, prompting us to become more aware of how our social positioning, language and customs affect the research encounter.

The rationalistic methodologies often favoured in the social sciences – particularly quantitative analysis and surveys - have a specific history in development research, the focus of which has tended towards developing policies "premised on appearing rational, professional, objective, effective and functional, grounded in measurable and quantifiable targets and outcomes, such as 'growth'" (Hardy, 2012: 119). I have found this in my own experience as an aid worker, where much of the activities I undertook – whether interviewing victims of human rights violations, providing emergency relief or organising civil society actions, lobby meetings and protests – were framed by very specific goals concerning what would be achieved, by whom and for which target population. Such frameworks were ultimately often too ambitious and their rigidity ran the risk of overlooking or excluding key voices and situations that had the potential to influence change.

These methodologies do not sit well with the key issues I'm concerned with in my research. This is because these issues require an exploration into how we understand and embody emotions in ways which may be influenced by culture and environment. As White argues: "Constructions of wellbeing are intricately connected to the places in which they are generated and the research method by which they are produced" (White, 2016: 3). Ethnographic methods have allowed me to address the nuances of working culture and structures that play a role in the way people behave. As has been acknowledged elsewhere (Hindman and Fechter, 2010; Lewis and Mosse, 2006), aid workers are too often assumed within development discourse to be atomistic actors (Hardy, 2012: 119), operating within a rationalistic, coherent and predictable aid system – when the reality is often far more messy and complicated. It is important to recognise in any study of the aid sector that there are individual, organisational and sector-wide interests which influence the way aid work is done, and thus also the behaviour of aid workers; ethnography is one way of exploring this, as it grounds people's beliefs, choices and actions in the environment within which they live and work. Its methods are often 'multi-sited, multi-vocal and multi-level' (Campbell, 2008: 264), and present opportunities to both observe and interact with the everyday lives of aid workers. Using these immersive methods helps to uncover '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' (Mosse, 2011: 6) that are key characteristics of negotiating the aid system. In so doing, we can reveal the murky, complex realities of aid work which are often hidden in the standard development discourse and NGO literature; literature accused of a 'means-ends' rationality that is 'normative/prescriptive' and 'predictive' (Lewis and Mosse, 2006: 3) and detached from historical, political or socio-economic contexts (Nauta, 2006: 150).

It is with an appreciation of the value of "improvising theory" – where the theory that emerges from ethnographic research very much depends on the dynamics of a particular field site (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 21) - that I now turn to the outcomes of these methods in my field experience; the activities it involved, and the challenges I had to overcome.

Research realities and challenges

My interest in highlighting diversity within the sector required a flexibility and openness during field research, both in terms of who I spoke to and in what we discussed. Although I had articulated a problematic, or argument, regarding stress in the aid sector in my research outline, I entered the field without any pre-conceived ideas of how stress is or should be defined. My interest was in how my informants talked about it; and indeed increasingly in the course of the research, I avoided use of the word 'stress' in my interviews and would instead ask them to speak about the challenges of their work. Looking back, I now see even more the value of this tactic, having learned – rather late in the process – that the term 'stress' is not often used, nor easily translatable, in the Kiswahili language spoken by most of my Kenyan research participants. Asking people about 'challenges' not only left more space for my informants to interpret my question in their own way; it also, I believe, helped me gain access – as talking about 'challenges' carried far less rhetorical weight, and importantly, perhaps less risk to one's job, than talking about 'stress'. I will return to these access issues later on in the chapter.

I had envisaged a rough sample size of around 40 research participants, in addition to insights I would gain through participant observation. In the end, a total of 125 people contributed to my research; through one-to-one interviews, focus group discussions,

social interactions and participation in the stress management workshop I facilitated in Nairobi. This number comprises 61 men and 64 women; 64 of whom were Kenyans, 16 from other African countries, 31 Europeans, 10 from the Americas (the United States, Canada and Latin America), 1 from Japan and 1 from Turkey, and 3 who described themselves as mixed, or dual, nationality (comprising a French-Irish man, an Italian-Croatian woman and a Kenyan-Italian man). My informants included managers as well as field workers and programme officers; consultants; administrative staff; people working for UN agencies; former aid workers; and those providing counselling and support services to aid workers. In addition, there were many others I met at official meetings or social settings who I would not classify as research participants as there was no formal discussion about my research, nor about their role as informant or mine as researcher.

The 125 research participants have been disaggregated by different categories in the tables and charts over the next few pages.
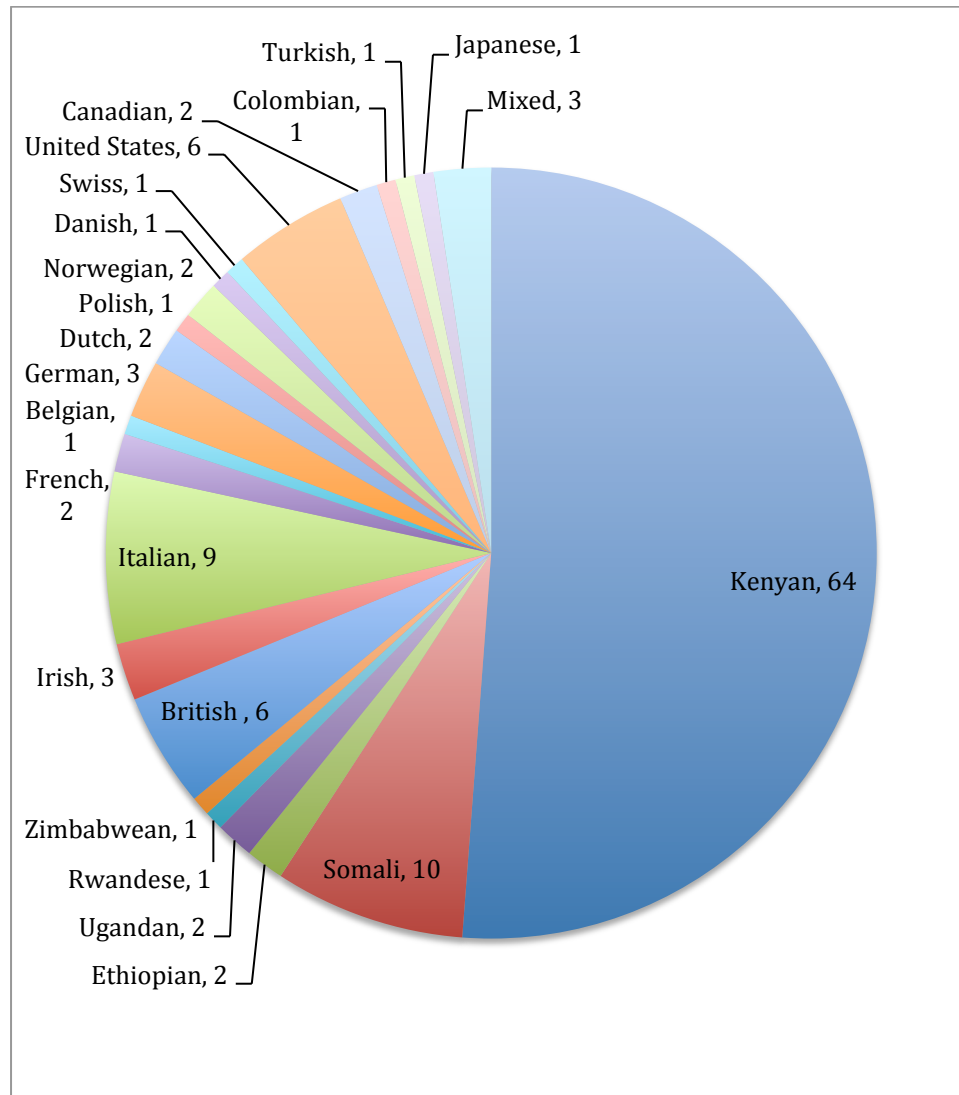
Figure i: All participants by nationality
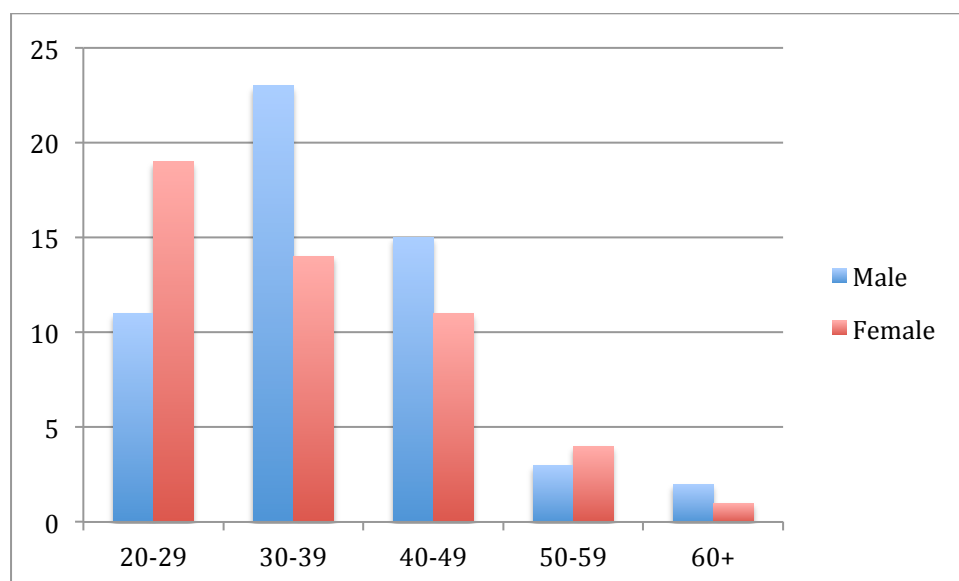
Figure ii: Age range of participants by gender
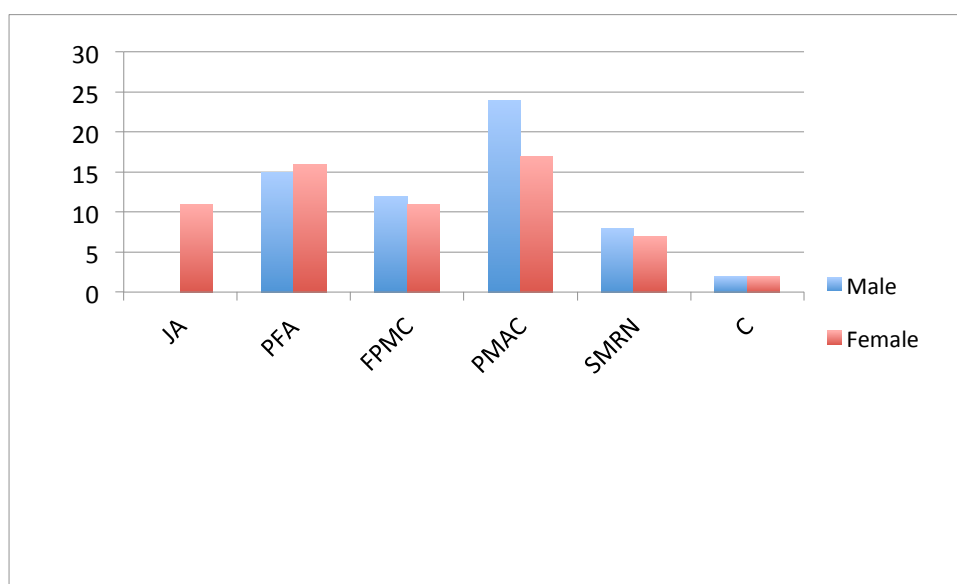
Figure iii: Professional role by gender
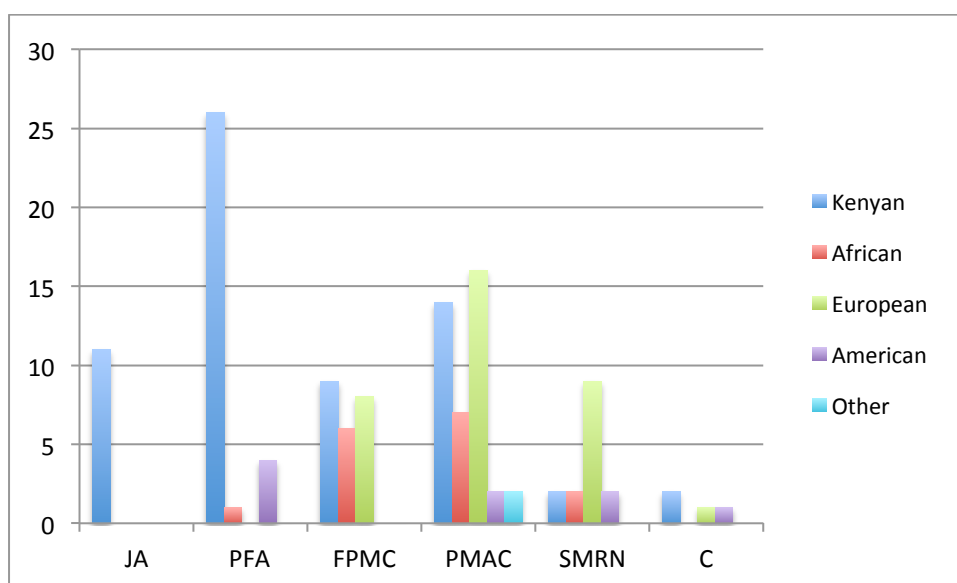
Figure iv: professional role by regional identity

In figure iii and iv, I have divided up the professional roles into generic categories: junior/assistant, programme/field officer, field project manager/co-ordinator, programme manager/adviser/co-ordinator, senior/national/regional manager, consultant. These are not wholly accurate categories for several reasons. Firstly, the job titles of aid workers are rarely that straightforward; over the years organisations have

become increasingly creative in their positions and job titles and it is not always easy to discern where exactly they fit on the professional ladder. Although I always asked my informants what their actual job was, I did not find out about their salaries. I have therefore created categories here that are approximate representations of what I understood my informants to be doing, and of the related professional status this was likely to imply. Further explanation for each professional role is below.

Junior/Assistant (JA): receptionist, administrator, programme or project assistant

Programme/field officer (PFA): works on particular programme e.g. emergencies, protection – but with no managerial function.

Field project manager/co-ordinator (FPMC): Based in the field (Turkana) and manages or co-ordinates project and/or staff there

Programme manager/adviser/co-ordinator (PMAC): Based in field or Nairobi, manages/advises/co-ordinates national or regional programme

Senior manager (regional/national) (SMRN): Holds the most senior position at national level, covering Kenya and/or neighbouring countries e.g. Country or Regional Director

Consultant (C): Self-employed, or working for a consultancy firm, as a researcher, advisor or expert on an aid agency programme

The interactions I had with the 125 participants varied considerably. One-to-one, recorded interviews were held in people's workplaces; there were long discussions over lunch, dinner or drinks; snippets of conversations in vehicles as I accompanied aid workers on field visits to project sites; contributions made through the stress management workshop; and insights gained less from talking and more from witnessing body language and emotional responses in a range of settings, including yoga workshops, dinner parties and at people's homes or offices. This is where ethnography's value can be seen clearly; where certain patterns, gestures or behavioural cues emerge that aren't contained solely within the interaction of an interview. For example, on occasions where I met informants multiple times, in different settings, I could contextualise more easily the struggles they spoke about to me in a one-to-one interview. Their habits – such as frequent yawning, or often being late to meet me because of work-related commitments – became more apparent and added meaning to the verbal expressions of tiredness or feeling under

pressure. The time I spent in Turkana enabled me to witness first-hand the day-to-day realities of living in an enclosed and remote environment, with few leisure activities and far from family and friends, and where staff accommodation was often situated metres away from their office; such observations are crucial in understanding the structural nature of the challenges that were being described to me by people working there. Participating in social interactions among aid workers in Turkana and Nairobi was also hugely valuable in understanding ways in which 'stress' was articulated and discussed (or not spoken about at all) and also managed through activities ranging from yoga to drinking alcohol. Spending extended periods of time with informants in their work environment allowed me to pick up on these discourses and practices, as well as identify silences and the unspoken and the meanings behind them (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010).

The ways in which I met with and talked to my informants very much depended on two elements: where I was meeting them (in Nairobi or Turkana), and whether they were a Kenyan or an international. The ensuing sections of this chapter will illustrate what research activities I pursued in the two research sites; who I spoke to, the difficulties of access, and the reasons behind these difficulties.

Nairobi

I chose Nairobi as my initial field site as I believed I knew the city sufficiently well to access a range of aid workers fairly easily, mainly through 'snowballing'. An option for my methodology may have been to embed myself within one NGO, as an employee or intern, but I had decided against this for two reasons. Firstly, I was not confident that this would be the best way of interacting with aid workers about what could be sensitive and personal issues, since any discussions in the workplace might leave them feeling exposed and monitored or judged by their employers. Secondly, I was concerned that confining myself to working with one organisation could limit my ability to work with the diversity of the sector, and discover nuances, patterns, similarities and differences among staff employed by other organisations.

These factors meant that I did not have the cushioning of the NGO that was employing me to help me meet new people or guide me through the city. And in spite of having lived and worked in Nairobi previously, there was still much I was unfamiliar with, and needed to learn about, in order to ensure I collected rich and varied data; such as where different

NGOs and aid agencies were located, and how to tap into places where I could meet aid workers, such as networking events, NGO coalition meetings and organised social gatherings.

International aid organisations in Nairobi are located in the city's more affluent suburbs, which are also the home to most of the international staff; suburbs in the north and west of the city, such as Gigiri, Westlands, Kilimani and Lavington. These areas were also where I ended up conducting most of my research in Nairobi; whether this was meeting an informant at their office, or at a local café during their lunch hour, or a bar or restaurant in the evening or at weekends. My first few months in Nairobi were spent reaching out to other people I knew there, seeing if they could put me in touch with anyone for my research and networking, particularly with NGO coalitions and inter-agency consortiums. One international NGO I approached via a friend who had worked there also sent out an email to their staff on my behalf, outlining my research and requesting participants; this only yielded one interview, although I was to have greater success with this NGO when I met some of their staff working in Turkana. I presented my research at a couple of NGO coalition meetings, with mixed results. In the first meeting of this kind, I discussed the research with a group of human resources managers from different INGOs; whilst they were interested in what I was doing, it became problematic attempting to get past the red tape and actually speak to any of their staff. This experience indicated to me that accessing aid workers through their organisation was not the best way of approaching people, and I had similar obstacles when meeting the management personnel of other organisations. I wondered at the time whether they were nervous about what negative revelations about their employers may emerge from staff who talked to me; revelations that had the potential of damaging the well-polished public image of these organisations. On the back of particularly damning evidence of the aid sector's failures in the duty of care of staff,[18] which came to light in the year I was conducting field research, it's quite possible that managers were fearful of what could emerge from the sort of research I was doing. An additional factor worth considering is that staff themselves may have felt suspicious about the intentions of a research request initiated by management; this may explain why only

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[18] In November 2015 an aid worker called Steven Dennis won his court case against his employer, Norwegian Refugee Council. The organisation was found guilty of gross negligence and failure in its duty of care, and liable for the physical and psychological injuries Dennis had suffered as a result of being kidnapped and shot at by Somali militants in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Another staff member was killed in the attack.

one person agreed to meet me following the first international NGO's email to staff about my research.

Another presentation with a different NGO coalition nevertheless yielded more successful results; one of the participants at the meeting, the regional director of a European NGO, was interested in my research and eventually suggested I run a stress management workshop with her staff. The workshop was attended by 22 staff members, the majority of whom were Kenyan but also included Somali, Italian and French aid workers. The workshop was an opportunity for me to expand my methodology beyond pure ethnography, and to organise an action research initiative which was aimed at supporting staff to reflect together on the challenges they face in their work and how they may overcome them. The workshop ran over two days in a conference venue not far from the organisation's office in Nairobi, and consisted of a variety of quite different sessions; ranging from group discussions on key challenges in the workplace and how stress appears in the physical body, to 'inner work' – reflections and writing exercises on individual motivations and examples of overcoming challenges – to trying out various self-care techniques such as breathing exercises. A stress management manual was produced after the workshop, where I included outlines of the exercises and participants' responses to them, which was then circulated among the staff. I also followed up with some of the participants with one-to-one interviews.

In Nairobi I also became friends with particular international aid workers, mainly Europeans, who I met at networking events or who I was put in touch with via friends in the sector. My own living situation in Nairobi also helped to some degree; I lived in a large country-style house in Lavington, with a German woman working for a German development agency, and a British man working as a development consultant. The house was popular as a site for yoga classes, thanks to the owner himself being a yoga enthusiast. This provided opportunities for me to organise yoga workshops at the house, which were attended by some of my international informants. I also joined a number of social networks and groups found through Facebook and the online social platform 'Meetup', with the aim of meeting both Kenyans and internationals. Although these were often attended by a mixture of Kenyan and international professionals who had money to spare for these types of social gatherings, aid workers I met, if there were any, were usually Europeans.

My meetings with Kenyans in Nairobi largely took place during working hours, either at their offices or nearby. This entailed a certain formality that was not as obvious in the interactions I had with my international informants in the more social settings. Whilst Kenyans were happy to meet with me, the time was limited to their lunch hour, or a break from work in their office; so I often felt pushed for time and unable to build a lasting relationship given both the time limitations and the sense that only certain information would be divulged whilst speaking in an office environment. The social differences that emerged from my efforts to access Kenyan and international aid workers are important findings in themselves, and will be given due attention in the empirical chapters. However they are also worthy of some recognition here, as they affected the way in which I conducted my research. It highlights how methodology meets theory in the practice of ethnography; my struggles with spending time with Kenyans outside a timebound interview and my comparative success with seeing international staff outside working hours are part of the differentials of power and privilege between these groups which are interrogated in my findings.

Part of the reason why I was able to meet aid workers from the global north in Nairobi more easily was that their social lives existed mostly within the wealthy city suburbs that I knew well from having lived in Nairobi before, and where I also lived during my field research. In contrast, some of the Kenyans I met told me that they lived a long way from their office, in parts of Nairobi with which I was unfamiliar. Without an explicit invitation, and directions, it was thus hard for me to access Kenyans' private lives; and invitations in Nairobi were not forthcoming. Although I didn't ask the marital status of all my informants, I was aware that the majority of Kenyans, unlike the Europeans and Americans I met, were married with children. This is another possible reason for their lack of availability outside working hours. The apparently separate social lives of western expatriates and Kenyans was an issue I discussed with both national and international informants and will be analysed more thoroughly in the findings chapters.

Whilst it was easier for me to meet and get to know internationals – particularly Europeans - in Nairobi, I was still faced with considerable challenges. They too, a lot of the time, did not seem ready to invite me into their social circle. I had assumed that much of my field research might be spent at the parties and social gatherings with which I was very

familiar from my days working for INGOs in Nairobi. These gatherings – mainly of Europeans and Americans, some but not all of them aid workers - were held either at people's homes or in one of the many bars or restaurants in the suburbs popular with foreigners. Whilst I did attend a small number of such gatherings during field research, I was surprised that more invitations to these sorts of events did not materialise.

In addition, on numerous occasions – particularly with my international informants - social arrangements such as meeting for coffee or lunch were cancelled or postponed. There are several examples of this, two of which I've summarised below to illustrate how these incidents occurred.

Anna, the American country director of an INGO, postponed our meetings several times due to being ill or having travelled to the field. She then became very hostile to me when I was unable to meet her at a time and place that she suggested very much at the last minute, and which I was unable to travel to promptly because of bad traffic. She refused to speak to me after that, and accused me of disrespecting her, her organisation and the beneficiaries.

Tim was a British man working for a UN agency who claimed he'd suffered from PTSD when I first met him in November 2015 and told him about my research. Despite saying he'd happily talk to me further about his experiences, I did not see Tim again because he either didn't reply to my emails or would tell me he was very busy with travelling to Somalia for his work.

Although hard to prove, one way of interpreting these setbacks is to suggest that some of my informants felt uncomfortable about my research topic; they may have been interested in it from an academic perspective, but they did not want to put the spotlight on themselves and discuss their personal difficulties with a stranger. The fact that in both these examples, there were indications that these aid workers were struggling, or had struggled in the past, with health problems renders this possibility all the more compelling. They may have perceived certain risks in admitting openly to these problems; such as damaging their status, particularly those in managerial positions which carry certain expectations of responsibility and capability. I was reminded also in my

interactions with managers such as Anna that they are gatekeepers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 50) to my research site – elites who are likely to view me as an outsider, in spite of my professional credentials (Herod, 1999) - and may have felt a duty to protect both themselves and the reputation of their organisation. There is also the possibility that people were reluctant to talk to me because of the perceived risk to their jobs. A number of aid workers I spoke to suggested that stress is a very sensitive subject in the aid sector, one not openly or easily discussed, because people fear the impact this might have on their job and role within their organisation. These problems highlight the challenges of researching what Smirl called "a closed tribe," whose members generally do not wish to discuss with outsiders the thorny issues concerning the conditions they work in, for which they may be partly responsible (Smirl, 2015: 13).

These access difficulties prompted a rethink about where to focus my research, and my decision to travel up to Turkana and meet aid workers 'in the field'. I knew that people working in remote areas were likely to have more time on their hands, and being there would give me direct insight into the everyday challenges of aid work in a very different way from what I'd learned thus far from my interactions with aid workers in Nairobi.

It was from the time of my first visit to Turkana, in late May 2016, that my research began to make more steady progress. As well as being able to speak to aid workers in the field, the friendships I'd developed in Nairobi led, more positively than previously, to further research opportunities. This is perhaps typical of the slow, organic and unpredictable experience of ethnographic field research; a process that "is characterized by partial understanding, as well as floods of insight, in a process that is more spiral in nature than linear and cumulative" (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 19).

I will turn now to my experiences in Turkana.

Turkana

Turkana is one of Kenya's poorest counties, although when I travelled there it was receiving increased interest and investment due to the recent discovery of oil reserves in the region. Located approximately 500km north of Nairobi, Turkana is a fairly inaccessible and inhospitable place, due to the hot and dry climate, the rough terrain and largely

untarmacked roads, which become particularly difficult to navigate during the brief but heavy rainy seasons.

I visited Turkana three times over the course of my field research, staying in the county capital, Lodwar, twice and Kakuma refugee camp twice. In Lodwar I was initially put in touch with aid workers by a Kenyan man who worked for a local NGO, and was a contact of a friend of mine in Nairobi. I first travelled to Lodwar in late May 2016.

Most of the NGO programmes being implemented in the areas around Lodwar are focused on long-term development, and increasingly involve collaboration and partnership with the new county structure that was established following Kenya's 2013 elections. There were two prominent programmes like this in Lodwar when I was there in 2016, both of which were being implemented through a consortium of NGOs, county government authorities and donors. One was the Food for Assets programme, where food and monetary incentives for the pastoralist community were combined with technical support to build more sustainable livelihoods and implement community assets and public works projects. The other was the Hunger Safety Net programme, a cash transfer initiative aimed at the poorest communities suffering from drought in the region, which also had a strong social protection component where beneficiaries were being trained on their rights to access basic services. The majority of aid workers I met were part of these joint development initiatives.

On some occasions I was faced with similar bureaucratic obstacles to those I'd experienced in Nairobi; particularly seemingly suspicious managers who, in this instance, requested I seek authorisation to interview their staff via the senior management in Nairobi. Knowing this would in all likelihood be a lengthy, and quite possibly unsuccessful, endeavour, I avoided pursuing such authorisation and instead worked with the INGOs – staff and managers - who were more approachable and willing to talk to me. In general, however, I found in Lodwar that aid workers – most of whom were Kenyan - had more time and willingness to talk to me, both during and outside working hours.

This was partly because the Kenyans I met were not from Turkana and had their partner and family in other parts of the country. They would visit their families on their 'R and R' -

the compulsory rest and recuperation break written into the contracts of most INGO staff in Turkana. These usually lasted 5 to 7 days and occurred every 8-10 weeks. Without these regular family commitments, the Kenyans in Lodwar had little to do when they weren't in their office; there are few bars or restaurants to go to, nor places to relax or take exercise. The blistering heat – which climbs to over 40 degrees Celsius in the dry season – means that after 7 a.m. it is too hot to move around unless absolutely necessary. The heat brought a certain sleepy and relaxed atmosphere to the offices I visited, as I remarked in my research journal:

> The standard working hours for NGOs here seems to be 8 or 9 until 1, then a 2 hour lunch break, followed by another 2 more office hours, finishing at 5. I don't blame them for the long lunch break actually, given how hot it is at that time.
>
> [Research journal entry, 31 May 2016]

The slow pace of work, and the few pressures or commitments outside office hours, meant that I was able to build relationships fairly quickly, and meet with some of my informants a second time when I returned to Lodwar again in late June.

On my first trip to Lodwar I stayed for two weeks. I spent two days travelling to field sites with a faith-based NGO; this included food distributions to the Turkana pastoralist community in the remote and arid landscape outside Lodwar, and visits to health clinics further north alongside Lake Turkana to monitor the use of nutritional supplements the NGO had provided for mothers and babies. I also met individuals in their offices, went for a meal at Lodwar's only luxury hotel with one of my informants, and attended an evangelical church service along with a number of aid workers who were part of the congregation. On my second visit, lasting four days, I had follow-up meetings with some of the aid workers I'd met on my previous trip and was introduced to a few more.

I found a different set of circumstances on my visits to Kakuma refugee camp, situated 120km to the northwest of Lodwar, and not far from the South Sudanese border. Kakuma is home to approximately 180,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan but also from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. A host of aid agencies line the south-eastern rim of the camp, in large purpose built, gated compounds that house their staff and their offices. These compounds include a staff canteen, usually

serving up goat or chicken and rice, chapatti or ugali (a common Kenyan staple, consisting of maize cooked to a dough-like consistency); due to the hot climate and remote location, it is difficult to have a varied diet with regular fruit and vegetables in Turkana. Most aid agency staff spend the majority of their time outside working hours confined to the compound in which they live – residing in small air-conditioned prefabs or shabby guesthouse rooms - or at the facilities or social spaces in neighbouring compounds. The UNHCR compound was particularly popular because of its gym, football pitch and running track. Few people ever travelled into Kakuma town, which has little to offer beyond some basic grocery stores and small market stalls. Social gatherings usually took place at the occasional party thrown by one of the humanitarian agencies, or the few local bars in the area serving up beer and nyama choma (grilled meat).

I was to stay in two of these humanitarian compounds on my visits to Kakuma; first in early June 2016 – when I travelled there on the bumpy five hour road trip from Lodwar – and two months later in August, when I flew there direct from Nairobi. In June, I went to Kakuma with one of the NGOs whose regional manager I had met in Lodwar; she organised for me to go in a vehicle with some of the staff who were conducting a monitoring visit in the host community – the Turkana villages outside the camp – where the NGO had been implementing a water and sanitation programme. This was a challenging and not wholly satisfactory trip, as I spent most of the time in the UN compound where I was staying, unable to travel into the refugee camp a few minutes' walk away from the compound. This was because in order to access the camp I either needed to go directly to the camp's co-ordinating agency – the UNHCR – to get authorisation to enter, or I needed to be hosted by an NGO who could escort me into the camp. As I had neither of these to my advantage, I was confined for the majority of the time to the compound. I also struggled to get to know any of the staff living there, the majority of whom were Kenyans who set off each day to work in the camp and did not return until the evening. I found the compound an unfriendly place, as I commented in my research journal:

> This place is weird. I've only had one night at the guest house and I'm wondering how much longer I can stick it out for. So much for thinking that, it being a guest house, I'd easily meet and chat to people; there's barely a nod to say hello among most of the people I've seen so far at lunch, dinner or breakfast this morning. People are either sitting on their own, half watching T.V. and half on their phones, or they are in well-established groups, occupied in their own conversation. Either

way, I don't feel at all that I could just turn up at a table and sit and chat with anybody.

[Research Journal entry, 3 June 2016]

Out of shyness and discomfort around the aid workers on the compound, I rarely approached anybody to speak to them, and as a result I collected very little data. I did however travel to the Turkana villages with the Kenyan aid worker who I accompanied in the car from Lodwar, and met with international aid workers on their organisation's compounds a few hundred metres from where I was staying.

The following factors may help explain why I found it so hard to meet or talk to many people on this first trip to Kakuma. It will have been obvious to others on the compound where I was staying that I was alone and not affiliated with any organisation; I had no colleagues with me (the NGO staff who drove me from Lodwar stayed elsewhere), nor accompanying me in and out of the compound. I usually travelled out on foot – a rarity for most aid workers there who, due to security protocols, are required to move around in vehicles. Perhaps in this way I stood out as a stranger of sorts; clearly not an aid worker and thus possibly worthy of some suspicion.

The second trip to Kakuma, in August, was largely more successful than the first. This was because my transport to and from Kakuma, which this time was on a UN chartered flight, was organised through a faith-based NGO who also hosted me at their guesthouse in one of the humanitarian compounds. The Italian country director, based in Nairobi, travelled with me to Kakuma and introduced me to the staff, and encouraged me to interview any of them and accompany them on daily trips into the refugee camp. I therefore had access to the sites where the NGO worked in the camp, and could observe their interactions with the 'beneficiaries'– refugees receiving educational and psychosocial support from the organisation. Being in the camp each day for the one week that I was there also connected me to other aid workers. In addition, a Kenyan aid worker I'd met in Nairobi but who worked in Kakuma had put me in touch with some of his friends and colleagues from other organisations. It meant that for this second visit, I had plenty of people to meet and, like Lodwar, they had more time for me than in Nairobi. This was due to the lifestyle and working conditions there: there is little to do outside working hours, and Kakuma is regarded by aid agencies as a 'non-family duty station.' These are areas deemed too unsafe

or inhospitable for aid workers to bring their partners or families, and entailed that the aid workers I met in Kakuma were living there on their own, despite – in the case of the Kenyans I met - many of them being married with children. Seeing how the policies and systems associated with the humanitarian compound played out in practice – in terms of the bounded ways in which staff spent their time – proved to be an essential part of the ethnographic process, and of understanding the challenges of living in these environments beyond what I was being told in interviews.

During all these trips up to Turkana – both Lodwar and Kakuma – I found that I was mainly interacting with Kenyans and other Africans, not aid workers from the global north. In the case of Lodwar, this was primarily because I didn't actually see or meet many non-Kenyan aid workers based there. In Kakuma however, I saw them working in the camp and at some of the humanitarian compounds, particularly UNHCR. I had thought that perhaps I might get to know one or two of the European or American aid workers I'd been put in touch with, and be invited along to one of their parties - which were a regular occurrence, according to another doctoral researcher I met in Kakuma. This did not happen, and my one proper interaction with a group of British and Americans over lunch at one of the compounds on my first visit in June 2016 – which is expanded upon in detail in Chapter 4 - felt slightly uncomfortable; I got the sense that they were nervous about my research and how much they were willing to divulge in front of me. I recorded this tension in my field notes:

> When I told them about my research, Bill too seemed quite shocked that Jessica was talking to me. 'Are you allowed to do that?' he asked at one point. Jessica remained unbothered. But I sensed Bill in particular became more guarded once he knew I was a researcher. Certain comments were muttered and then qualified with 'so long as it's off the record', or, more jokingly, 'oh but there's no stress really!'
>
> [Field notes, 4 June 2016]

Bill was suggesting here that Jessica, an American woman working with one of the UN agencies, was not authorised to talk publicly about her organisation; a rule stipulated to all UN staff and which I was warned about on other occasions when I approached UN officials about my research. Despite my assurances that this research was not about the UN as such, and that specific agencies would not be named, the rule about public disclosure

appeared to influence the extent to which people were willing to talk to me. Another UN staff member, a Kenyan man who I met in Kakuma, expressed similar concern about how much we could discuss. Jessica herself told me later that afternoon that she had been cautious not to tell me anything that might be viewed as incriminating. She also suggested that most of her colleagues at the UN probably wouldn't want to talk openly about being stressed as this would be seen by their employers as poor performance; a claim I will return to in more detail in the findings chapters. This exchange nevertheless gave me a very good indication of the suspicions that were likely to affect me as a researcher, particularly given my research topic; and could explain why neither Jessica, nor any of the friends of hers that I met, were interested in seeing me again after our first meeting.

The fact that I had more success in talking to aid workers on my second trip to Kakuma could partly be attributed to having one of the NGOs there endorsing my research, and also to the fact that I changed my approach slightly; taking on board the concerns raised by the UN staff I spoke to, I tried to explain my research in far more general terms – avoiding the word 'stress' and just focusing on 'challenges' – in order to allow people to talk about whatever they felt was important or relevant. Rich data also came out of interactions that weren't strictly interviews but participant observation; particularly when I was accompanying the staff of the NGO that was hosting me to some of their projects. My visits to Turkana, both Lodwar and Kakuma, thus provided me with rewarding opportunities for ethnographic inquiry and access to social and professional spaces inhabited by aid workers which had hitherto been difficult to navigate.

Data Analysis: identifying case studies and emerging patterns

I returned to Sussex in October 2016 with rich and varied data, from a greater number of research participants than I had envisaged when I travelled to Kenya the previous year. The challenge in what is otherwise a positive outcome to field research is identifying which stories and incidents are worthy of detailed analysis and inclusion in the thesis, and which are not. It was inevitable, given the ethnographic depth emerging from the stories presented in this thesis, that not all the people I interacted with could be included in the final draft; although there is still potential for their stories to appear in other published material. What is contained herein is the result of a great deal of data sifting and organising, and writing and editing. I started off this process by identifying some of the

key themes emerging from my ethnographic material which were then coded using Nvivo software: themes including love and family life, relationships with colleagues, morals and values, job security and compensation, and maintaining passion and purpose. These became a helpful way of quickly locating quotes or passages from transcripts as I was writing up. Some of these themes became written pieces of several pages where I highlighted the perspectives and reflections of some of my informants; and from these pages, parts were extracted and are now contained within the thesis. I also wrote individual case studies of particular individuals whose accounts covered a range of concerns and topics. It was through these writing exercises that patterns began to emerge, and where I was eventually able to move from mere description of what was said, to more detailed analysis, ideas and conclusions around the meaning behind their accounts. The time I spent in Turkana was helpful in enabling me to combine the challenges that were expressed to me regarding the very specific working and living conditions, with the realities I myself saw and experienced whilst I was there. In this respect, Chapter 4 concerning life on the humanitarian compound is a particularly good example of how aid policies and systems frame the informant's experience, thereby producing iterations of behaviour that became increasingly easy to spot as I analysed the data.

What also became clear from the data analysis was the importance of terminology around 'stress' and the degree to which this terminology is used. Certain incidents related to me that were undoubtedly stressful were not necessarily named as such. This was a cue for me to consider why this was the case, and why some people named 'stress' and pathologised it, whilst others did not. This is where the opening findings chapter – which follows this one – is of importance, as it highlights how my own assumptions that stress was 'a condition' for everybody had to be revised, thereby setting the stage for some of the other arguments contained within the thesis regarding narratives and discourses associated with aid work. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this is where ethnography has most value: through the production of rich data collected in a variety of situations, I was able to tune in more clearly to instances where common assumptions are being made (including by myself) – about a person, or a profession, for example – and find case studies where these assumptions are disrupted. The outcome is a thesis that highlights individual stories that challenge widely held beliefs and expectations about who the aid worker is, how they come to this profession, and how they approach their work.

Concluding Reflections: Positionality and the dilemmas of engaged research

Many of the challenges outlined in this chapter are common to ethnography; particularly with regard to access - which is often far harder than anticipated (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 41) - and building sufficient trust in research relationships (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 63-86).

Also at the heart of my struggles as a researcher in Kenya were my assumptions and beliefs about what type of research I was conducting. There were two related categories which informed much of my methodology; engaged and insider research.

Insider, because I was studying a professional sector and working environment that I identified myself as being part of, where much of the behaviour and discourse were already familiar to me. I also believed that my insider role would be seen as such by others, thereby granting me increased access to my research informants. I viewed myself as an engaged researcher because I had aims that reached beyond academic aspirations and were firmly focused on making a valuable contribution to the sector I was studying and in which I worked. Engaged ethnography entails a certain attachment to the values and interests of the group one is researching, and a commitment to contributing to meaningful change in the lives of that group. This association with the values and/or goals of the research subject is inevitably going to be an emotional endeavour, as Bartky has pointed out (Bartky, 1996) and, given the topic of my research, implied emotion would be centre stage in the experience.

Assuming particular researcher identities, such as being 'engaged' or an 'insider', increases the risk of essentialising one's positionality, leading to incorrect assumptions that overlook other identity differences between researcher and researched (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Mullings, 1999; Narayan, 1993). As my findings will demonstrate, race, nationality, class and gender all have a part to play in understanding how aid workers talk about and experience stress; and likewise they had a part to play in how I interacted with my informants, and what they chose to tell me. I have to consider that my status as a

white, middle-class, educated European woman places me in a position of power – a position with a particular legacy in a country such s Kenya, that was colonised by the British for many years - which may work against, rather than for, any aspirations I had about solidarity, or even friendship, with my Kenyan research participants. In addition, even though we may share certain professional experiences within the aid sector, how we got there – our motivations, what opportunities were available to us and the degree of support we received from our friends and family – are also likely to be different. These positionality claims are given greater validity through my research findings, but it is worth acknowledging them here as they serve to upend some of the assumptions made around insider research; ultimately, our position as insider or outsider is never fixed, and is heavily influenced by the 'who, what, where and how' of the research encounter (Mullings, 1999).

There are additional, more practical, problems that accompany these categories of research. For instance, in the case of insider research, being able to step away from what seems familiar and analyse it with fresh eyes; or, in the case of engaged research, being able to manage emotions that arise – with the informant as much as the researcher – in a caring, ethical manner that respects the wishes and interests of the researched population. In many ways the problems of these two research identities interlocked with each other as I conducted field research. It was because I had witnessed, and experienced, stress as an aid professional that I approached my informants in particular ways; often with a certain degree of emotionality and familiarity – 'I sympathise with what you're saying because I've been there/seen it before.'

Aside from the fact that familiarity can be a false assumption when considering one's position in relation to 'the other', there are ethical implications to having these sorts of sympathies towards one's research subjects. As an engaged researcher I was keen to allow the voices of those who have been neglected in aid and development discourses – particularly aid workers from the southern hemisphere – to speak for themselves; but in doing so, I had to question whether this was indeed for their own benefit, or whether such displays of vulnerability might cause them harm.

As Koboyashi highlights:

> [Research ethics] involve an ethical commitment, not only in the larger sense of making the world a better place but in the more immediate sense of understanding and taking responsibility for how one sets in motion the complex emotions that flow back and forth in the course of a research encounter, sometimes reaching beyond that moment to affect people's lives in more permanent ways, over which we may have no control.
>
> (Kobayashi, 2001: 60)

It is not easy to know when one has overstepped the mark in this respect; from giving space for one's research subject to speak, to indulging - in the interests of a good research story - in discomforting emotions that the subject would rather not have and does not know what to do with after the interview is finished. Whilst I was aware of the difficulties that could arise in this respect, and acknowledged them in my research outline, the realities and experiences of field research make it hard to know whether I was always following the lofty ethical principles I proclaimed before heading out to the field. Beyond explaining the purposes and anticipated use of my research, and seeking consent, it was often hard to know what my participants thought or felt about our encounter, even when I asked their opinion. I was told by some that the interview felt therapeutic or cathartic; but with others I went away feeling unsure about how they regarded our exchanges.

The key ethical question here is, did I harm anyone by taking the approach I did in my research? This is hard to give a categorical answer to, as I certainly did not see anyone appearing to suffer from our interactions; there were no occasions when it felt as if we were straying into dangerous ethical territory in terms of, for instance, reliving past traumas. Most of my informants did not know me before they sat down to be interviewed, so although they were often happy to relate particularly difficult moments they'd experienced, it felt much of the time like they did so with an element of guardedness; as if they were talking about another person at times, not themselves. In the space of what was often only an hour or two at the very most, there was little opportunity to go deep into personal feelings, even if they had wanted to. The majority of people I met who clearly had a story to tell of intense stress, burnout or trauma, grounded their story very much in the past tense; as something that happened some months or years previously, which no longer affected them now.

There were of course exceptions, two of whom immediately spring to mind, and who will be discussed in the findings chapters; one who had been recently diagnosed with vicarious trauma when I met her, and another who was told by her psychotherapist that she was going through a burnout. In both instances, I remained in contact with the informant after our initial interactions. In the former case – the woman diagnosed with vicarious trauma – I contacted her on a few occasions to see how she was doing, and although responsive, she also seemed preoccupied with the everyday stresses she was experiencing at the time related to her business and her children. She also moved from Kenya to the UK whilst I was still conducting field research, and I didn't hear from her again after she left. In the latter case - the woman experiencing burnout - we remained firm friends. In this instance, it felt very much as if my research, and my presence in her life, was an opportunity for the woman to share some of the problems she had been facing in what she believed was a safe space. I had to remind her on one particular occasion when I recorded our conversation, that what she was saying was quite sensitive and that this was being recorded, but she brushed this off as unimportant. In the end, I had to take responsibility as the researcher to separate what I felt was too personal to go in to the thesis, or any other publication, in order to ensure our friendship remained one of mutual understanding and trust; and I endeavoured to apply this principle to all my other informants as well. However the particular challenges I encountered with people I felt close to highlight the moral dilemmas that arise in the practice of research with friends or intimate others (Ellis, 2007); we want to be a sympathetic listener but also not to feel we are taking advantage, or encouraging these conversations for personal gain (Cotterill, 1992: 598).

I should also note here that both these women were European; the woman diagnosed with vicarious trauma was British and from a Jamaican background, and the woman with burnout was Belgian. And in both cases, we had worked for the same organisation. This immediately implied a certain commonality; we could share our experiences of cultural spaces with which we were both very familiar. These examples are perhaps where my claims to be conducting insider research are validated. But at risk of universalising our experience purely through our shared identities as women aid professionals who worked for the same organisation, I have to acknowledge too that other differences remained that no doubt distinguished our experiences; particularly in relation to race with the regard to the first informant and nationality with regard to the second. This acknowledgement highlights the fluidity that exists between being an insider or outsider in research, as

Mullings aptly shows when she discusses *positional spaces* that may arise in the researcher's interactions with informants*:*

> That is, areas where the situated knowledge of both parties in the interview encounter, engender a level of trust and co-operation. These positional spaces, however, are often transitory and cannot be reduced to the familiar boundaries of insider/outsider privilege based on viable attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity or class.
>
> (Mullings, 1999: 340)

These positional spaces were harder to find in my interactions with Kenyan aid workers, as other factors already noted earlier in this chapter – such as where they lived and how they spent their time outside office hours – had certain implications for, and created boundaries within, those interactions.

Another ethical question I have to ask myself is, did my research subjects gain anything from my research? This relates to the broader question of how to carry out research with 'Others' without reinscribing hegemonic social relations (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2013: 5). Engaged researchers may wish to make a meaningful contribution to improving people's lives, but this requires a degree of reflexivity; recognising how our identity affects the research process, and that our interests as social scientists may not correspond to the interests of those we are studying (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 219).

Researchers can of course attempt to make their research more collaborative, and to build lasting relationships with participants that outlive field work and are of mutual benefit. An interest that participants as well as the researcher have something to gain from the research encounter was clearly felt within the sector I was studying. I was told on many occasions by friends and colleagues that unless I was clear on how aid workers may benefit from my research, they would not be interested in speaking to me, as most people are too busy to talk to researchers. My difficulties in accessing aid workers in Nairobi, which I discussed earlier on in this chapter, may partly be explained by this supposed attitude; and conversely may also explain why aid workers in Turkana, who had more time on their hands outside working hours, seemed far more approachable and accessible.

With the aim of encouraging continuing exchange and interaction with my informants, I have remained in touch with some of them, both Kenyan and international, mainly via Facebook. This social media platform also provides an opportunity for my informants to read about my research, via my blog site which I established before travelling to Kenya. The blog site, which contains reflections on my research, but also suggestions and recommendations for how both individuals and organisations may better understand stress in the aid sector, was another element of disclosure when I sought consent from my participants. I hoped also that it was an easy means through which my participants could stay up to date with what I was doing, and possibly learn something helpful about stress in the aid sector.

The stress management workshop I organised in Nairobi towards the end of my field research, in August 2016, was a way of conducting research where there was greater opportunity for mutual gain. This was a workshop that was a joint planning effort with the organisation whose staff would be participating, but for which I was the sole facilitator. This form of action research was an opportunity to be more collaborative with my research subjects; to co-create knowledge that aims to be useful for, and in, action (Sykes and Treleaven, 2009: 216). Action research is a more structured way of ensuring that the knowledge constructed incorporates both the researcher's reflections and the research participant's insights. It is research aimed at fostering change and action, and the success of this aim depends on the degree to which the knowledge created in a particular context is taken up in action (Sykes and Treleaven, 2009).

Whilst this may have been a more collaborative research activity, compared with the interviews I conducted with my informants, I still cannot be fully confident of the value of the workshop – or any other research endeavour – to my participants. My continuing reflexivity means that I have to admit that I can never be sure if my research is achieving the aims of social change or justice, and whether I am fairly representing 'the Other' or simply reinforcing long established imbalances of power. Indeed, I reflected on these dilemmas in my research journal when I conducted the stress management workshop.

> Another thing that somehow made me nervous was my doubt as to whether I really had the authority to 'teach' these people about stress management. For instance, what right do I have to tell someone living and working in Somalia – who,

as [one participant] told me over lunch, is essentially risking their lives each day travelling to the field on roads that are regularly bombed – how to manage their stress?

[Research Journal entry, 1 September 2016]

This recognition of power as a white, western researcher may suggest that any form of ethnographic research, unless performed among those who share that position, is inherently unethical and exploitative. However, I would like to echo a point made by Lisa Cary in her reflections on researching 'the Other': that ethnography "may move beyond simplistic representations and respond to the ethnographic crisis" by "destabilising and disrupting essentialist assumptions" in order to "provide possibilities for other ways of knowing." (Cary, 2004: 79).

Applying this proposal to my research topic, I hope to use my status as researcher to highlight that although stress and related conditions such as burnout and PTSD may seem to be obvious occurrences in the aid sector, the way they are conceptualised and dealt with are in fact very different. These terms used to describe different forms of stress may be essentialising categories which increase the distance between self and other; they are categories that are commonplace in the western world and have found their way into aid sector jargon, but they are not necessarily talked about or lived in quite the same way in other parts of the world.

In order for me to grasp this reality, I had to travel a long way through my research process, with many dead ends and disappointments. I had to acknowledge that the reasons why I struggled to access or grasp the everyday lives of Kenyan aid workers had much to do with my own identity in their eyes, and the assumptions I was making about my research topic. I also had to make what may seem like an obvious discovery; that language has a huge influence on what is communicated in the research encounter. I travelled to Kenya assuming I did not need to learn Swahili, as I would be talking to aid workers – whose working language, I thought, would be English. In some respects this is correct, given that most NGO public material and reports are in English, and that nationals are usually having to communicate and interact with English-speaking people in the workplace every day. However, the growing localisation of aid work in Kenya, resulting in a greater number of Kenyan staff, has also led to the increased dominance of the Swahili,

or local, language. Particularly in organisations where I found no international staff – as was often the case in Lodwar – I noticed that my Kenyan informants clearly struggled to express themselves in English. In addition, there were moments where I was supposedly conducting 'participant observation' – such as accompanying Kenyan aid workers on monitoring visits to the field in Turkana – where in reality I was very much the outsider, as the conversations happening around me were all in the Swahili or Turkana language.

These challenges illustrate that in many respects I was not an insider at all; both my status as a researcher, and a white, European one as well, meant that I could not always get as close to people as perhaps I had wished. Pursuing an ethnographic approach has encouraged me to become more reflexive in this regard, and recognise that in spite of my credentials as an aid worker, my relationship with other aid workers – particularly from the global south – is steeped in and influenced by legacies of inequality and colonialism, and will have played a role in what was discussed and what was not (Scharff, 2013: 90). Narayan acknowledges that as anthropologists we need to recognise that, "even as insiders or partial insiders, in some contexts we are drawn closer, and in others we are thrust apart" (Narayan, 1993: 676). Nevertheless, conducting ethnography with a self-reflexive lens allows us to consider whether we go about representing our research subjects: "as mere fodder for self-serving statements about a generalized Other" or "as subjects with voices, views and dilemmas – people to whom we are bonded with ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise" (Narayan, 1993: 672).

It is in the spirit of reflexivity, reciprocity and the deconstruction of dominant western narratives that I now turn to the stories of my research subjects in the findings chapters. My research is an effort to show how in some respects our emotions bind us together and may be viewed as a collective experience; but in others they are individual and subjective, gendered, and racialised. In other words, my sense of solidarity with my participants due to my own emotional history in the aid sector does not necessarily translate into shared emotional experience. Audre Lorde's reflections on the differences between white and black female suffering are instructive:

> Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be

dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.

(Lorde, 2013: 119)

My own story, and the extremely varied stories of those I met in Kenya, seeks to highlight that differences exist, but have the potential for a greater collective understanding, and change, in how stress and related suffering is addressed within the aid sector. Audre Lorde's words again resonate as the thesis turns to the research findings.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals.

(Lorde, 2013: 123)

CHAPTER 3

NAMING AND CLAIMING STRESS IN THE AID SECTOR

"I think they also don't necessarily understand what it is, a lot of them. [...] The first person I officially told was [my Congolese colleague]. [...] They were the ones that were like 'Go to [your home country], go see a real doctor, to figure out what you have'. And I just basically in that conversation said I'm having a burnout, and he was like, 'a what'? And I was like, 'a burnout' and he was like, 'I have never heard of that, like what is that, I've never heard about it.' So I kind of just said, 'Google it'."

[Interview with Marie, Nairobi, 26 December 2017]

Marie is a European woman in her thirties who works for a large international NGO. During the time of my field research Marie had suffered several health problems which had affected her physically and psychologically, and on some occasions she would tell me she suspected she was having "a burnout". However, it was only a year after I left Kenya, when I saw Marie again in late 2017, that she had become so ill that her doctor in her home country – who she had seen on a visit there a couple of months previously – had suggested she take at least 6 weeks of sick leave. Her Dutch psychotherapist in Kenya, who Marie had been seeing for almost two years, had also told Marie she believed she was going through a burnout, and had written a letter for Marie's organisation which gave recommendations about how to address her health problems.

In the quote above, Marie refers to the colleagues she works most closely with – all of whom are from Africa – advising her to seek help in her home country; reaffirming what Marie had already experienced – the difficulty of getting a proper diagnosis for her illness in Kenya. Marie told me it was only her Dutch psychotherapist in Nairobi, and some of her European colleagues who work in the organisation's London headquarters, that suggested that her health problems were linked to burnout. As highlighted in the quote, when she used this term to explain to her Congolese colleague what her illness was, he gave a perplexed response: he had never heard of this term.

This exchange between two colleagues, neither of whom has English as their first language, may simply be an example of phrases getting lost in translation; but it could also

point to the ways in which words like 'burnout', or 'trauma', or even 'stress' are socially constructed and culturally situated. In the case of aid workers their use may be commonplace, but for some people more than others. This possibility is further highlighted in another interaction I had, with a Kenyan aid worker called Morani in Kakuma refugee camp. In a discussion with him and four of his male colleagues about their understanding of stress, Morani told me:

> "To me it is a foreign concept. Not foreign but, er…it is not a concept instilled in me. As in at no one point can I tell someone 'I'm stressed' because I don't really understand what stress means. Because is it when I have a problem? Is it when I have a deadline to make and I have not submitted at the important time? So…I cannot really be able to quantify this stress, what exactly we are talking about so…and in essence then I cannot be able to know how to deal with it."
>
> [Focus group discussion, Kakuma, 22 August 2018]

Morani and his colleagues concluded that talking or complaining about stress and using support mechanisms such as counselling were "not so African"; this was because, they believed, stress was part of everyday life in Africa and therefore not worthy of analysis.

In this chapter I wish to explore how the diversity of human experience and understanding of the world has implications for the ways in which stress-related conditions are described and understood. I examine how terms such as stress, burnout, or post-traumatic stress disorder are used in the aid sector – by whom, and in what context. I will investigate who does and does not claim an affinity with this terminology, and why. Lastly, I will consider how the aid industrial complex influences the ways in which these terms are recognised and articulated, and the implications this has for the expression of personal problems.

I use the word 'stress' in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, because it is a term which is at the centre of my research question. Yet this chapter also illustrates that 'stress' and related conditions such as 'burnout' are socially and culturally constructed, and have limited meaning or relevance in some contexts. However, to fully deconstruct or de-universalise this terminology may be another research project in itself and beyond the scope of this thesis. The chapter should nevertheless be helpful in challenging

assumptions that such terminologies and meanings related to our emotional, physical and mental behaviour and responses apply equally in all settings.

I will proceed first with an overview of the literature on stress-related illnesses in the aid sector. This literature suggests that definitions of mental and emotional distress are often Eurocentric; couched in a language that emerged from and speaks to societies in the western world, primarily Europe and the United States. Furthermore, as my ethnographic material demonstrates, it is often through diagnosis by clinicians that use this language that aid workers begin to pathologise their own experience; to label their experience as an illness in need of a medical response. I will follow this with some suggestions as to how different cosmologies can frame the way personal suffering is identified and articulated. Examples from Somali and Kenyan aid workers demonstrate that stress is not always pathologised in the same way using clinical or medical terms; whilst certain terminonologies and behaviour concerning stress carry social stigma in particular societies, there is at times supernatural meaning-making of moments of emotional distress that support those who are suffering. I will then address the role of living conditions and the degree of choices available to aid workers in seeking support for challenges in their lives. Claims made by my informants about the resilience of Somali aid workers will be given particular attention. In a situation where suffering is part of 'the everyday', aid workers in these contexts often find ways of coping that may differ from those who do not live permanently in these environments. I will build on some of these issues concerning the social, economic and structural factors that influence aid workers' experiences, particularly how they are treated in the workplace, in the section that follows. I will show how the status of 'national' or 'international' staff implies specific treatment that affects the ability to deal with health issues. In the final part of this chapter, I explore how some of my informants' descriptions of health problems and other challenges were highly gendered; shaped by the masculinised discourse and working environment of the aid sector. These institutional parameters at times encourage certain forms of discussion and expression related to stress, whilst silencing others.

The discourse of aid worker stress and its origins

Extreme stress, trauma and burnout have been increasingly recognised conditions within the aid sector in recent years. They have been narrated by aid workers themselves in essays and memoirs (Elliott, 2013; Hoppe, 2014; Thomson et al., 2006) and through the media, in online newspapers[19] and on social network sites. The Facebook group 'Fifty Shades of Aid' was established by some women aid workers in 2015 primarily as a means for people in the sector to discuss incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace. With its current membership at over 20,000, it is increasingly used as a platform for sharing and seeking solidarity and support around difficult experiences within the sector, including what some members describe as periods of 'burnout'. The discussions taking place in the group (whose code of conduct prohibits the sharing of personal stories outside the group without permission) would suggest that 'burnout' and other forms of mental or emotional distress such as 'anxiety' or 'depression' are universally recognised terms in the sector, and that they are common conditions suffered by both national and international staff.

Indeed, as I indicated in the introduction, a number of studies appear to support this possibility. A survey of aid workers conducted by the Guardian newspaper in 2015 (Young, 2015) found that approximately twenty per cent of their 754 self-selected respondents had suffered from PTSD and panic attacks, whilst forty-four per cent suffered from depression. Academic studies addressing the health and wellbeing of aid workers have referred to the increasing instances of burnout in both national and international staff working in emergency settings (Cardozo et al., 2005; Eriksson et al., 2009).

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[19] The 'Secret Aid Worker' series in the Development Professionals Network section of the Guardian is one example (worker, 2015).

Measuring stress and burnout

The term 'burnout' is often described using the psychologist Christina Maslach's definition:

> A syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity.
>
> (Maslach et al, 1996, cited in Schaufeli et al., 2009: 206)

Studies into burnout and other stress-related conditions in the aid sector use measuring tools that have been long established in Europe and the United States: these include the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Eriksson et al., 2009), the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (Cardozo et al., 2005) and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Comoretto et al., 2011).

Stress-related illnesses have also been given detailed definitions by organisations providing psycho-social support to aid workers. The Headington Institute, for instance, uses a framework of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual characteristics for aid workers to identify whether they may be suffering from a stress-related condition or disorder.

Physical	Mental	Emotional
Sleep disturbances	Poor concentration	Mood swings
Changes in appetite	Confusion and disorganized thoughts	Feeling 'over emotional'
Stomach upsets	Forgetfulness	Irritability
Rapid heart rate	Difficulty making decisions	Anxiety
Fatigue	Dreams or nightmares	Depression

Muscle tremors and tension	Intrusive thoughts	Anger
Back and neck pain		Emotional numbness
Headaches		
Inability to relax and rest		
Easily startled		
Spiritual	**Behavioural**	
Feelings of emptiness	Risk-taking (e.g. driving recklessly)	
Loss of meaning	Over- or under-eating	
Discouragement and loss of hope	Increased smoking	
Cynicism	Listlessness	
Doubt	Hyper-alertness	
Anger at God	Aggression	
Alienation/loss of sense of connection		

Adapted from Headington Institute/Lisa McKay, *Understanding and Coping with Traumatic Stress, Online Training Module One* (McKay, 2007)

These sorts of instruments, and the findings that arise from them, may be problematic, and unreliable; particularly when applied in cross-cultural settings, or in developing countries that are far away – geographically, socially and culturally – from the regions from which these instruments were developed and validated. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, for instance, was a condition first identified to describe the experiences of Vietnam war veterans; referring to men who went from a situation of relative normality into war, then returned back into normality (Honwana, 1998: 108). The relevance of the diagnostic features of this condition to populations who are born into and who live within conflict situations thus needs to be questioned.

In addition, the responses to these surveys do not always accurately reflect the demographics of the research site, nor of the broader aid sector. It is well established that approximately ninety per cent of people working in the sector are nationals operating in their own countries in the southern hemisphere (Swithern, 2014; Egeland et al., 2011). Yet the focus in the literature is often on the experiences of international staff, with little acknowledgement that the experiences of national staff may be very different. This extends to the ways in which they may understand and deal with stress-related conditions, and raises the question as to whether diagnostic instruments originating from European and American societies and which are referred to widely in NGO literature addressing staff care, are relevant or useful in describing the experiences of aid workers from countries in the global south, where this terminology is not so commonplace.

Social scientists and psychologists writing about the mental health of communities in conflict or post-conflict settings have picked up on this problem. Gilbert, a clinical psychologist who has worked with INGOs in Jordan, Liberia and Pakistan among others, writes in the Global Health Watch report:

> Those whose language and explanatory models exert greatest power also hold the power to determine and label mental distress. In an increasingly globalised world, it is mainly the materialistic, secular and scientific ideologies of the West that dominate thinking, particularly in international organisations. For example in 2007, The Lancet published a prominent series on global mental health, wherein the contributors argue for the universal applicability of Western models. They pay little attention to the role of traditional healers and make scarce mention of the essential role of language and culture.

> The globalisation of Western approaches can sideline the articulation of local understandings of mental distress in indigenous languages and sometimes ignore or pathologise the religious and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

> (Gilbert, 2008: 51)

The tendency in both social and physical sciences to focus on rationalistic principles to describe human experience may drown out alternative interpretations of what it means to suffer or face challenges. This has implications for the way aid interventions tackle human suffering, as Eyber notes when, echoing Ager and Ager (Ager and Ager, 2011), she argues

that "neo-liberal notions of progress, development and positive social change are associated with an unquestioned commitment to a 'rational' and secular world-view" (Eyber, 2015: 200). This worldview is also inherent in much biomedical thinking, with its emphasis on the mind/body dichotomy as a way of understanding an individualised 'self'. This is at odds with societies where wellbeing is often linked to faith and spirituality (Eyber, 2015); or where health is understood in terms of a person's relationship with their environment and the spiritual world (Honwana, 1998); or where emotional distress is associated with supernatural forces and disharmony within the heart or soul (Hassan et al., 2015). This failure to acknowledge different ontologies of mental health has led to questionable aid interventions in post-disaster settings; interventions which have narrowly interpreted trauma and its solutions (Gilbert, 2008). The psycho-social support given to aid workers is at risk of the same problems, as current assessments and recommendations in this area (Antares Foundation, 2012; Ehrenreich and Elliott, 2004; McKay, 2007) often assume terminologies such as 'burnout' and 'trauma' have been sufficiently pathologised, using western definitions, in every context. As some African feminists argue (AIR, 2015), the way these conditions are diagnosed and treated also foregrounds "an individualistic view of self" which ignores alternative perspectives, including those that highlight the structural causes of traumatic experiences – such as racism, sexism or poverty – and which emphasise psychic interdependency rather than autonomy, and spirituality rather than rationality (AIR, 2015). A comment from a Ugandan woman working on gender-based violence, at a convening of African practitioners and activists in Kigali, Rwanda to discuss conceptualisations of trauma, is instructive:

> When we started this work, I confronted these big words: trauma, mental health, emotions, PTSD. I wanted to understand what trauma meant. I asked women in Samia, my own language: "what is trauma?" They described it as *obuchuuni* – a word you could translate as 'pain'. In their explanation, pain meant discrimination, marginalization, denial of belonging, illness. All this caused them this invisible pain that affected their minds and body. That enabled me to start seeing how we could respond as an organization and start to deal with pain in their bodies, minds and spirits.

> (Horn, 2014: 9)

This description provides an alternative understanding of stress and trauma to that put forward by the Headington Institute at the beginning of this sub-section; one that recognises the structural – as well as the physical, psychological and spiritual – dimensions of stress and trauma, and how these are embodied.

Situating pathologies of stress within the aid sector

There is no doubt that terms such as PTSD and trauma have widespread usage in the sector, partly due to the prevalence of these concepts in aid agencies' efforts to respond to the mental health needs of populations recovering from natural or human-made disaster.

However, the Guardian survey of aid workers, and my own research, highlight that these conditions are more readily claimed by some people than by others. The majority of respondents to the Guardian survey were women, and identified themselves as international staff (Young, 2015). The degree to which such a survey speaks to the experiences of all aid workers is thus highly questionable. During field research I found terms such as burnout and PTSD were often used quite casually by international aid workers I met, particularly Europeans. When I told them about my research project they would often roll their eyes and with a knowing grin on their face suggest that I could interview them about their 'burnout'. On one occasion I interacted with a British man who claimed he and his European colleagues, all of whom had worked recently in Somalia, had suffered from 'PTSD'; a claim I was unable to verify due to none of the men responding to subsequent requests by me to interview them. Ultimately, I had more success in hearing stories of burnout, trauma and PTSD from European female aid workers. Whilst counsellors and psychotherapists I met in Kenya used these terms frequently when I spoke to them, only ten aid workers claimed they had suffered from any of these conditions. Two of them were European men, and one was a Kenyan woman. The rest were all European women. What had helped these European women identify their condition, and seek to resolve it, was a diagnosis from a clinician. I will now turn to some case studies to highlight this point.

Katya

Katya is a German woman in her thirties who works for a development agency. She described to me how she was diagnosed with PTSD four months after being victim to an armed robbery in her home, along with her Kenyan-Asian fiancé and his family. She also described going through a burnout at around the same time, due to throwing herself back into her work immediately after the armed robbery and eventually not being able to cope

with the long periods she was spending away in remote locations in Kenya, far from her friends and family. Although her organisation has a procedure for addressing security incidents and any associated health problems, this had not been carried out satisfactorily, according to Katya. Ultimately, it was not until she sought professional help – first in Kenya and then in Germany - that she became fully aware that she was suffering from PTSD and burnout. Katya spent 5 months in Germany, attending regular psychotherapy sessions and spending time with family and exercising in nature as part of her recovery.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline's story offers a slightly different interpretation on the role and impact of diagnosis. Jacqueline is a British woman in her forties, who identifies herself as a pan-Africanist, partly due to her Jamaican origins. She was working for an international humanitarian organisation when I met her in December 2015. When I met her again in March 2016 she spoke to me about how earlier on in the year she'd been told by a psychologist in Kenya that she was suffering from a form of trauma beginning with 'v'; on my suggestion that it may be vicarious – a term which I then explained to her - she agreed that it could be as her work in communications and advocacy requires a great deal of listening to and documenting traumatic stories. Jacqueline was still trying to make sense of this diagnosis when I met her. The last time she believed she had worked in a challenging environment was around a year before, when she went to Burundi to cover the elections for her organisation. However, the symptoms of the trauma did not appear until Christmas 2015, when she was feeling very anxious and kept fainting for no apparent reason. She had also been suffering from insomnia and nightmares. Jacqueline believed that these symptoms were as much associated with her worries over her Jamaican restaurant – which she had established as a side project to her NGO work in October 2015 – as with any trauma from the work she did a year previously in Burundi.

These examples are illustrative of a broader recognition in psychiatry, and also in the aid sector, of trauma as a condition requiring clinical support; although this recognition is problematic in the humanitarian environment, where trauma has been politicised and its meaning adapted to meet the interests of different stakeholders (Abramowitz, 2014; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). In addition, the understanding and naming of this condition, and the desire to seek clinical support, does not necessarily have relevance to all aid workers.

Aside from one woman who told me she was diagnosed with depression after working in Somalia, the only Kenyans who talked about stress and related conditions such as trauma in pathological terms that required a psychiatric response were those providing counselling to refugees. Moses is one example. He has worked as a counsellor in Kakuma refugee camp since 2014 and attends regular psychotherapy sessions when he returns to Nairobi every 8 weeks for R and R (rest and recuperation). Describing the difficulties he had with counselling victims of war and disaster in nearby countries he told me:

> "Sometimes you become very paranoid. Especially if you hear stories from the DRC or Congo – I find those ones very traumatic. Burundi, Rwanda…very traumatic. You hear some of these things and you wonder…you know, who should you trust? You become very paranoid. So personal therapy helps you. Because without personal therapy, these things – you dream them, you need energy to wake up tomorrow."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 12 August 2016]

Moses could understand and recognise his own distress because he was working in a context where talking about and recognising personal problems was commonplace and acceptable.

However, as I will demonstrate in the next sections of this chapter, the way a lot of my Kenyan and Somali informants talked about and dealt with emotional difficulties in their lives suggested that there are different ways of understanding such difficulties that go beyond psychiatric conceptualisations and solutions. I will explore the reasons why international aid workers I met – particularly, but not exclusively, Europeans – so readily used pathologised terms to describe their experiences. And I will assess the cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and structural dimensions which influence the degree to which stress is recognised as a condition requiring treatment.

Mental health stigmas and spiritual interpretations

> "An individual who talks about stress is seen as a weakling while those who do not talk about it are said to be courageous."

"Being emotional about the challenge at hand is not acceptable in the Somali culture. For a man it is especially difficult to get emotional as you will be viewed as a weakling. The woman on the other hand will be accused of being jealous. 'Did your man marry another woman?'"

[Rapporteur's notes on participants' discussion at stress management workshop, Nairobi, 30 August 2016]

At the stress management workshop in Nairobi[20] which I facilitated, and which was attended by 22 European, Somali and Kenyan staff from a European NGO with the endorsement and encouragement of the NGO Director, participants were asked to describe how stress was understood in their society. The two contributions above came from Kenyan and Somali participants, respectively. Both comments suggest a society that disapproves of displays of emotional distress, seeing this as a sign of weakness. The Somali participants said that such displays may be the subject of mockery; a point which is backed up by a UNHCR study into mental health in Somali culture (Cavallera et al., 2016). The study claims that behaviour such as crying or overthinking indicates a sign of mental illness in some communities and is often responded to with social exclusion and stigmatisation (Cavallera et al., 2016: 30). Furthermore, the causes of this mental illness - particularly among women - are often attributed to the realities of specific norms and practices within the Somali society, such as polygamy (Cavallera et al., 2016: 40).

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[20] Quotes and photograph from the workshop taken from a report of the workshop recorded by Doreen Odeck, with her full consent.

Participants at the stress management workshop, 30 August 2016

[Doreen Odeck]

There was also the suggestion made by some of my informants that displays of emotional distress should be avoided as they may be viewed as spirit possession. As the Somali participants in the stress management workshop noted:

> A stressed individual is said to be possessed by jinnis and demons and is accused of not praying enough or having moved away from reading the Koran or is cursed by family members.
>
> [Rapporteur's notes from stress management workshop, Nairobi, 31 August 2016]

The term *jinn* is understood as 'evil spirit' in the Islamic tradition, and is referred to in the Qur'an (Cavallera et al., 2016: 38). When the *jinn* enters the body, a person may show signs of distress and emotional states of anxiety, crying or shouting, and somatic states of sleeplessness, persistent headache or unspecified body pain (Cavallera et al., 2016: 39). This condition is primarily treated with the help of a sheikh or traditional healer, and through the use of prayer and the preparation of a protective amulet or holy water; western psychiatric treatment is treated as a last resort, or when the illness is clearly a result of war or disaster (Cavallera et al., 2016: 44-45).

A link between emotional distress and evil spirits was also made by a Kenyan man I met in Nairobi as he spoke about his society's largely Christian faith at a trauma healing workshop organised by the Catholic aid organisation where he works.

> [He] said to the group that he was concerned that intense emotions like trauma, when displayed too publicly, could be seen as 'demonic' in this society. And to share such feelings was a risk, as perhaps the person you share them with would not take them seriously and would not help you.
>
> [Field notes, 9 August 2016]

The UNHCR study of mental health in Somali culture makes similar claims.

> Illnesses may be interpreted as punishment from God or a test. It might also be seen as a consequence of not having been good enough in following one's faith. In that sense, mental illness can also be seen as a punishment from Allah, which can lead the community to assume the person has not been a good Muslim.
>
> (Cavallera et al., 2016: 38)

As Eyber has argued (Eyber, 2015: 199), the habit within development and humanitarian discourse of collapsing these beliefs and practices within the broad umbrella of culture fails to recognise the importance of how different cosmologies – ways of perceiving and being in the world - influence the way people behave and respond in the face of life's challenges. Scheper-Hughes also remarks that "culture" is not simply a "veneer or patina," or "a series of carnival masks and disguises;" emotions are in fact constructed out of culture and cannot be separated from it (Scheper Hughes: 431). The comments made by my Kenyan and Somali informants are thus not simply indicators of social stigma around stress that are couched in religious or cultural terms; they also suggest that faith and spirituality are the means through which they interpret and make sense of their lives, including hardships. The Somali aid workers at the stress management workshop, for instance, referred to life's challenges as 'God's will,' and a channel for meaning-making through prayer. Their faith thus helped them find meaning in their life, and was a way of avoiding distress or discomfort. The reflections of my Kenyan and Somali informants

indicate that these are guiding and supportive elements in the lives of many aid workers[21]. These factors will be given greater attention in Chapter 6.

The everydayness of stress: living conditions and the limitations of choice

"At the beginning, when I arrived, the first question I asked myself was what is the difference between me and them so that I cannot go there but they put their lives at risk on a daily basis. And then I talked to [my manager] and other colleagues and they said, very rightly, well this is their life, I mean they live there. So they would live there anyway, and at least they have a job, which is a good job so…it makes sense. And it's true because many Somali people decide to go back to stay there, to live their life there, in Somalia. You ask yourself why, really? You want your daughter to go back to Somalia and stay there? And this is the case, they want to go back, they want to be there. So yeah, no one is pushing them to stay there, right."

[Interview with Lavinia, Nairobi, 10 September 2016]

In the above quote, Lavinia - an Italian woman in her early forties – was telling me about her feelings about her Somali colleagues based in Somalia. She travels there frequently, but lives in Nairobi. Her comments highlight a distinction which can be made between the international and national aid worker experience: the former can leave the disaster they work in, the latter cannot. This has implications for the way in which people respond to and make sense of difficult experiences. Lavinia told me that she had been diagnosed at a hospital in Nairobi with anxiety and depression, which she linked to the pressures of being in a new job. She was relieved to be told that she "had something", as she "didn't know what was going on," she told me in our interview in September. It is likely that it would have been far harder for Lavinia, or her Somali colleagues, to seek and attain such a diagnosis in Somalia given the dangerous environment and the restrictions on movement there, particularly in Mogadishu where Lavinia's organisation works.

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[21] Religious faith was, however, rarely referred to by my informants from the global north. Rather than assume this was because none of them practised a religious faith, there is the possibility that their silence in this regard was also linked to certain norms from their own societies concerning how religion is claimed and discussed publicly.

Lavinia's remarks are also significant because they suggest that both she and her manager – also Italian – interpret the hardships of national aid workers as a necessary, if unfortunate, by-product of living in a war zone. They believe that no one is stopping their Somali colleagues from living in Kenya – where many Somalis reside – but instead they chose to live in Somalia, and thus must endure the consequences. Lavinia's remarks overlook the fact that her Somali colleagues are doing the same as many Europeans do – choosing to return home to what is comforting and familiar, and to where their community resides. It may be a choice, or more a sense of kinship, belonging and duty that is shared by anyone who identifies themselves within a particular community[22].

The society that some of my Kenyan and Somali informants live in and were born into was clearly one of hardship and suffering, on a scale that is unlikely to have been experienced by many of the western aid workers I met. In this context, the way Somali and Kenyan aid workers I spoke to spoke about challenges in their lives and how they responded to them was very different from their western colleagues; it was a discourse that suggested a devaluing of the term 'stress' in a context where difficulties were part of everyday experience.

An interaction I had with one of the Somali participants at the stress management workshop reinforces this possibility. During the lunch break a Somali woman told me how she had laughed at the way a European colleague got on the first plane back to Nairobi when she was there during a bombing in Mogadishu. She told me that it is normal for her to have a journey into work where there is the risk of being caught up on the road by gunfire or bombings. Some of her own family members had lost a limb as a result of such attacks. Her anecdote highlights the difference between what in her world is everyday suffering, and in her European colleague's world is something worthy of shock, and a cause to escape. The Somali aid workers do not have this option, as they are working in the same environment they live in; they have to endure what they are confronted with. This acknowledgement of everyday hardship was made by some of the Kenyan aid workers I spoke to as well.

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[22] Conversely, it's also important to recognise that one's own community, and family, can be the site of oppression and violence, and from which many – particularly women and children - wish to flee.

Kevin, for instance, is a Kenyan man in his twenties who works in Kakuma refugee camp. At the group discussions held with him, Morani and other male colleagues from the same organisation, he told me:

> "We as Africans we handle stress differently. Everyone seems to have their own issues so why do you think yours is bigger? So for us we don't…I mean everyone has their issues so….it's Africa so!"
>
> [Focus group discussion, Kakuma, 22 August 2016]

Kevin may not be experiencing war and violence each day in Kenya, but the suggestion he makes is that life is also difficult for his community – hardship is part of the everyday, which cannot be easily resolved or escaped.

Some reflections from another of my informants, Salim, also highlight how living conditions at times shape the way people respond to suffering or setbacks.

> "It is acknowledged internationally of the danger of the post-traumatic stress that [aid agency] staff are going through. But when you talk to the local people themselves, the word resilience is I think the word that people talk about when they discuss things in Somalia. When that becomes every day a part of their life, if that happens every day, and the day after, for the last 25 years, at the end it becomes just a joke. The children in Mogadishu can tell you the sound of the gun, what gun that sound is… Is it from AK47? Is it from M16? Is it from Russian gun? Is it from American or Chinese gun? They can tell you the truth! So sometimes the concept of our western and…sort of, people who are not part of this mess, of stress and trauma and depression and that…is absolutely different when you talk to these guys who had that mess as part of their lives. I'm talking about the local aid workers as well…"
>
> [Focus Group discussion, Nairobi, July 2016]

Salim's comments raise a number of issues. Firstly, his use of the word 'resilience' to describe the Somali people is telling. It was the same term used by an Italian aid worker at the stress management workshop, comparing her Somali colleagues who are living in a

war zone with Europeans who have not been exposed to such hardships but nevertheless feel stressed by very small things.[23] The term resilience has been the focus of debate for some time within development and social studies (Harper and Speed, 2012; Harrison, 2013b; Mohaupt, 2009); however my interest here is attempting to understand why this term is applied so readily to the Somali population.

As I have already noted, religion and cosmologies more broadly are important in understanding how people understand and respond to difficulties in their lives. The Somali participants at the stress management workshop in Nairobi, for example, referred to stress as being 'God's will', a reference that is echoed in the literature on the resilience and coping mechanisms of Somali people, signalling that a person can overcome challenges through patience, hope and faith (Cavallera et al., 2016; Robinson, 2012). Regular prayer is important, and a way of mobilising people together to support each other in times of hardship (Koshen, 2007: 84). Ultimately, spiritual health is seen as the primary force which can ensure all other forms of health (Robinson, 2012: 68).

The structure of Somali families and communities is also important, according to one study (Koshen, 2007). The fact that many Somali people live among an extended family or clan, who depend on each other for moral and material assistance, helps them to cope in a country that has been at war for decades (Koshen, 2007: 95). These studies demonstrate that although 'resilience' may appear to describe the Somali way of coping in extreme conditions, and be a term that is recognised and to some extent claimed by them, it is culturally constructed and situated. Harper and Speed sum up the problem related to resilience terminologies thus:

> In understanding distress there is a need for more sophisticated understandings of experience, framed in people's own words, using the language that survivors themselves use. However, these narratives need to be understood in a collective and political and economic context.
>
> (Harper and Speed, 2012, citing Trivedi, 2010, Wallcraft and Michaelson 2001: 22)

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[23] Rapporteur's notes from stress management workshop in Nairobi, 30 August 2016.

In other words, what an individual finds to be supportive in distressing situations is dependent on place, context and culture, and cannot be easily generalised across different nationalities, or possibly even different communities within the same country. Much depends on how they view the world in the first place and how social contexts – including living conditions - inform that worldview. This is important in challenging any assumptions that there can be a universal understanding of resilience which can then be applied across the entire aid sector – an effort which has gained increasing popularity, both in development programming and in staff care strategies.[24] As some African feminists argue (AIR, 2015; Horn, 2014), a more nuanced approach would recognise the varying structural factors that shape both trauma and resilience, including the ways in which individuals and communities survive and challenge poverty and violence which is part of their everyday lives. Likewise, the way in which wellbeing is defined and understood may at times differ from Euro-American interpretations, which largely emphasise the value of individual therapy and assume the individual to be a powerful, autonomous unit; an alternative understanding, as suggested in Honwana's study of mental illness in Mozambique and Angola, is that the individual is situated in relation to a collective body, which may include spirits or the family, and over which they may not have complete control (Honwana, 1998).

Salim's remarks also highlight the importance of positionality in understanding the relevance of words such as stress, trauma and resilience. He is an Ethiopian man in his late forties, who spent much of his childhood in Somalia after having fled conflict in his home country. He has worked for the UN for over twenty years, and lives in Nairobi with his wife and family. In his comments he appears to be identifying himself as a "westerner," and this may be attributed to the fact that he is an international aid worker, receiving all the benefits this role brings in terms of salary and extra allowances. This is in contrast to Somali aid workers who are confined to their conflict-affected country and are experiencing its hardships every day. Salim also told me he has two masters' degrees, travels frequently to Europe, and through his work in many emergency settings, where he has also lived, he has been surrounded by a variety of cultures. His mobility – his ability to

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[24] Literature addressing resilience as a staff care strategy in the aid sector include *Resilience of Humanitarian Workers* (Blanchetiere, 2006), *Resilience - Building Resilient Managers in Humanitarian Organizations: Strengthening Key Organizational Structures and Personal Skills that Promote Resilience in Challenging Environments* (McKay, 2011), *Building resilience and preventing burnout among aid workers in Palestine: a personal account of mindfulness based staff care* (Pigni, 2014).

travel to far-off places, to work and be educated abroad – are "markers of authenticity and authoritative knowledge" (Peters, 2013: 279); credentials that adjust his perspective on what 'the everyday' means to him. Although he lived in Somalia as a child, and has also worked there for several years, these credentials mean he no longer situates himself as a direct victim of the 'mess' that is part of Somali life.

At the same time, his childhood as a refugee fleeing war in Ethiopia, and community he lives in whilst growing up, cannot be overlooked; like the Somalis he speaks about, this experience may also indicate why – as the next anecdote from Salim demonstrates – he avoided pathologising experiences of distress, or seeking clinical help. Describing a double suicide bombing which took place close to where he was working at the time in Mogadishu, Salim told me:

> "When we came out – there were two people who had suicide vests and they exploded – the biggest discussion that was taking place, was our security guys showing us bits and pieces of the flesh on their foot, on their shoes, on the car. The head landed on the lap of some woman, who was sitting there."
>
> [Focus group discussion, Nairobi, July 2016]

Salim's manager wanted him to leave Somalia immediately and receive some counselling when he got back to Kenya.

> "And I said what for? I don't personally see the reason why I should get out to Nairobi for counselling, to be honest with you I did not. And I did not even have….I'm sorry to say this may mean I'm also dried up, but I didn't even have the feeling….that this was necessary."
>
> [Focus group discussion, Nairobi, July 2016]

Salim's attitude towards counselling suggests an interplay between different, related, factors: the circumstances of his childhood where he witnessed and fled suffering on a magnitude that most European aid workers are unlikely to identify with; growing up in Somali and Ethiopian society where signs of emotional distress may have been shunned;

and expectations concerning how he should behave in these societies as a man[25]. His story highlights that he is still, to some degree, positioning himself and his beliefs within the socio-cultural context he has grown up in, in terms of the suffering that people endure there, as well as the traditional norms concerning how people should respond to this suffering. At the same time, his comment that he may be "dried up" because he didn't think counselling was necessary also suggests that suffering continues to be part of his 'everyday' in his current work; highlighting the fluidity and multiplicity of the social and cultural contexts in which 'stress' is constructed, contested and managed.

The fact that many of my Kenyan and Somali informants did not articulate challenging experiences using the terminology of 'stress' is thus not only related to the oft-used blanket term of 'culture' and its associate, 'religion;' it is also linked to the conditions in which they live, and the degree to which extreme suffering are commonplace. As Scheper-Hughes suggests in her examination of why women in a Brazilian shantytown did not appear to mourn the death of their children (Scheper-Hughes, 1993), the dismissal of difficult emotions may be a reasonable response, and survival strategy, in impoverished societies where death and violence are part of everyday experience. In these contexts, national aid workers often have to endure these experiences because they have no choice; unlike their international colleagues, they do not have the option of returning home to a safer and more secure place.

The dual system of stress and wellbeing in aid work

Related to the points made in the previous section, it is acknowledged by aid workers and aid agencies (McWha-Hermann et al., 2017; "Secret aid worker," 2015), that the sector operates a dual system in which national staff are not entitled to the same access to healthcare and other benefits as their international colleagues. Although I did not ask explicitly about the salaries or income of my informants, a few Kenyan aid workers I spoke

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[25] There is a growing body of literature examining how African societies construct masculinities (Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005), including the concept of the "big man", who among other attributes "does not show fear [...] is always calm and decisive [...] does not complain in hard times or show pain" (Dover, 2005: 178).

to did suggest that there were disparities between themselves and their international colleagues.

Dennis, a Kenyan man in his thirties who works for a large INGO in Nairobi but travels frequently to other African countries as part of his job, told me:

> "During the pay review, there were crazy concerns around compensation of expat and Kenyan staff and all that. And the gap, I mean the inequality, in fact, someone said that, we are busy generating policy briefs and papers on how to combat inequality but internally it's *crazy*, you know...I mean the kind of pay we give international staff compared with the kind of pay we give to national staff."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 3 December 2015]

A Kenyan woman I spoke to, Rebecca, who works for another large INGO, suggested that there was little understanding from her international colleagues of the impact of these sorts of discrepancies on national staff, telling me: "I'm not sure they really know what people go through here" [Interview, Nairobi, 13 April 2016].

Rebecca's comment highlights how the experiences of international and national staff – in terms of how they are treated in the workplace, but also the nature of their day-to-day lives – are often very different, but that these differences are rarely acknowledged or appreciated in the aid sector. The stories of some of the Kenyan aid workers I met demonstrate how financial concerns and family responsibilities often override any desire to articulate or respond to work-related stress. Dennis, for instance, has to use his income to travel on his free weekends to Kisumu, three hundred kilometres away, where his wife lives and works. Although it is possible to fly to Kisumu from Nairobi, Dennis told me he cannot always afford this and so has to go by road. He also has to support several of his siblings, as he explained to me.

> "It's crazy, I mean for some of us who have to pay school fees. That's another thing and, someone like myself, I have a sister I have to pay school fees for in the university and I have to rely on what I get to do that."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 3 December 2015]

Jared is in his twenties and is married with a young child but works in a remote village in northern Turkana far away from his family. He described to me the harsh living conditions in the village, where there is no electricity or internet access, and poor phone reception.

> "It is just a matter of getting used to those circumstances. So at first, my first time, I was getting challenged, because I was used to being with my family and…but because I'm there, working there, it is just a job. I will not leave my job to stay with my family, what will I eat, if I leave a job? [...] So I have to go and look for a job, even if I go far away…prefer my family get something to eat."

[Interview, Lodwar, 30 May 2016]

An awareness of dependent family members and the scarcity of well-paid work in Kenya were therefore strong reasons for why some of the national aid workers I spoke to appeared to manage work-related challenges without complaint. To take this observation further, the suggestion was made by some of my informants that it was this concern for job security and a steady income in order to meet family needs that influenced the degree to which they sought counselling offered by their organisation. Valentina, the regional manager of the NGO where I held the stress management workshop, told me that she believed her Kenyan staff had not taken up the counselling that her organisation offered because they feared they'd be seen as incapable of doing their jobs, and not have their contracts renewed.[26] This is an interesting remark given her staff attended my workshop and appeared to be willing and engaged participants. It is of course quite possible that there were many personal concerns left unspoken in such a group setting with other colleagues present; whether in a workshop or in a counselling session, it is likely that not all problems will be openly shared and that job security will be one factor in determining what people are willing to discuss.

Dennis also hinted at a concern for his job as a reason why he – and other Kenyan colleagues – had not used the counselling service at his organisation.

> "I think we're too busy to focus on such things or to look for counselling. I think there's also this fear that the moment you approach HR that you need counselling services on your work, then it's a sign of weakness or a sign of incompetence or

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[26] Interview with Valentina, Nairobi, 31 March 2016.

something. At least that's what I'd feel. So I don't think people make use of such services very seriously."

[Interview in Nairobi, 3 December 2015]

A concern for job security may also explain why few Kenyans talked openly to me about their mental health problems. It's possible that, despite my assurances that data collected would be kept confidential and not shared with employers, the Kenyans I spoke to still feared that speaking up about their emotional difficulties carried too big a risk to a coveted job that guaranteed them a regular income with which to support their family. The differing values placed upon one's job, and the motivations behind working within the aid sector, will be given further attention in ensuing chapters. For now, it is important to highlight how aid workers' positioning and status within their organisation frames the way they talk about and manage stress in their lives. Whilst terminologies and pathologies may be socially or culturally constructed, the extent to which they are identified and acted upon is also contingent upon socio-economic conditions; particularly where they live, and what opportunities exist for mental health care. As I have shown, the status of 'international aid worker' brings with it certain benefits and opportunities that do not exist for national staff; the mobility and the choices that come with this status are instrumental in identifying and articulating experiences as sources of mental and emotional distress requiring medical help.

(En) gendering stress in aid work

Some of the stories outlined in this chapter suggest ways in which stress and mental health are gendered topics. The fact that some of my male informants (for instance, Morani, Kevin and Salim - all of them from African countries) appeared to dismiss stress in their lives as unworthy of consideration, whilst those who had sought professional or medical assistance were largely white women, indeed points to a gendered, and racialised, interpretation of mental health. I wish to move beyond simplistic narratives that associate African men with toughness and emotional self-control – narratives which are socially and historically constructed, and which become problematic when assumed to be static and untouched by changing, and different, African contexts (Silberschmidt, 2005). I instead propose that there are gendered practices and behaviours specific to the aid and development sphere which affect how staff respond to difficult situations.

As some studies have shown (Patni, 2011; Rodgers, 2010; Wigley, 2005), the aid sector is often replete with discourses and practices which reflect particular assumptions about how aid workers are meant to behave. As Patni explains with reference to national staff she interviewed for her study of NGO workers in India:

> Being diplomatic, being professional and being controlled, robotic and machine-like in their persona are all highlighted as the expected ways of being professional in the field and operating in the organization.
>
> (Patni, 2011)

A point made by her and others (Wigley, 2005) is that the working culture of the aid sector – particularly in humanitarian and human rights organisations - is one that accepts and celebrates macho behaviour, which is associated with danger, risk-taking and remaining unflappable, whilst silencing other more vulnerable forms of expression. This affects the ways in which aid workers are able to interact in the world, and the degree to which they are willing to share their vulnerabilities with others. Some have argued (Gritti, 2015) that this type of culture is also blind to the needs and experiences of different groups, including women and national aid workers. Discussions with some of my informants echo the claim that the aid sector constitutes a macho environment; in addition, there is also the suggestion made through their accounts that this environment shapes the way stress is acknowledged and talked about.

Sebastien, who is half French and half Irish and works for an international NGO that offers medical assistance to disaster-affected populations, told me:

> "Even in a medical organisation [like mine] there is stigma. 'You're not tough enough'…. there's a very very macho culture. […] My boss is like, until you get your first bullet wound – which is metaphorical you know – until you've been through your first proper proper crisis, you ain't worth shit here. But all these things colour code your approach you know. You kind of wonder like, well actually do you want to go through this."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 2 October 2016]

Rosa, who is half Italian and half Croatian, works for an international refugee agency.[27] She expressed similar sentiments when we met in December 2015. She described to me how her colleagues had mocked her when she chose to leave Somalia, where she had been working for three years, following a serious bombing metres away from her in Mogadishu in 2012. She also told me she felt uncomfortable with the way her female manager in Nairobi would often travel to some of the most insecure areas in the region as this implied an expectation that Rosa, as a regional co-ordinator, should do the same.

This sense of rivalry over who can be the toughest was echoed by another informant, Winnie, a Kenyan woman in her forties who has worked in development consultancy most of her professional life, mainly on civil society and governance projects in South Sudan. Her descriptions of interactions with her male colleagues indicate the subtle forms of pressure to behave in a certain way which emerge in these emergency environments. She told me how on one occasion she was accused of being a "wuss" when she told her colleagues she was tired and wanted to go home when they were out late drinking in a bar in Torit.

Winnie claimed she hadn't experienced any overtly sexist behaviour in her work. Yet her comments point to how she would at times hide her gender behind her professional identity; a form of concealment described as "passing" by Ahmed (2017: 119), a term also invoked by Read (2018) in her interpretation of the experiences described by women aid workers striving to prove themselves in humanitarian settings. Winnie admitted:

> "Your femininity goes in the background. OK you're not trying to look like a man, I would never put that forward, but you're all going in tough, you take responsibility for tough things, you put in the hours."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 1 November 2015]

Here she evokes a common descriptor associated with both masculinity, and aid work – being tough – to illustrate the impact this type of signifier has for women in the sector.

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[27] Interview with Rosa, Nairobi, 1 December 2015.

Toughness, in her words, is connected to taking responsibility in dangerous or difficult circumstances, and working long hours. I will explore these signifiers in more detail in Chapter 5. Their relevance here is to show how a macho environment can frame the way aid workers view, talk about and respond to challenging situations.

Similar signifiers were implicit in remarks by Clare, a Ugandan woman heading up an INGO's regional office in Turkana. When Clare started her job in 2014, she was one of only ten women in an office of eighty staff. When I met her in 2016, the office had been reduced to only nineteen staff, five of whom were women. Clare was very conscious of being in the minority, and of not being able to share her personal problems with most of her colleagues – owing both to her position as a woman, and as a manager. She told me[28] in particular about how the hot climate in Turkana makes it difficult for women when they are menstruating; she can feel very irritable during this time, but was conscious that if she lost her temper she would be accused of being a difficult person. Travelling to remote field sites also wasn't easy for menstruating women, but Clare felt these were issues that could not be discussed with her male colleagues. Clare too appeared to be "passing" (Ahmed, 2017; Read, 2018); concealing gendered, embodied behaviour in order to live up to a particular image of toughness associated with aid work. This image appears to be particularly pronounced in remote or inhospitable field environments where emergency interventions take place; although in the case of Clare, her organisation's work was largely focused on development.

Seamus, an Irish man working for the UN in Somalia, described to me health problems he experienced in 2013 and 2014 which he attributed partly to burnout.[29] He had been working 80-hour weeks for his organisation, with few holidays, and had also worked over the Christmas period. Seamus started to feel ill towards the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. He was eating unhealthily, had put on a lot of weight, and was also losing motivation in his work. For around six months, he told me he did not work very hard. "I had no interest...I would just want to lie on the couch and watch TV," he told me when we met in October 2015. He went on a meditation retreat in Ireland in March 2014, which he

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[28] Interview with Clare, Lodwar, 31 May 2016.

[29] Interview with Seamus, Nairobi, 3 October 2015.

believed helped him for a short time. And when he returned to Kenya he started sessions with his organisation's counsellor. However, shortly after his return, four of his colleagues were killed and four others seriously injured in a bombing in Garowe in Puntland, in April 2015. Seamus decided not to continue the counselling. This was partly because he believed that his Somali colleagues were in greater need of professional support. "Everybody was suddenly going through a mass grieving process. People were going through a more difficult process than I was," he told me. But also his decision appeared to be influenced by a belief that his emotional or psychological wellbeing wasn't an important factor in his ongoing health concerns. He told me that he believed he was using the counselling as "a crutch" and that he preferred to respond to his health problems through physical means such as taking more exercise, changing his diet and spending more time in the sunshine. This was because he had gone for medical tests which showed he had vitamin B12 and D deficiencies, which are often linked, respectively, to poor diet and lack of exposure to the sun.

I wasn't able to find out more about Seamus' condition as our promises to meet up again never came to fruition. On the one occasion when we had arranged to meet again, Seamus did not answer my text messages and the meeting never happened. By coincidence, I bumped into him at the UN compound in Nairobi a few days later, as we both queued for coffee at one of the cafés there. Seamus was looking red-cheeked and as if he'd put on weight. He told me with an apologetic smile that he had spent too much time in the sun during the week and all he had wanted to do at the weekend was stay in bed and watch DVDs – hence why he did not respond to my messages. This somewhat awkward exchange left me unsure as to how much Seamus was actually willing to tell me about his health problems; suggesting, perhaps, that there was much he was choosing not to reveal both to me and to his colleagues.

The accounts of Seamus, Winnie, Rosa and Sebastien all point to a working environment where there is little tolerance for signs of emotional discomfort or vulnerability. Whilst this situation may not be exclusive to the aid sector, it has added meaning in a context where actions are supposedly guided by humanitarian principles of care and concern for vulnerable others. The discourse and practices described by Rosa, Winnie and Sebastien downplay these principles when applied to the personal lives of staff, and instead suggest that aid workers feel under pressure to remain strong and unflappable in inhospitable or

insecure settings. Seamus' account, on the other hand, is more complex. He acknowledges that staff support mechanisms were in place to respond to critical incidents involving local staff in Somalia. This suggests that under certain circumstances – such as an armed attack or bombing – there is institutional recognition that emotional support is required. However, Seamus' personal health issues appeared, in his eyes, to be different from the drama and trauma of a critical incident; he chose to focus more on his physical wellbeing rather than investigate any emotional or mental health problems arising from the long working hours and pressures of his organisation. His behaviour is made more significant by his claim to me that at the UN, "with mental health issues, you're out the door." He also told me:

> "I think mental health problems in this sector are greeted with laziness and weakness. We've always not delivered in this sector, we can never do enough no matter how hard we try, so if you're not always in tip-top shape, you'll be seen as not dealing with it well."
>
> [Interview in Nairobi, 3 October 2015]

Seamus made it clear to me that he viewed the UN as an institution that was "full of egos", and that his office was a "toxic environment" when he started his job in 2013.

> "In my first meeting someone shouted at me, 'you and me are going to be enemies!' Now it's fine, we get on great but it took a lot out of me. I think I was overly diplomatic."
>
> [Interview in Nairobi, 3 October 2015]

I did not find out the background to the outburst from his colleague that Seamus recounted to me. Nevertheless, his efforts to be 'diplomatic' suggest he was exercising considerable emotional restraint in spite of what appears to be a hostile encounter. Similarly, his emphasis on the physical aspects of his illness may point to an avoidance of discussing his emotional wellbeing, for fear of how this may be perceived in a working environment that he himself acknowledges is 'full of egos'. His account echoes observations made by Patni (Patni, 2011) and Wigley (Wigley, 2005) about macho behaviour in aid settings, and also point to how stress in the sector may be interpreted in very narrow ways – associated with the danger and risk of insecure environments. In this respect, Seamus' actions with regard to his health problems suggest that the suffering of

colleagues working in Puntland was acknowledged as worthy of recognition and support, whereas his was not; hence his decision not to pursue counselling any further, and to attribute his lack of motivation and exhaustion purely to physical illness.

Stress in social and environmental context: implications for research findings

This chapter has highlighted that the terms that are central to this thesis – particularly stress, burnout and trauma – cannot be assumed as universally understood and may in fact be essentialising categories which shut down alternative ontologies of health and wellbeing. The way these terms are used depends largely on where the individual is situated, and in the aid sector this requires an understanding of their working as well as their living conditions.   Whilst pathologising one's experience and seeking clinical support may be important and necessary for some aid workers, there is the risk of assuming that causes and cures for these types of conditions can be given social and cultural equivalence in every context. I have tried to show in this chapter that world views and experiences differ, and that greater attention needs to be given to how the aid sector's working environment contributes to, and at times restricts, how emotional distress is spoken about and managed.

The next chapter will pick up on some of the ideas presented in the preceding pages. It will look at how 'stress' is at times narrowly constructed and associated with critical incidents, concealing more complicated forms of emotional distress. It will describe the securitised, high-risk narrative associated with emergency settings by exploring the accounts of aid workers in Kakuma refugee camp, and consider how these environments influence the way stress is understood and discussed. The chapter will also expand on some of the problems hitherto raised regarding the impact of aid work on family life, particularly for Kenyan informants.

Subsequent chapters will expand on the ways that aid policies and structures shape personal experiences and challenges; and how emotional discomforts common to aid workers – such as anxiety, self-doubt or guilt - are often influenced by discourses and

imagery associated with being 'the perfect humanitarian.' The final findings chapter will draw further on some of the cosmologies outlined in this chapter to highlight the centrality of religion and spirituality to the coping mechanisms of some of my informants.

CHAPTER 4

COMPOUND LIVES AND THE (DE) CONSTRUCTING OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

One typically hot afternoon in Lodwar in May 2016, I met Karl for lunch.[30] He is a German man in his thirties who at the time we met was working for a European development organisation, providing health services and running agricultural and livelihoods projects with refugees in Kakuma camp and with the surrounding host community, who are Turkana pastoralists. Karl had come to Lodwar – the county capital of Turkana, 120km from Kakuma - for a meeting, and was returning to Kakuma that afternoon.

He described to me the working and living conditions of Kakuma, to where I was hoping to travel for the first time in the ensuing days. Karl was working in a small, poky office – which I would later visit – on one of the handful of compounds managed by some of the bigger agencies, including UNHCR, WFP, Lutheran World Federation and Norwegian Refugee Council. As with most aid agency staff there, the compound was also where he lived. Every three weeks, Karl was entitled to 'R and R' – rest and recuperation, with the expectation that some of the break would be spent reporting back to his organisation's office in Nairobi. Most other agencies in Kakuma have their R and R every 8-10 weeks.

Karl described Kakuma as a 'hardship' location, and equated this to the security problems in the area. Examples of the security protocols governing aid workers such as himself, were rules not to leave their compound after 6pm and not to move around without armed escorts. He told me that some of the main insecurity in the camp currently was linked to fighting between the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups from South Sudan – who comprise the largest number of the camp's refugees, after an influx of 60,000 people fleeing the newly independent country's civil war. Insecurity was also linked to the hostility of some refugees towards the UNHCR staff. Protests regarding the UN agency's insufficient response to people's needs in the camp had been held by refugees at the entrance to the

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[30] Interview with Karl, Lodwar, 31 May 2016.

UNHCR compound, and in such incidents, Karl believed that all the aid agencies are seen as the same and blamed equally.

Karl believed that what he called "the compound life" was unique. Being largely confined to the humanitarian compound, due to the security restrictions he described to me, could be difficult at times. Staff usually can't travel anywhere without armed escorts. There is little to do on the compound except watch movies, or use the sports facilities provided by UNHCR. But Karl told me this environment also helped to strengthen the social support among colleagues. Friendships emerge very quickly, from the moment an aid worker arrives, so there is no effort in having to look for them. Due to the close proximity of colleagues, both in the office and in the sleeping quarters, there is a feeling that people are there for you all the time, he told me. He believed this was particularly important because most of the posts in Kakuma are "unaccompanied", meaning aid workers are not allowed to bring their partner or spouse with them to the field site. Friendship and collegiality within the compound thus becomes more essential as a form of support, and Karl claimed that it is an element of the specific living conditions of humanitarian settings that people miss when they move on to other jobs.

Kenyans have a different experience, Karl explained to me. Most of the Kenyan staff in Kakuma are from other parts of the country. They have families they are supporting, and who they only get to see every couple of months during their rest and recuperation period. Options for career advancement were limited, because most humanitarian workers move from one emergency situation to another, in multiple countries – and Kenyans would often rather stay in-country to be with their families. More senior positions in Nairobi are scarce, so Kenyans end up staying in their jobs, in Kakuma, for many years. This is in contrast to their international counterparts, who are usually there on short-term contracts of between a few months and two years, in keeping with most international humanitarian deployments.

Karl's account provides an interesting and insightful overview of the context which this chapter aims to investigate: the humanitarian compound, and the ways in which it shapes aid worker lifestyles and behaviour. His remarks regarding the differing situations for international and Kenyan staff resonate with issues that I raised in the previous chapter; they highlight that the difficulties that aid workers are confronted with vary according not

only to levels of danger or insecurity, but also concerns about the degree to which they feel supported by their organisation and colleagues, and their ability to spend time with their families. The extent of these concerns may be determined by organisational structures and policies – as Karl's reference to 'unaccompanied posts' and compound life suggests.

As one of many "spaces of aid" (Smirl, 2015), the humanitarian compound is an important case study in understanding how organisational structures and working practices – including security regulations, and rules on social interactions – affect the aid worker's experience. Recent reports concerning sexual abuse and the use of local prostitutes by aid workers (O'Neill, 2018; Pollak, 2018; Rawlinson and Booth, 2018) add relevance to the particularities of the compound environment commonly found in emergency situations. Although the living and working arrangements within the compound walls may vary from one country to another, as well as one organisation to another, there is a common thread of increased physical securitisation (Smirl, 2015) that places aid workers within a confined, fortified space that separates them from the rest of the wider community. This compound environment may be viewed as symbolic of masculinist aggression (Partis-Jennings, 2017: 420), with its razor wire walls and the presence of armed guards on the gates.

This chapter will explore how this infrastructure affects men and women, national and international staff, from the aid sector. In particular, I am interested in investigating the everyday challenges of living in humanitarian settings; challenges that go beyond isolated security incidents and suggest other ways in which aid workers struggle with their working environment. This shift away from the obvious 'stressors' of aid work serves to highlight other difficulties related to this profession which have hitherto been given little analysis in relevant literature. I will use examples from Kakuma – which I visited twice over the course of my field research – to demonstrate how experiences may vary. Karl's account, for instance, is illustrative of the experience of a white man from a European country; he is conscious of the need for friendship and belonging within the humanitarian compound, outside of which he has been told the environment is insecure and unsafe. As an international aid worker, he is likely to stay in this environment for no more than two years (he in fact told me his contract would end in 2017), and after that he will leave Kakuma and find work elsewhere, possibly in another emergency situation in a different

country. He suggested that the experience of a Kenyan aid worker is likely to be different, largely because of the pressures of family life and the limited options this entails for career progression.

Proceeding from the suggestion made in the previous chapter that socio-economic, socio-cultural and organisational factors all shape the way aid workers understand stress, I will explore the implications of the policies and structures of humanitarian operations for aid workers' happiness and wellbeing; to what degree they feel at home, or that they belong, in these surroundings, and in what areas they are forced to adjust their behaviour. I will investigate whether these policies and structures produce, or reinforce, social differences – and how this may be felt by different aid workers. I will consider factors such as nationality, race, gender and the stages in their life cycle – for instance, whether they are married or have children – and how these influence their approach to the policies and practices which shape the daily lives of people working in emergency settings. The working conditions associated with the humanitarian compound will be assessed through the lens of gender, race and nationality, as discussed by my informants. The chapter will explore whether these working conditions reinforce gender disparities, or a dual system regarding the treatment of national and international staff.

The chapter also has an interest in understanding how social relations are constructed and deconstructed by the policies and practices that emerge from the humanitarian compound setting. I will focus particularly on the ways that aid workers relate to each other, to their loved ones and to the communities around them in Kakuma. Indeed, relationships of all sorts – friendships, romances, relating to 'aid beneficiaries' or to colleagues – were key concerns raised by many aid workers throughout my field research as they described the challenges and stresses of their profession.

To address these themes, I will first return to the literature that investigates the particularities of humanitarian compounds; the security discourses associated with them and the impact this has on the behaviour of aid workers in disaster situations. I will then give a more detailed overview of Kakuma as a site where the security narratives described in the literature are played out, and justified by aid agencies operating there. The chapter will then assess the implications of the rules and regulations governing the humanitarian compound and its local environment in the context of Kakuma; with a particular focus on

the impact on friendships and romantic and marital relationships. Lastly, I will draw together the observations made throughout the chapter to reflect on the gendered and racialised dimensions of social relations that emerge in compound life.

Aid worker encounters in a bunkerised community

In their report for the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group, Collinson, Duffield et al describe the humanitarian compound thus:

> These compounds have come to represent a highly visible and separate 'island of modernity' that exposes the exclusivity of the international space and its unequal relationship with the surrounding environment – interconnected by exclusive means of transport and representing private spaces that mesh into what, spatially at least, could be likened to a secure archipelago of international aid.
>
> (Collinson et al., 2013: 7, citing Duffield, 2010)

The exclusivity referred to by these authors is partly a result of the increased securitisation and "bunkerisation" (Duffield, 2012) of humanitarian operations; a situation borne out of a perceived increase in risks to aid workers (Dandoy and Montclos, 2013; Duffield, 2012), and resulting in ever more rigid safety and security measures and restrictions on movement which have literally walled off relations between the aid worker and the people they serve (Smirl, 2015: 78). The fears of heightened risk in disaster areas are backed up by reports of aid workers increasingly becoming a target for attacks by armed groups and the local population (The Aid Worker Security Database, n.d.; Stoddard et al., 2009). The credibility of the data collection and the reliability of the staff statistics from such reports has been questioned (Smirl, 2015); nevertheless, this evidence, plus aid agencies' own experiences of insecurity, has produced a narrative within the aid sector that things are getting worse, and more dangerous, in disaster and conflict areas (Collinson et al., 2013: 6).

It is within these fortified humanitarian spaces that aid workers become increasingly cut off from the populations they are assisting, whilst also forming close bonds with their

colleagues (Smirl, 2015: 32). In the humanitarian compound environment, aid workers spend most of their time with their colleagues, during working hours and at the evenings and weekends. Separated from the world outside the compound, aid workers often retreat from the familiar norms and practices of their lives back home. It is a space where "experimentation, trickery and ignoring laws of normal society become the norm" (Smirl, 2015: 34). International aid workers in particular (Thomson et al., 2006) have attributed their illicit or excessive behaviour - including alcohol and drug abuse, and casual sex – to the extreme environments that humanitarian workers find themselves in, and to a sense of entitlement that comes with being in this position. Roth's study of humanitarian workers (Roth, 2015) also suggests that this entitlement is associated with the rapid progression up the career ladder that often occurs for international staff, leading to "kings and queens" (Roth, 2015: 91) with increased power and questionable competencies taking charge of, and at times bullying, national colleagues.

There is a gendered dimension to this also, as some studies demonstrate (Appleby, 2010; Partis-Jennings, 2017). An emergency situation, and the discourse of fear that emerges from it, can foster a macho environment where foreign men enjoy their status – dominating both the humanitarian and peacekeeping space - and the ability to order people around in a way that would not be acceptable in their own country. According to one of Appleby's informants in her study of aid workers in East Timor, an Australian teacher, women feel objectified in these environments:

> Elly reasoned that by travelling overseas, normal social expectations had been removed, allowing some men to enter a time warp and "revert to that type of behaviour" whereby women's bodies are constituted and controlled through the scrutiny of the male gaze.
>
> (Appleby, 2010: 7)

These forms of behaviour in the aid industrial complex have come under the spotlight in recent months with the revelations concerning the use of prostitutes by aid workers in disaster areas (Elgot and McVeigh, 2018; O'Neill, 2018);[31] acts which may be viewed as

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[31] This was not the first time such revelations emerged. See, for instance, Asmita Naik's report on the West Africa sex scandal (Naik, 2003), the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership's report on

linked to the inherent inequality between aid giver and aid receiver, as one commentator writes:

> The relationship between expatriates and locals gets distorted in poor African countries because the point of contact between the two is essentially utilitarian; the latter either work for the former (as chauffeurs, nannies and the like) or are seen purely as "beneficiaries" of development assistance. This unequal relationship can, and does lead, to exploitative practices, including sexual abuse, especially in war-torn countries.

(Kazado, 2008: 100)

In February 2018, reports emerged of a Belgian aid worker called Roland Van Hauwermeiren hiring local sex workers in Haiti during his time there as country director with Oxfam in 2010. It was also reported that some of these sex workers were in fact below the age of consent, suggesting that Hauwermeiren was guilty of rape. He had resigned from the post in 2011 amid investigations into alleged misconduct which only came fully to light in 2018. The reports prompted a flood of accounts by aid workers around the world claiming to have been harassed or abused, or having witnessed exploitation and abuse of aid 'beneficiaries', in their organisations. Several of these reports suggested that much of this abuse was taking place on the enclosed properties of their employers (BBC News, 2018; Pollak, 2018; Ratcliffe and Quinn, 2018). The public outrage in response to this news may largely be interpreted as a belief that immoral or exploitative acts, such as the hiring of sex workers in disaster areas, are particularly shocking and unacceptable when they are committed by supposed agents of moral authority, such as humanitarian workers (Yanacopulos, 2018).

Whilst there are also claims of national staff, and international staff from the global south, being involved in these abuses (Telegraph, 2018), it is primarily the actions of white men from European countries that have been most widely documented and condemned in the media. This may partly be attributed to the status of national staff; on lower salaries, with less protection and fewer benefits than their international counterparts, they may fear to

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prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in Namibia, Kenya and Thailand (Lattu, 2008), and Save the Children's policy brief on sexual exploitation and abuse of children by aid workers and peacekeepers (Save the Children, 2009).

speak up on harassment or abuse that they have experienced, as one aid worker from the Caribbean suggests:

> The unfortunate reality is that the role of the country offices is almost never about the care of the local staff, or quite frankly their rights. Do people in these offices, especially at lower levels, really believe that they can speak out? Are they subjected to the same rules that demonstrate fairness and equity with expatriate staff? In many cases, they are not. Local staff remain silent when faced with allegations of misconduct, impropriety, abuse, and unfair treatment because NGO jobs are highly sought after and difficult to come by.

(Bruce-Raeburn, 2018b)

Her comments echo what I have argued in the previous chapter: national aid workers appear to be at a disadvantage when discussing mental health issues, because they have more to lose if they are judged as being incompetent for the job. In the humanitarian sphere in particular, they are likely to be on contracts with lower salaries and fewer benefits in terms of health care, insurance, risk protection and evacuation entitlement than their international counterparts (Collinson et al., 2013: 3), and this is likely to affect how they respond to the challenges they experience in the workplace.

The privilege that comes with being an international aid worker from a northern country – someone whose mobility and capacity to travel and live anywhere is in stark contrast to national counterparts from the global south – has been discussed in development literature (Ong and Combinido, 2018; White, 2002). In the aid sector, this mobility is often interpreted as giving the aid worker authority and expertise (Kothari, 2006a; Peters, 2013; Redfield, 2013), and ultimately the status of 'international' staff; someone in command of a salary and benefits package that allows them to live a comfortable life they may not have afforded in their own country, complete with larger house and domestic staff (White, 2002: 409). This lifestyle breeds, in the words of one commentator on the Oxfam scandal, "a sense of exceptionalism that allows people to do things they would not do in their own country" (Shantha Bloemen, quoted in Green, 2018).

In Redfield's study of Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF), one of his female informants echoes these sentiments:

> There's a status of color in much of Africa, your authority and knowledge are rarely questioned when you're white. That can lead people to despotic behaviour, particularly if they're insecure. The thrill of bossing your father around. And you do have money relative to people around you, plus enormous access to very beautiful, very young women. I don't see it as a moral thing, but some just can't handle it.
>
> (Redfield, 2013: 171)

The suggestion made by this female member of staff at MSF is that both race – particularly 'whiteness'[32] - and gender matter in understanding how aid workers behave, and the ways in which the working environment shapes their behaviour. She added that although the institutional culture was changing at MSF, ultimately this type of work remains easier for young men, as they fit the stereotype of a free traveller, unlike women who she believed were generally viewed through the lens of being a wife and mother and thus lacking in such ease of travel (Redfield, 2013: 171). Thus the idea of mobility as a key element of humanitarian work is of particular advantage to men from wealthy northern countries. This point is suggested by another of Redfield's informants, an Italian nurse, who believed that as a woman she was not seen as the obvious candidate for a job that requires a great deal of mobility, particularly as her desire to have children didn't quite fit with an institutional culture that favoured 20-hour working days and a lot of drinking and smoking (Redfield, 2013: 165).

It is these factors that I wish to investigate further in this chapter, by using the field site of Kakuma refugee camp as a case study. In particular, I am interested in exploring how social relations are affected by the structures, policies and working practices that are common to the humanitarian setting – particularly, the humanitarian compound; and what these mean for the relationships of national and international aid workers, those from the global north and global south, and women and men. Building on the literature that recognises that humanitarian structures produce unique working conditions that affect the way individuals operating within these structures interact with each other and

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[32] This term refers to the powers and privileges that are assumed – at times unconsciously - solely on the basis of being white, and which silence and oppress those who do not identify themselves as such. The term is part of a broader, and expanding literature tackling white supremacy in modern western societies. See for instance (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Munshi, 2017).

the communities in which they live (Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2017; Duffield, 2012; Smirl, 2015), I am interested in assessing how these working conditions shape social relations and encourage, or discourage, a sense of belonging. The degree to which aid workers feel at home, or feel alienated, in emergency settings, can provide some insight in to why they behave as they do, and how everyday challenges are interpreted and managed.

Kakuma refugee camps 1, 2, 3 and 4,[33] *including UN agency compounds situated at the south-eastern tip [Government of Kenya, UNHCR, 2014]*

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[33] This map doesn't include the new settlement, Kalobeyei, which lies 3.5km from the main camp and was established in June 2016.
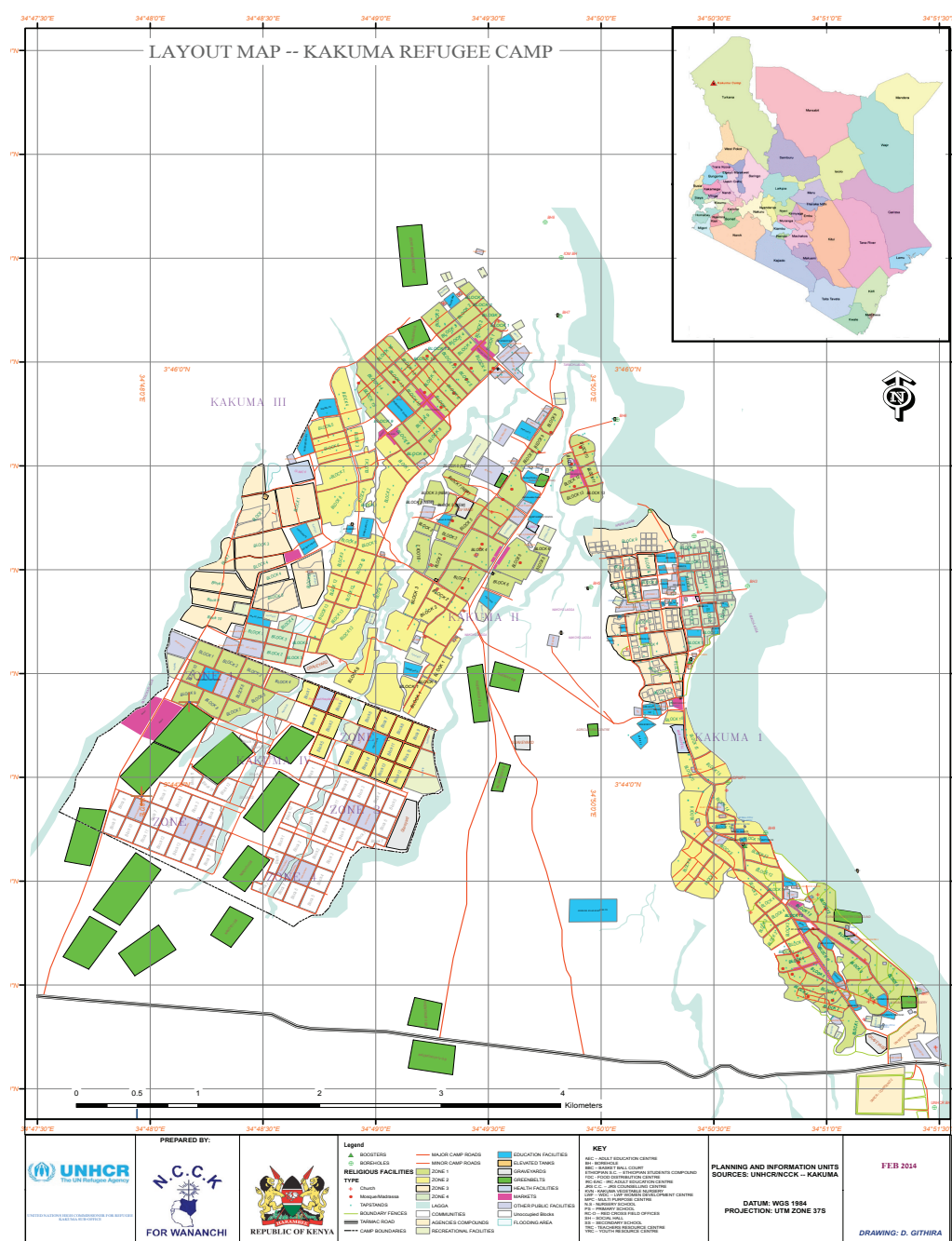
Navigating the humanitarian space of Kakuma

Kakuma refugee camp, viewed from an aid agency vehicle

[author's own photo, 23 August 2016]

As described in the methodology chapter, Kakuma is one of Kenya's two refugee camps and, at the time of my field research, was home to approximately 180,000 refugees from nearby countries, including South Sudan, Somalia and Burundi. It is comprised of five camp areas, one of which – Kalobeyei – opened in June 2016. I stayed in Kakuma twice over the course of my field research – the first time on my own in a prefab on one of the UN compounds, and the second time at a guest house of the international NGO that had agreed to host me, which was situated on another NGO compound where several organisations based their living quarters and offices.

The refugee camp is a bustling mini-metropolis of market stalls, restaurants and organised events and activities supported by the aid agencies operating there, such as life skills trainings, competitions, trauma counselling, health checks and games for children. There are more choices of where to eat and groceries and household goods to buy in the camp than there are in the nearby town, which is little more than the thoroughfare of the main

road that stretches from Lodwar to the southeast and Lokichogio, bordering South Sudan, to the northwest. In Kakuma town there is a sprinkling of shops, bars, market stalls and local services such as a hospital and bank, but in comparison the camp is far more populated and lively. Most of the aid workers I spoke to rarely went in to town, instead preferring to buy their groceries from the camp where there was more choice; although the town did have the odd culinary luxury such as an ice cream parlour, according to one of my informants. One Kenyan aid worker I met claimed the town is also where some of the national INGO staff from outside Kakuma stay when they travel there for fieldwork, because it is cheaper than the aid agency compounds and thus will use up less of their per diem money allocated by their employers for living expenses whilst in the field.

Not far from the camp and Kakuma town there exists a series of Turkana villages or *manyattas* – enclosed clusters of thatched huts inhabited by the Turkana people, who are largely pastoralists. As a 'host community', they have been accused by the aid agencies working in Kakuma of hostility towards aid workers; some of my informants claimed that the local population were disappointed with the lack of assistance they received compared with the refugee community. This had resulted in protests by the local Turkana people outside the UNHCR compound, and in attacks – though generally minor ones such as unarmed scuffles – on aid workers in or near the town.

Signs indicating the programmes of different aid agencies at Kakuma refugee camp
[author's own photo, 3 June 2016]

The presence of the aid community is certainly a defining feature in Kakuma. Not long after leaving the town, a series of signs with different aid agency logos appear, and dusty, untarmacked tracks from the main road lead to the compounds of UNHCR, Danish Refugee Council and Norwegian Refugee Council, World Food Program and Lutheran World Federation. These compounds are dotted around the southern perimeter of the refugee camp. Although different in size and number of inhabitants – with some providing space for other NGO offices and guesthouses - they share similar features: heavily guarded entrances; a tall perimeter fence with barbed wire; the main offices of UN agencies and NGOs working in the area; often their distribution centres and facilities serving the aid beneficiary community; and the accommodation, leisure and catering facilities for staff. The facilities on offer vary; whilst most places had a canteen and somewhere to buy alcohol, it was only the UNHCR compound that provided space for sports such as a running track, gym and basketball pitch.

Life inside the humanitarian compound is very different to that in the camp itself. As well as being where the aid agencies base their offices, the compound is where aid workers will eat most of their meals each day – either from the staff canteen or prepared in their own homes, for those who have a proper kitchen - and socialise with their colleagues over a drink in the bar. In each of the compounds, the aid agency offices are within a short walking distance from the sleeping quarters of the staff, contributing to a temptation to work in the evenings and at the weekends. Whilst UNHCR provided a few more leisure facilities than other compounds – which were available to all aid agency staff in Kakuma - most of the aid workers I spoke to suggested there was little to do in their spare time except watch movies on their laptop or read; although most of the Kenyans I met would also spend some of their weekend going to church. Most of my informants didn't refer too much to the use of alcohol, but it was clear from some of the casual remarks that were made, and my own observations, that this was a key feature in the leisure time of some of the aid workers. An American woman I met, Meghan, referred to the large number of empty beer bottles that she often saw outside the homes of the UNHCR staff at the weekends.[34] Moses, a Kenyan who works in Kakuma but who I interviewed in Nairobi, told me that parties organised by the UN agency staff were fairly common – as was excessive

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[34] Conversation with Meghan, Kakuma, 19 August 2016.

alcohol consumption, with some people (not exclusively UN staff) staying up all night partying in spite of being expected at work the next day.[35] And the few local bars a few minutes' walk from the humanitarian compounds were clearly popular with the aid workers in Kakuma, as I was to witness when I went to one of them on a couple of occasions during my stay there.

Aid agency staff gather for a meal on one of the compounds in Kakuma

[author's own photo, 3 June 2016]

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[35] Interview with Moses, Nairobi, 12 August 2016.

Some of the typical sleeping quarters of aid agency staff on the compounds in Kakuma [author's own photo, 4 June 2016]

It is difficult for aid workers to travel outside of Kakuma for a break at the weekend, as this requires security clearance. Most therefore stay within Kakuma the entire time they are there, before heading back to their homes or a holiday destination during their R and R period. As noted in the methodology chapter, the R and R cycle is usually every 8-10 weeks and lasts 5-7 days. Aid workers I spoke to in Kakuma told me how everyone looks forward with impatience – particularly in the last weeks of the cycle – to leaving Kakuma for their R and R. Travel to Nairobi is generally by air, on UN or EU chartered flights.

There is a dominant discourse among aid workers and their agencies in Kakuma – and other emergency locations - that is replete with terms which emphasise the difficulties aid workers are likely to experience living in these areas and suggests ways in which they are expected to behave. Disaster or post-conflict deployments are identified by aid agencies as 'hardship locations', where the jobs are 'unaccompanied posts' in 'non-family duty stations.' The implication is that these areas are perceived by aid agencies as too dangerous to bring a spouse or children. Kakuma's status as a 'hardship location' – and the dangers and insecurity this entails – may be disputed if one were to compare the camp, which has been in existence for decades in a largely peaceful country, with other more immediate emergencies arising out of violence and conflict, such as situations in South Sudan or the Central African Republic.

Nevertheless, security measures in Kakuma further reinforce a sense that it is a dangerous and insecure place in which to work. Aid workers travel to and inside the camp in large four wheel drive vehicles, often with armed escorts; a scenario which, Read argues, is described using gendered imaginaries of fear and discomfort by some women in humanitarian settings (Read, 2018). Whilst staying in Kakuma, I was advised by aid agencies against walking in to the camp as this was believed to be unsafe. At the same time if I were to go in a vehicle with other aid agencies I needed to have security clearance from UNHCR. The dependence on travel in cars – for journeys which at times would only take a few minutes by foot - immediately creates a separation from the local population, both inside the camp and in the neighbouring villages; whilst aid workers are protected in their vehicle from the heat, rain or dust outside, the refugee and host community are not (Smirl, 2015: 104). These arrangements mean that aid workers have fewer opportunities to interact with the local population, a point also observed by one of Redfield's informants in his study of international staff at MSF in Uganda:

> He told me a joke about the international aid worker who finally climbs out of a hulking, air-conditioned vehicle, prompting one local to comment to another, "I didn't know those people had legs."

> (Redfield, 2013:162)

This separation reinforces a power imbalance, as writer Lara Pawson observes.

> The large Land Rover, Cherokee, Landcruiser, Pajero or whatever it may be, gives the passenger an advantage of power – literally and metaphorically. Given that most Africans walk or take public transport, they are forever looking up at the fortunate foreigner, sealed into his large, air-conditioned, people-carrying unit […] Foreigners can hide behind the thick glass quite easily, and may not have to confront their consciences as much as they would were they closer to the ground, closer to the outstretched hand of the beggar.

> (Pawson, 2008: 114)

In addition, the use of armed escorts by some agencies sends out a very clear message to the refugees in Kakuma: that they are seen as dangerous, and a risk to the lives of aid agency staff. The security rationale that informs these policies were nevertheless disputed by some of the aid workers I met, including one Kenyan and one American, who both

claimed that Kakuma was a safe place to work, and that they didn't feel at all in danger on the occasions that they walked around on foot.

There are also rules about how aid workers can engage with 'aid beneficiaries.' They are only allowed within Kakuma camp during working hours, and by around 6pm they are expected to go back to their compounds. The movement of international staff from the UN is further restricted; viewed as more at risk of harm from the host or refugee population, they spend less time in the camp each week than their national counterparts, according to several of my informants.

The compound grounds and offices of one UN agency in Kakuma
[author's own photo, 3 June 2016]

Aid workers are also discouraged from forming any sort of friendship with the people they assist. I was for instance told to avoid visiting the homes of refugees in the camp, even if invited, unless I was accompanying aid agency staff who were carrying out official duties. This was explained in terms of security and surveillance; that a visit to a refugee's home usually requires permission from the local authorities (the UNHCR and the Kenyan Refugee Affairs Secretariat) because they wish to monitor what everyone is doing in the camp, for security purposes.

Both international and national aid workers I spoke to in Kakuma were very conscious about not overstepping the boundaries of their professional role as 'aid givers'; of wanting to remain professional and not raise too many expectations of friendship among the refugees with whom they were working, as these comments demonstrate.

> "It's more or less a professional relationship and you can't bring them closer. He can share his things, but you can't. So you just joke and laugh together for a minute and leave it like that."
>
> [Interview with Rosemary, Kenyan, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

> "[My organisation] discourages the one-to-one interaction, I try to let [the refugees] know that as much as we worship [in the church] together, I can't go this far with you. [...] I explain to them, and make it clear that, when it's worship, it's about worship and not about work. And so far they understand, although there are a few people who try to get to come to see me in the office, but I discourage them."
>
> [Interview with John, Kenyan, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

> "We are aware that there are limits we cannot go above. Not because the friendship itself is bad, but because you understand the risks involved. If you want to serve people equally, with equality and fairness, then you understand that you cannot have favourites. And it's very important to make that distinction very clear."
>
> [Interview with Japhet, Rwandan, Kakuma 25 August 2016]

As Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka argues in her study of Polish humanitarian aid workers (Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2017), aid agency rules and regulations regarding interaction with 'aid beneficiaries' – often drummed into staff before they've even arrived in the field – produce discourses of difference that limit the interaction between aid giver and aid receiver. Whilst these sorts of regulations may be necessary in the context of humanitarian assistance, in order to avoid unethical or exploitative behaviour, the implication is to reinforce a power imbalance between aid giver and aid receiver and denies aid workers an opportunity to relate to the communities in which they operate.

This dynamic creates what Redfield calls "a double bind" (Redfield, 2012: 377), where aid workers on the one hand are expected to engage with and understand 'aid beneficiaries', but on the other are prevented from doing so by their employers on the grounds that

emergency environments are not the context within which to build long-term friendships. This double bind has different implications according to whether the aid worker is Kenyan, from another African country, or white and from the global north. It is to these nuances that I now turn, by examining how humanitarian workers I met in Kakuma pursued and managed social relations – particularly with regard to friendships and family life.

Finding friendship and belonging in Kakuma

Japhet is a Rwandan man in his thirties. He had lived in England, whilst studying for his master's degree, and worked in Zimbabwe before moving to Kenya in 2014. He started working in Kakuma in February 2016, managing a faith-based organisation's education programme in the camp, so when I met him in August he was still quite new to the role. Japhet had a fairly active social life in Kakuma; he usually spent his evenings and weekends either playing basketball at the UNHCR compound, or drinking with colleagues and friends from other aid agencies in one of the local bars. Yet at the same time I also found Japhet to be somewhat a loner; often walking – against his employer's advice – in to and out of the camp rather than being taken in a vehicle, eating dinner at his NGO's guest house on his own, and spending a lot of time at the weekend in his room, listening to music. When he visited Nairobi in September that year, he joined me at several social gatherings I was attending, and this was partly because, he told me, he had few friends there; although at the same time he regarded Nairobi as his home when he was not in Kakuma.

Japhet talked wistfully about the challenges of finding meaningful friendships in Kakuma, when I interviewed him in August 2016.

> "Part of life here that is probably the most challenging is that the social life here is...not that great, because all of us are away from our families. And..you can make efforts and go out with people once in a while and all that but, it's not the same thing."

> [Interview, Kakuma, 25 August 2016]

Japhet was in an unusual position. As an African man, and an "expatriate", he believed that most aid workers in Kakuma were welcoming towards him, because they viewed him as "one of them". However, the people he felt the closest to in many respects were the Burundian refugees in the camp.

> "These are really like, my people. The Burundians we consider them as our cousins, we speak the same language and I realise that either me, or them, might develop this sort of dependence over each other."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 25 August 2016]

The caution required in forming friendships with refugees in Kakuma therefore had added meaning for Japhet. Whilst he respected the strict guidelines of his organisation and others in Kakuma regarding these sorts of relationships – and consciously avoided ever speaking in his mother tongue so that he could not be easily identified as Rwandan - these restrictions prevented him from becoming too close to people with whom he shared an ethnic affinity.

His perception of the Burundian refugees disrupts the narrow interpretation of aid giver as someone with agency and the aid receiver as someone with dependency, as the following comment suggests:

> "I could have developed...I know it happens a lot with, you know, people from my country – that you lean on your community. Because you need to have that backing from your community, you lean on them, and I knew from the beginning that that must not happen."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma refugee camp, 25 August 2016]

Organisational protocols and guidelines meant that Japhet was forced to transcend his own dependency on people to whom he felt an affinity, and instead confine himself to the aid giver and aid receiver relationship. This problematic positioning was viewed with discomfort by Japhet.

"Being identified with aid work, with humanitarian work, puts you on a certain level and, this is something to me that is almost pushed on you [...] it is something that you create. Just you belong to [his organisation], so you are a humanitarian worker, so people will treat you like that."

[Interview, Kakuma refugee camp, 25 August 2016]

Other aid workers I met shared this concern of being seen only as 'the aid giver'; some of them attempting to challenge institutional regulations that perpetuate this image by walking in the camp, rather than travelling by vehicle, and going in to the houses of refugees when invited. Japhet's account however suggests a particularly uncomfortable and dissatisfied reading of his role as 'aid giver'; a role that creates an unnatural divide between him and the people in Kakuma with whom he feels the most belonging.

Japhet's experience is in contrast to international aid workers from Europe or the United States who, while at times bemoaning the rules that separated them from the refugee population, did not describe their relationships with 'aid beneficiaries' in any way that suggested 'relatedness' (Carsten, 2000: 4). An observation made by another doctoral researcher I met in Kakuma, and also Japhet, was that the international aid workers generally knew very little about the refugee population, partly because they spent so little time in the camp. This was essentially due to security protocols, particularly for UN staff, which directed internationals to spend most of their working hours in their offices on the humanitarian compounds – supposedly away from potential harm. National staff, on the other hand, carried out most of the field work in the camp. These security policies applied largely to UN staff, not all the other agencies working there, such as where Japhet worked; but this nevertheless confined a large number of international aid workers to their compounds for much of the time. In addition, hostility from Kakuma's local, pastoralist population – who believed they were being excluded from most of the aid interventions there – meant that international staff were advised against walking anywhere outside their compounds, including to the nearby town less than 2 km away.

The separation of many of the international aid workers from the local and refugee population had implications for how they perceived people residing outside the humanitarian compound, as demonstrated by a group of Europeans and Americans I met one Saturday afternoon. They spent much of our time together discussing social gatherings that revolved around food and drink: a prized cucumber and other delicacies

unavailable in Kakuma that had been brought from Nairobi, the anticipation of drinking gin with the cucumber sliced into it and some Krest bitter lemon – a soft drink also hard to come by and much treasured when it was available in the compound bar. They also made reference to their excursions outside of the compound – particularly when they would go for a run along the main road beside the refugee camp in the evening, when it was less hot. One incident in particular was related by Jessica, an American woman in her late twenties, to her British and American friends.

> Jessica mentioned again that you have to avoid the locals throwing things at you [when she goes for a run]. On one occasion a guy tried to attack her with a panga [machete], she added casually. She said also that on one occasion she ran past someone with his 'dong' hanging out, basically naked and lying on the floor. She swore his 'dong' was about the size of the coca cola bottle each of us had. She wasn't sure if he was just hanging out there or maybe dead – once again said very deadpan. [...] Everyone around the table was amused by this anecdote. Jessica said a lot of the time the men near the camp just don't give a damn and you'll find them standing around naked, or just with some cloth covering their nether regions, at times with their 'dong' hanging out below it. And a few women showing their 'boobs' too.
>
> [Field notes, Kakuma 4 June 2016]

Jessica's account points to an 'othering' narrative; one that reproduces the image of the 'aid receiver' as someone powerless and without agency, in contrast to a liberated and confident aid giver (Mohanty, 1984). Furthermore, it is in this 'othering' narrative that Jessica's identity as a white, international aid worker is constructed and reinforced. To echo Heron in her study of Canadian women working in sub-Saharan Africa (Heron, 2007: 56), it is the operation and maintenance of specific boundaries between 'self' and 'other', produced through aid structures and regulations, that keep certain spatial and social differences intact. Institutional policies in particular – such as the restrictions around interacting with the local community and refugees – produce social separation to such a degree that people from these communities are objectified by aid workers in ways that reinforce prejudice and stereotypes (Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2017: 15). Similar observations have been made in relation to UN peacekeepers in Congo (Autesserre, 2014).

Institutional policies then become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the case of these aid workers in Kakuma, their confinement to the compound, and the rarity of travelling somewhere on foot without a vehicle, means that they attract unwanted attention when

they go running close to the nearby town – thereby validating the precautions advised by the UN agencies regarding movement of international staff, and reinforcing the stereotypes of 'dangerous locals'. The discourse of the 'dangerous local' within aid organisations and among aid workers has been suggested in other studies (Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2017; Smirl, 2015); and within these discourses, it is white women in particular who are viewed to be most at risk.

> Walking, especially for white women, is seen not only as bizarre, but dangerous. Outside of the expected and established spatial modes of interaction, they are considered fair game for trickery, harassment and abuse both by other expats and by local populations. This causes a retreat back into the established expat spaces, and a reinforcement of the divides. The aid workers become affectively constrained in how they conceive the other.

(Smirl, 2015: 43)

What Jessica witnesses is also related as if the people she sees on her run are merely a spectacle – including one person who may in fact be dead – not people with whom she wishes, or tries, to interact. On the other hand, as Smirl observes from her own research (Smirl, 2015: 91), the humanitarian compound creates an environment where Jessica and her colleagues can forget about those dangers outside and enjoy the familiar tastes and experiences of home, such as their gin and tonics and imported food, whilst joking about the spectacle beyond the compound's gates. Baaz recognises that this behaviour often emerges as aid workers discover their whiteness as 'a marker of difference' (Baaz, 2005: 85). Her study and others (Roth, 2015; Verma, 2011) have suggested that the discovery of privilege, and the discomfort of living in a situation of huge inequality prompts some aid workers to further distance themselves from these inequalities, by engaging in social practices that are familiar to them. This may be witnessed in Kakuma, where the divisions between the compound and the environment outside, and possibly between aid workers from wealthy countries compared with their Kenyan colleagues, prompts Jessica and her friends to search for comfort through shared meanings and food and drink that remind them of home. Although I did not spend sufficient time on their compound to observe the degree to which this distancing played out in relation to the national staff, it is perhaps nevertheless noteworthy that on the two occasions I interacted with this group there was only one Kenyan present, on my second meeting with them.

Another aid worker I spoke to, a Japanese woman called Kai, also suggested ways in which the living conditions of a humanitarian worker, particularly the humanitarian compound, contributed to this distancing, and to a retreat to home comforts. Kai's compound was made up of a series of Japanese designed air-conditioned prefabs that stood out in Kakuma as being more modern and luxurious than others in the area. Kai spent most of her leisure time there, apart from occasionally going for a run or to the local bar. She told me she preferred drinking at her compound as she didn't like the hassle she received at the bar from people – mainly locals from Kakuma - searching for work.

Referring to her experience of living in Africa, including Kenya, she told me:

> "Mostly, people see [in] me money! […] here, I'm here inside our compound. We have ACs, we have electricity, we have everything. So…I don't think I deeply understand them and they deeply understand me."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 24 August 2016]

Whilst she had made an effort to become friends with Kenyans in Nairobi, when she visited there during her R and R, she had not done the same in Kakuma.

> "In Nairobi […] if I see there's no danger, I try to be a friend with them […] In Kakuma, I don't do that, because I work here."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 24 August 2016]

Kai's comments echo those made by Baaz's informants in her study of aid workers in Tanzania (Baaz, 2005: 88). They struggled with, or resisted, making friends with Tanzanians, on the grounds of both social and economic difference, and the suspicion that locals were only interested in friendship with foreigners for the possible financial gain. In addition Kai suggested she cannot be friends with local people in Kakuma because of her professional role; again reinforcing the limiting boundaries of the aid giver and aid receiver relationship. Kai appeared to be further alienated by the fact she was Japanese and not entirely fluent in English; she told me she had few friends in Kakuma, and attributed this to the lack of people there speaking her native language.

She was thus more alone and isolated than Jessica and her friends, but also used the compound as a space to which she could retreat and feel safe in fairly familiar surroundings; it was there that she could drink a beer, eat the Japanese snacks she offered to me, and cook Japanese food kept in the freezer on the compound, without the risk of being disturbed by local people demanding something from her.

Proximity and closeness: the compound family

Whilst aid structures produced separations between aid workers and the 'aid beneficiary' population, they also produced particular friendships that are arguably specific to the humanitarian context.

Jessica's friendships were partly constructed out of a shared confinement; where she and her colleagues spent most of their time together on the compound, either in the office or outside working hours. These were friendships not far from what Karl describes at the beginning of this chapter: the close proximity of office and sleeping quarters, the restrictions on movement, the fact that international staff are there for fairly short periods, all on 'unaccompanied posts', are all factors which give the friendships vitality and intensity. At the same time, it is this shared experience that had made Jessica doubt her relatedness to her friends and family back home, in the United States. When I asked Jessica if she missed home at all,[36] she told me she didn't, and usually returned to the United States once a year at Christmas. She was also looking ahead with clear disdain to a series of weddings that she had to attend there in the year ahead. She told me that she felt she didn't have much in common with her friends back home anymore. When she saw them, they were talking mostly about themselves and took little interest in the work she was doing, and she found their conversations boring, she told me. People she was once closest to were thus becoming part of a different reality – no longer associated with family and belonging, elements which Jessica was instead creating in her new living environment of Kakuma.

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[36] Interview with Jessica, Kakuma, 4 June 2016.

Kenyans I spoke to also found their friendships in Kakuma important, and meaningful in the context of shared working and living conditions. Rosemary is in her late twenties, and travels to the camp fairly regularly to conduct life skills trainings with young refugees, but also spends a large amount of her time on her organisation's compound. When she showed me around the compound in August 2016, I was struck by the lack of leisure facilities, and the proximity of the sleeping quarters to the office. Rosemary told me that these conditions meant much of the time all she did was "work, sleep and eat". On the other hand, she was aware of how her colleagues – all of them Kenyan - had become her "family", people with whom she could share the challenges of the work, who she knows will understand.

"That is how we give ourselves hope, that is how we try to….you don't give up through that, you feel that you're not alone. Even him if he is stressed, if he talks to you he feels that he's a bit relieved. It's all about your colleagues. Actually I came to know that they are my family while I'm here. They *are* my family. My family is just secondary. But the primary family that I have, they are here."

[Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

As described earlier, Japhet's experience is in many ways different from both Rosemary and Jessica. He described the social life as disappointing in Kakuma, partly because he was unable to interact with the people with whom he felt closest. His separation from people he identified with was all the more palpable because he travelled out of his compound more regularly to the camp, often on foot, where he was confronted by Burundian refugees; yet he was unable to engage with them, due to the rules imposed by his organisation. Institutional policies and structures thus serve to enable some forms of friendship and belonging, whilst denying others. More than once Japhet referred to the importance of his family in giving him a sense of belonging, and the impression I got was that he did not aspire to keep working in these sorts of conditions, away from the people with whom he felt most at ease. When I asked him in Nairobi[37] what he planned to do after his current job in Kakuma, he told me that he would like to keep building on his training in I.T. and possibly apply his skills in the corporate sector, or move in to academia, suggesting that he would feel more comfortable in an environment without such rigid boundaries and restrictions. Both his and Kai's reflections present a rejoinder to the

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[37] Conversation with Japhet, Nairobi, 30 September 2016.

narrative – suggested by Jessica and Rosemary - that one can find one's family in humanitarian work (Wigley, 2005); whilst this may be possible, and easy, for some, not everyone feels immediate affinity and a sense of belonging with their colleagues.

(Non) Family duty in humanitarian contexts

John is a Kenyan man in his thirties, who has been working for a UN agency in Kakuma for over ten years. He is married and has two children, aged 14 and 6 when I met him in August 2016. John's home is in Kisumu, in western Kenya, and this is where he travels to when he takes his R and R, every 9 weeks. His family have not come to see him in Kakuma, and he avoids this because of its designation as a 'non-family duty station'; this means that they cannot stay with him on his compound, and he was not confident that they would be entitled to evacuation by his organisation were there to be a security incident.

When John isn't working in the UN office, where he manages the refugee database, he told me he is usually in his bedroom watching films or listening to music, as he doesn't drink or smoke and isn't interested in parties. As a Seventh Day Adventist, he also attends church on Saturdays.

As a Kenyan working in a humanitarian setting, John's situation is not that unusual. I met other Kenyans in Turkana who had a similar family arrangement, where they worked for long periods hundreds of kilometres away from their spouse and children, only seeing them every two months. This was in marked contrast to the international aid workers in Kakuma. They are usually employed on contracts of between a few months and two years, whereas national staff, who fill the majority of administrative and implementing positions, may be employed for several years or more. They thus have to endure the conditions of an 'unaccompanied post' in a 'non-family duty station' for far longer than their international colleagues. In addition, Kenyans like John are more likely to stay in the job in order to ensure a regular income than move on to a different form of employment. Explaining why he chose to stay in this job for so long, living far from his family, John told me:

> "In Kakuma, we have a room in the compound. There is security, the rent is not as high as it would be in Nairobi or Kisumu. I don't have to get public transport to work every day. Then if I was the other side I think I would really be spending."

[Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

He admitted that his absence due to his work had at times been challenging for him and his wife, but that ultimately, his job helped pay the bills, put food on the table and his children in to school. John's justification for staying in a job that took him away from his family for long periods was similar to other Kenyans I spoke to; the importance of a treasured job and regular income that could support the family outweighed the sacrifices that were being made. Ultimately, the 'non-family duty' location still equated to Kenyans fulfilling family duties – to stay in work, and to provide for their dependents.

In Kakuma and elsewhere in Kenya, the majority of European and American aid workers I spoke to were in their twenties and thirties and did not have children, and were not married. This lack of family responsibilities may explain why those working in Kakuma were more likely to spend their R and R partying in Nairobi or on the beach on the Kenyan coast, whilst their national counterparts would spend their R and R catching up with family; an activity which was often complicated by the fact that relatives may be dotted around the country. The situation is made even more difficult because many national aid workers do not receive the same benefits as their international colleagues, a point that has been reported in the media (NPR, 2018) and in humanitarian and academic literature (MacLachlan and Carr, 2005; McWha-Hermann et al., 2017; Peters, 2016). As Peters writes:

> National staff members are almost never considered eligible for similar benefits largely because they are seen as belonging in and to the work site, not as displaced or inconvenienced by the work location.

(Peters, 2016: 498)

John claimed that his organisation provides free flights to Nairobi for the international staff, while he is expected to pay for his transport back home – a journey that is not only a flight to Nairobi, but another journey of several hours after that, in order to get to Kisumu.

For Kenyans, then, much of their R and R was spent travelling, and then juggling family demands and other duties.

As Rosemary pointed out to me:

> "You get home, you have a lot of things to do….remember you are tired also, you want to go rest, but at home a lot of things are waiting for you. Even visiting friends is work! You don't rest."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

Her colleague, Moses, who I met in Nairobi during his R and R away from Kakuma, made a similar comment.

> "So you have seven days [for R and R], that you have to divide between your rest time, between yourself, family and any other friend. So technically, you will hurt someone. You will not be good to everyone. Not everyone will understand."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 12 August 2016]

The accounts of Moses, John and Rosemary demonstrate the ways in which their family lives, and their relationships as well, are shaped by the circumstances of their work. The non-family duty station, and unaccompanied post, implies that aid workers are not to have long-term relationships whilst in Kakuma. For some, this meant putting their romantic lives on hold; a point which Japhet too, as an international aid worker, acknowledged.

> "When you come to a place like Kakuma you have been removed from your place, your normal life, where you had a life and probably where a relationship would have developed because that is where you know people, you have friends and all of that. And you are here in a sort of temporary….so I don't deny that you could meet someone here. But in a way this never feels like home, for you to build something."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 25 August 2016]

But for many of the Kenyans I met, being in a non-family duty station simply meant having to adapt their existing family life and relationships accordingly, which at times implied making some difficult decisions, as the following accounts demonstrate.

Peter, whom I met in August 2016, is a Kenyan man in his forties who has worked for a UN agency in Kakuma since the 1990s.[38] He monitors arrivals in the camp, and oversees food distributions and resettlements. He has been married and divorced twice, has three children and is also supporting a stepdaughter from a previous marriage. Throughout this period he has seen his family only during his rest and recuperation period every two months, or sometimes longer when he has had to miss his R and R due to work pressures. He told me that sometimes when he returns home he does not recognise the people he is with, including some of his family members, and he has lost touch with many old friends. Peter believed that most relationships in humanitarian work will fail – mainly because the jobs are 'unaccompanied', so a choice has to be made between staying with the "UN family" (Wigley, 2005) or with one's own. He thought that most Kenyans – men and women – would choose their career, and the financial security it brings, over a relationship. He added that a job with the UN in particular is very coveted, and the skills developed within the UN system are not easily transferable. Echoing the comments made by Karl when I met him in Lodwar, Peter told me that there are not many options for career progression open to Kenyans such as himself who are working in humanitarian settings. The only place he could go with his skills is Nairobi, and it is hard to get a job with his UN agency there – he had tried four times and been unsuccessful. This was why he remained working in Kakuma, to the detriment, he believed, of having a fulfilling and sustainable relationship.

Peter's remarks highlight the limited choices Kenyans face with regard to their humanitarian careers, compared with their international colleagues. However, the implications for Kenyan men and women are different. Although Peter had clearly struggled in his relationships as a result of the work he was doing, other Kenyans I met suggested that it was harder for women, as men were less likely to accept their wives being away for such long periods.

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[38] Interview with Peter, Kakuma, 23 August 2016.

Samuel, a Kenyan aid worker I met in Nairobi who had worked in Dadaab refugee camp in north-eastern Kenya, explained the different perceptions of Kenyan men and women in humanitarian contexts:

> "I think it's more hard for ladies being in the field than for men. I saw very close friends who lost their families. The society is a little bit unbalanced. A man in Dadaab has better chances of maintaining a relationship with a girl in Nairobi than a girl does if she is in Dadaab and the man is in Nairobi. This is based on experience. Some of my friends who were in relationships have lost them. We're not very good at being patient!"
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 29 September 2015]

Rosemary echoed these comments when describing the difficulties for Kenyan women working in humanitarian settings.

> "Many people won't understand, that you are going to leave him for two months, and you tell him that you don't have someone here."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

Rosemary herself is in a relationship with a Kenyan man who she only sees every three months, due to being in Kakuma and her partner working in Zambia. Although she told me her partner is understanding towards this situation, Rosemary believes that her society generally views women in her position negatively.

> "So here I am, I'm looking for a man, these men are not serious. And again as a woman, when you focused your head onto career, your goal is always to be much better, much better, much better. So you know relationships, fine it's there but you don't even take it seriously. So, then the time you wake up, you are 35 years old. You don't have a husband. And again women with empowerment […] I don't know if it's all women but African women […] our men are very, very, very…they need a woman who is submissive. So if me, I tell this guy I'm bringing 50 per cent and you're bringing 50 per cent to the house and we need to respect one another, there's nothing like us, me being submissive, and you also need to help out with the work. There's no African man who will…understand that."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma 21 August 2016]

Rosemary is suggesting that maintaining a career in the humanitarian sphere is particularly difficult for Kenyan women. Her comments speak of a patriarchal society – not unique to Kenya - where women have to work a lot harder to prove themselves as capable in their profession; and in doing so, they risk disapproval from men. A woman like her is judged for choosing her career and a comfortable income above a family, and may end up unmarried as a result. Rosemary is therefore implying that women are forced to consider two distinct and separate options: pursue a humanitarian career, or pursue family life. This is in contrast to John, who has continued with his career whilst also being married and having children. Rosemary told me that whilst she loved her job and would like to get more experience in humanitarian settings, she did not see herself staying in this sort of work, particularly if she were to get pregnant. Other career options she was considering were lecturing or consultancy work.

For women who have children, there is the expectation that they must shoulder most of this responsibility regardless of their work. This becomes particularly complicated in an environment where families of humanitarian workers are discouraged from living there. One Kenyan woman, Jane - a nurse in her early forties, who worked in a maternity clinic for an international humanitarian organisation in Kakuma from 2013 to 2014 – described to me the challenges of looking after children in these contexts. When I met her in Lodwar she told me that in Kakuma she would work long shifts, from 7 a.m. until 4 p.m., delivering the babies of several pregnant women at any given moment. Whilst she was working there, she was also looking after her two children who came with her. Leaving them with her husband, who was living in Lodwar, was not an option for Jane.

> "Men in Turkana don't move with their wife to their work, you will move with your kids but men will remain where they feel it is, where they think it is home...not many men in Turkana would move with you, as you move as a lady looking in search of employment. So I moved with my kids."

[Interview, Lodwar, 28 May 2016]

Jane's organisation did not provide accommodation, so she had to look for a place to live with her children in Kakuma town. She also had to find a woman who could help look after the children whilst she was working in the camp. She told me it was a difficult time, as the youngest child would cry a lot when she went out, particularly when she was doing night

shifts at the camp's clinic. Her organisation was not sympathetic towards this situation; she believed that women like her, with young children, had little choice but to resign and seek employment elsewhere. Ultimately, Jane decided to look for a more flexible job in Lodwar, where she is from, to ensure she could spend more time with her children. Reflecting on the realities of working in the camp, she told me:

"A camp to me would best be suited to single ladies and gentlemen. You know for a gentleman the responsibilities of taking care of a child is not majorly with them. So for the ladies you must really have come from that area, or your children must have grown to an extent that you are leaving them away from the workplace. It is not the best place for family people."

[Interview, Lodwar, 28 May 2016]

Jane's remarks highlight that Kenyan women face both organisational and societal pressures concerning how they are expected to behave as professionals. Both she and Rosemary were in some respects resisting social and cultural norms which consign women to being wives and mothers without professional ambitions; acts of resistance witnessed in other studies of women development workers in the global south (Goetz, 2001). The pressures and expectations – from both society and employers – concerning how women should behave, and what image they should be fulfilling in humanitarian settings, adds an extra layer of challenges for female aid workers in Kenya. Whilst the 'unaccompanied post' and 'non-family duty station' were problematic for both Kenyan men and women, these restrictions entail for women like Rosemary and Jane a conscious decision to resist their perceived role as wife and mother, and work in an environment whose policies and structures are clearly in favour of men. The comparative freedom that Kenyan men have in this context can be seen with Peter, who had pursued his professional interests in a remote location far away from his family; albeit with two failed marriages behind him.

What happens in Kakuma, stays in Kakuma: Humanitarian infidelities

The freedom enjoyed by men in these situations had specific implications, as my discussions with Caesar demonstrate.[39] A Kenyan man in his thirties and married with a ten year old child, Caesar has spent many years in humanitarian contexts, including Ethiopia, Uganda and Dadaab refugee camp in north-eastern Kenya. When I met him he was working on a water and sanitation programme with an international NGO based in Lodwar, but travelled frequently to Kakuma where their programme was being implemented. His wife and child live in Thika, a suburb outside Nairobi. On two occasions I joined Caesar for a drink in a local bar in Kakuma town – a place rarely frequented by international aid workers, but popular with the local community. It was also full of sex workers – a fairly common sight in any local bar in Kenya. Caesar told me he believed that infidelities were inevitable, and acceptable, in his profession, given the realities of working in remote settings, far away from his family.

> I believe it's nature, he said – we have God-given needs he laughed. And it's to be expected if you are away from your home for 2 months at a time, he added. Do you think your wife feels the same? I asked. He didn't directly answer the question, but talked of how there is no other option, as if he wasn't working in the field how else would he provide for his family, when jobs in Nairobi are so scarce. What about your marriage vows, I asked. Yes you do make those vows, but part of that is to pass through such moments and just carry on as best you can – you can't help nature, he repeated. And what is the alternative? he asked.

> [Field notes, 5 June 2016]

Like Peter, Caesar alludes to the struggles of finding work in Kenya as a reason why he chooses to stay in a job that takes him away from his family. Whilst Caesar did not live permanently on a compound in Kakuma, the conditions of his work were not that dissimilar from others I met there; he had kept his wife and child at home because of the nature of the work he was doing, and he was able to stay in these environments in a way that was far less easy for women.

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[39] Conversations held in Kakuma on 2, 3, 5 and 6 June 2016.

His comments also point clearly to how humanitarian structures and workplace practices permit certain forms of behaviour whilst denying others. Caesar and other aid workers are expected not to bring their partners and children with them to the field. They are left to adapt to these circumstances, and it is clear from Caesar's remarks that infidelity is one way of doing this. In the absence of what may be called a 'normal' social routine – with friends and family from the aid worker's usual socio-cultural milieu – aid workers find alternative ways of spending their time. Excessive drinking and other illicit behaviour becomes more commonplace, as has been documented by aid workers themselves (Thomson et al., 2006). When I met Moses in Nairobi he told me about colleagues in Kakuma who had engaged in what he believed was excessive behaviour – such as casual sex with multiple partners – as a way of coping with the harsh living conditions. Two female aid workers I met in Kakuma claimed that sex workers were being hired regularly by some of their colleagues, and at times had been allowed on to the grounds of their compounds by the security guards.

Rosemary also told me that casual affairs were a regular occurrence in Kakuma. It was a reason, she believed, that men would always suspect their female partners of having affairs, if they were working in humanitarian settings.

> "Here, people do...it's said in Kiswahili 'helping one another.' There's nowhere we are going, but just for that comfort, for that companionship. Yeah. But when you're out of this place, at the airport, we don't know one another."

[Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

Rosemary and Caesar's comments both indicate how behaviour – including what in the public domain is generally viewed as illicit or immoral – is shaped and validated by the working conditions of humanitarian settings. The 'bunkerisation' (Duffield, 2012) of these settings creates a bunkerised mentality; separated from friends and families in distant locations, and from the local community beyond the compound gates, some aid workers commit acts of adultery as if this were a means of survival in otherwise harsh living conditions. As suggested by others (Appleby, 2010; Green, 2018; Smirl, 2015), morality shifts in these environments, and what is often more concealed, and disapproved of, in 'normal' society becomes more overt and acceptable within the context of confined living conditions governed by strict codes of conduct regarding what is and is not permissible in

social relations. This is implicit in Caesar's and Rosemary's references to extra-marital affairs – with neither of them denouncing the apparent regularity of them in a humanitarian setting such as Kakuma. And it can be witnessed with Jessica, who is not allowed to engage whenever or however she may wish with refugees or the local Turkana community, but can share a racist joke with other, similarly confined aid workers from Europe and America. And it is also relevant for those who are engaging in extra-marital affairs, or hiring sex workers. The common thread with these forms of behaviour is that they are permissible because of the unusual circumstances of living in an emergency situation, where the normal rules governing human interaction often do not apply.

This culture of permissibility has been written about in the memoirs of aid workers (Smirl, 2015; Thomson et al., 2006), and is being heavily scrutinised today in light of allegations of sexual misconduct.[40] Yet the discussions I had with Rosemary and Caesar demonstrate that whilst this culture is acknowledged by both men and women, particularly with regards to the regularity of extra-marital affairs, the ability for women to do as they please is markedly different. They do not have the same ease of mobility that is part of the humanitarian worker's life – travelling from one emergency deployment to another, and one job to another. And while both Kenyan men and women may endure the working conditions of the humanitarian setting – due to a shared concern that jobs in Kenya in this sector are scarce – a Kenyan woman is faced with further challenges due to society's expectations regarding her role as wife and mother.

In the concluding section that follows, I will turn to these factors, and others, which produce and reproduce inequalities in the aid sector that influence the emotional behaviour and experiences of aid workers, particularly in the context of the humanitarian compound.

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[40] Kakuma refugee camp has also had its own misconduct scandals. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership's report on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers includes informants from Kakuma claiming to have experienced or witnessed this form of misconduct (Lattu, 2008). And in May 2017 UNHCR reported that some of its Kenyan staff were found to have been involved in corruption, fraud, threats and intimidation in the camp. Disciplinary measures were enforced and an independent management review launched by UNHCR in response. (UNHCR, 2017).

Concluding Remarks: Compound lives and their meanings for stress in the aid sector

Humanitarian compounds exist because of a security narrative in the aid sector which assumes specific locations – usually disaster or post-conflict areas – are too dangerous for aid agency staff to live in 'normal' conditions.[41] Whilst critiques of development practice already acknowledge the spatial divides that are created and expanded in the encounter between aid giver and aid receiver (Baaz, 2005; Heron, 2007; Wilson, 2012), humanitarian compounds further entrench this separation through their specific structures and policies. Japhet's account suggests that this separation feels more pronounced for those who claim a natural affinity with the aid receiver, due to a sense of kinship and shared identity. The implication for Japhet was that he was unable to find support among the people he would normally desire it from. Both Japhet and Kai were faced with being somewhat alone in the international aid worker community in Kakuma, due to a lack of shared culture or language among their colleagues. This is in contrast to the experiences of people like Jessica and her friends; their discussions about food and drink are pointers to a shared culture, and thus a sense of belonging.

The humanitarian compound, whilst creating separation from the outside world, also creates opportunities for belonging from within. It is a space for aid workers to rebuild their own family, through living and working together in close proximity. And it provides an escape and isolation from the perceived dangers and difficulties beyond the compound gates. This escapism may be found in the hiring of sex workers, in casual sex, in excessive drinking, or in the form of luxury food items that compensate for an otherwise unvaried diet. My informants may not have referred to these pastimes as 'stress relief', yet it was clear that many of them were trying to find ways to make their lives a little easier and more enjoyable in an environment that is labelled as dangerous and unsafe. As Verma (Verma, 2011) argues with reference to French development workers in Madagascar, the tendency to resort to European modes of eating, social relations and other habits become

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[41] Of course, what 'normal' conditions actually represent, when applied to international aid workers deployed to any community in the global south, is still likely to be very different from how the local population lives, as Baaz observes in her study of Scandinavian development workers in Tanzania (Baaz, 2005).

coping mechanisms in a context where aid workers are constantly reminded of their social and cultural difference from the communities in which they live.

Yet these sorts of activities are not available, or relevant, to every aid worker equally. How much fun there is to be had, or how much illicit behaviour occurs, is shaped by socio-economic circumstances, by the status of 'national' or 'international' staff, and by race and gender. According to some interpretations (Green, 2018), a white saviour culture dominates in humanitarian operations, breeding a sense of exceptionalism, and enabling immoral behaviour on the grounds of the aid worker's mere presence as a 'do-gooder'. Thus whilst the professional lives of humanitarians are infused with moral authority, in their personal lives there is a moral vacuum.

The privilege that comes with being white in a developing country, and the uncomfortable inequalities this generates, is acknowledged by development and humanitarian workers alike. Discussing the prevailing use by development workers from the global north of domestic staff on low salaries in Tanzania, an informant in Baaz's study notes:

> Overall, I accept a whole lot of things, which would be strange at home. Why? 'It is part of the system, it is the way things are done here.' Certainly, that can explain a great deal. But at the same time as I adjust to that which prevails, which on the whole is a good thing to do, can that not become an excuse for doing things which I would not do at home?

(Baaz, 2005: 91)

Privilege and exceptionalism are thus tied to both race and the status that comes from being an international aid worker from a high income northern country. As Peters recognises (Peters, 2013), race and nationality intersect in the experiences and treatment of aid workers; it is often the education and mobility of white professionals from countries in the global north that help them gain the status of 'international aid worker' in a way that is not so easily attained by people from developing countries. There are undoubtedly huge class and socio-economic differences among white aid professionals, which also have implications for their ability to gain the required experience and qualifications for this sector. Nevertheless, opportunities for higher education within a globally recognised, elite university which can help an aspiring humanitarian gain a foothold on the career ladder

are far more accessible for individuals born and brought up in the same countries where these universities originate than for Africans with similar aspirations. It has also been suggested that having entered the aid sector, it remains difficult for national staff to move beyond this status (by moving across borders) because their employers, already bearing the financial costs of keeping aid workers from northern countries in the field, are reluctant to do the same for national recruits (Redfield, 2013: 157).

Their status as 'nationals', and the related challenges of attempting to graduate to the 'international' status that would bring more material gain, may partly explain why Kenyans I met – both in Kakuma and elsewhere – appeared to live a more modest life than their European counterparts; there was less talk among them of drinking and parties at the weekends, and more about sleeping in their rooms and going to church. Where the Europeans and Americans I met were spending their R and R at nightclubs and parties in Nairobi with other expatriates or on the beach on the Kenyan coast, the Kenyans I spoke to would spend it visiting family members and catching up with administrative tasks they were unable to complete in Kakuma. Where for many international aid workers, their experiences of working in an emergency is one of adventure and danger, for nationals it is often about survival (Baaz, 2005: 92); in the case of Kenyans in Kakuma, this entailed tolerating the working conditions - including lower salaries and long separations from their families - in order to keep their jobs and continue supporting their dependents. These different standards of living and of treatment by their employers are what Pawson labels "a sort of apartheid policy in liberal clothes" which contributes to exploitation of the wider local community (Pawson, 2008: 118).

These conditions were easier for the men to accept and live with. Thus whilst race and nationality are key factors in understanding the everyday lifestyles and challenges associated with humanitarian compounds, there is also a gendered dimension. The lives of the Kenyan women I met in particular, were dominated by social norms and expectations that - unlike their counterparts from Europe and America or some of the Kenyan men – at times clashed with professional aspirations. Whilst the assumed role of wife and mother is clearly a problem for white women as well – as demonstrated in recent discussions regarding the gender pay gap in British companies – the experiences of the Kenyan women I spoke to in Kakuma are quite specific to the sector in which they work. Constrained by the limited opportunities open to national aid workers wishing to progress

in their careers without travelling abroad, by the institutional rules against family life, and by societal disapproval of over-ambitious women, their ability to stay within these humanitarian environments appears particularly challenging.

The following chapter will continue to provide insights into how aid structures and working practices affect the emotional lives and professional choices of aid workers, but in a different context. I will build on some of the imagery hitherto evoked regarding what is associated with 'good' aid practice, and the realities this conceals. Focusing primarily on informants based in Nairobi, I will investigate the everyday problems of the aid industrial complex that often prevail regardless of location or the type of work; but which nevertheless have varied implications according to job status, nationality and gender. These everyday challenges shine a light on some of the contradictions of the sector and the difficulties of fulfilling both institutional and public expectations of aid delivery.

CHAPTER 5

THE MORAL AMBIGUITIES OF EVERYDAY AID PRACTICE

> The journalists interviewed the white figures against a backdrop of vast masses of black African refugees and dusty, deforested camps that seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see. The framing of such scenes was very predictable. The aid workers' concerned faces (and inexplicably clean T-shirts) seemed to pop off the screen. The media clearly sought charismatic figures – maybe latter-day Nurse Nightingales and Doctor Schweitzers – among their ranks, just as they sought nameless victims […] among the refugees (Evans and Hall 2007: 5). Selfless healers, selfless victims.
>
> (Malkki, 2015: 26)

In *The Need to Help*, Malkki (Malkki, 2015) observes how media portrayals of aid workers as selfless heroes informed her own assumptions about the motivations of her respondents – Finnish staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). She goes on to argue that many of these assumptions were proven false and challenged by her informants. This chapter's opening passage from Malkki's book echoes others before her (Hancock, 1994) and illustrates the idealised, and popular, image of aid work: as a heroic and selfless endeavour, primarily carried out by white westerners. This image is evoked also by Wilson when she argues that celebrity missions to disaster areas serve to reinforce the moral authority of privileged people from wealthy countries, and their role in rescuing a helpless 'other' (Wilson, 2012). Images of black aid workers from the countries where these disasters take place are rarely picked up by the cameras in western media coverage. The image presented by Malkki in the opening passage may be typical of how aid work is portrayed in the media, but obscures other day-to-day realities; such as the amount of time spent by aid workers not in the field saving lives, but at their desks pushing papers.

It is these contradictions which I wish to investigate in this chapter. Whilst the previous chapter focused on the exclusive lifestyles, policies and working practices related to humanitarian settings, what I wish to show in this chapter are problems which are less bound by the nature of the work or the geographical location. It is important to explore these as they raise questions over the familiar tropes associated with aid work, including assumptions about what constitutes 'stress'. Whilst the findings in the last chapter indicated that emergency environments may breed certain forms of exceptionalism and behaviour which undermine the principles of humanitarianism, in this chapter I wish to

delve deeper into the assumption – often presented in the media in wealthy, western, aid-giving countries – that aid work is a moral and courageous endeavour. I will explore how the internal workings of aid – the day-to-day priorities and practices – may reinforce or undermine the common tropes of heroism and selflessness associated with this work. An inquiry of this nature is relevant to my research interests as it addresses the possible dissonance between idealism and reality in the aid sector, and how this translates into a particular organisational culture and expectations regarding how aid workers should behave and the degree to which they can show their vulnerability.

I will start with further examination of how the academic literature and media portray the aid sector and professionals working within it. Departing from the more enclosed, structured setting of an emergency area such as Kakuma, I will then use the accounts from my informants in Nairobi and Turkana's capital, Lodwar, to assess how common descriptive terms in aid work are negotiated, enacted or resisted in aid practice; with a particular focus on the concepts of altruism and heroism. The subsequent section will investigate how these tropes may also be framed by institutional contexts; including internal restructuring processes and external policies and restrictions on how aid is delivered.

Finally, I will conclude with some remarks that draw together the accounts of my informants and highlight the intersectional elements of aid workers' motivations and their desires to feel valued in their sector. The chapter illustrates how the everyday processes of aid work are shaped by particular values and assumptions which instil expectations and pressures on staff; resulting in emotional, physical or mental distress for some, as stories from my informants will demonstrate.

The uneven moral boundaries of aid

Returning to Malkki's observations, we can see that the emphasis in western media coverage of aid work is often on the sacrifices made by professionals (and volunteers) from Europe or America, who have supposedly given up their comfortable lives in their own country to work in dangerous and difficult conditions, far from family and friends. It is not difficult to find similar imagery of the aid worker as "a figure of virtuous self-denial"

(Redfield, 2008: 202) in other press coverage of humanitarian interventions.[42] Underlying this portrayal of sacrifice is the idea that inhabitants of wealthier nations have a moral duty towards impoverished people in developing countries; an idea famously argued by Peter Singer (Singer, 1972), and implicitly adapted by others in studies of aid workers from the global north (Heron, 2007; Malkki, 2015). The assumption in Singer's argument is that people contributing aid – particularly those giving money, in his article – originate from wealthy countries in the northern hemisphere. This raises the question of whether there is an equivalent moral duty for aid givers (and practitioners) who originate from the same developing countries that are receiving aid. This question is important for the purposes of this chapter as it suggests two problems. Firstly, whether there is moral equivalence between nationals from the global south and people from wealthier nations providing aid; or whether the former should be applauded and rewarded more because they are operating from a situation of greater disadvantage, or less, because they are not necessarily sacrificing a better livelihood or their home comforts in quite the same way as aid workers from rich countries. And secondly, whether this idea of moral duty is actually fulfilled in the performance of aid-giving; or whether, in fact, aid-giving – including through direct aid interventions – may have the opposite effect and do more harm than good.

Turning to the first of these problems, in the popular imagery of aid workers, little is said about staff from Africa, Asia or low income countries, whose backgrounds and living conditions may be far less privileged than their counterparts from Europe or America. Instead, the focus on mainly white, western aid workers in the public domain[43] echoes historical, colonial imagery of white saviours going to backward countries out of a sense of

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[42] See, for instance, The Telegraph, *Aid workers are too often the unsung heroes*, which tells the story of a British health worker named William Pooley, who contracted the Ebola virus in Sierra Leone and whose voluntary work as a nurse there was, according to the article, "motivated not by the desire to be well known, but by selfless sacrifice." The article includes a photo of Pooley posing for the cameras with six unnamed Africans, all of them wearing T-shirts with the message, "Remove the Barriers: Free Health Care." (Telegraph, 2014). See also The Sun, *'My Heart is Full': Hero aid worker is reunited with little Iraqi girl, 5, he rescued from ISIS sniper who had killed her mother* (Hodge, 2017*).

[43] A google image search on 'aid worker' or 'humanitarian worker' provides a helpful insight of the degree to which the 'white saviour' dominates imagery of aid and development work, in spite of the sector comprising approximately 90 per cent nationals from the global south. Many of the images contained therein are from aid agencies' own image archives.; The prominence of this imagery has also been depicted, and satirised, on the website Barbie Savior ("Barbie Savior," n.d.).

duty to civilise the natives living there (Baaz, 2005). As Baaz suggests, with reference to Africa in particular, the white saviour narrative is "the celebration and mythologizing of the great deeds that the white man/hero alone was to accomplish in the dark continent" (Baaz, 2005: 107). Furthermore, she argues, this conceptualisation now informs "contemporary expectations attached to the development worker role" (Baaz, 2005: 107).

Both Baaz's postcolonial critique and Singer's moral argument concerning aid giving share the same problem of emphasising the power and agency of the white westerner, and in so doing deny or silence the worldview of other aid workers, whose moral compass may be shaped by very different circumstances than people from wealthy, privileged countries.

With regard to the second problem, concerning the supposed benefits of fulfilling a moral duty – Singer's utilitarian position – the assumption with aid organisations, and their staff, is that they are in pursuit of humanitarian ideals to save lives and end suffering. Whilst the publicised goals of aid organisations usually appear morally commendable, [44] how operations are managed and implemented on a day-to-day basis can be more problematic, with difficult choices being made affecting the lives of aid recipients. As has been suggested elsewhere (for example, in Barnett and Weiss, 2008; Bornstein and Redfield, 2011), these decisions call into question the assumed moral authority of aid workers, as funding constraints, organisational priorities and bureaucratic hierarchies, and differing internal and external political interests can all lead to outcomes that may seem far from institutional missions and goals or personal humanitarian ideals. With reference to human rights NGOs, Mutua challenges the assumption that these occupy a "seemingly unassailable high moral ground," and operate under an "aura of nobility and righteousness" when in reality they may not be fully accountable to the constituents they claim to represent (Mutua, 2009: 33). Indeed, his claims ring true in the broader aid sector, given recent accusations of misconduct and exploitation of 'beneficiaries'; issues which I have discussed in the previous chapter. As Wenar argues, these realities also

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[44] As examples, Oxfam's stated goals include helping people claim their right to a better life, championing equal rights for women, saving lives and safeguarding global food supplies (Oxfam GB, n.d.). Christian Aid aims to expose poverty throughout the world, help in practical ways to end it, and highlight, challenge and change the structures and systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalized (Christian Aid, n.d.).

undermine the inherent assumption of Singer's proposal that giving aid will lead to better outcomes for affected populations and is therefore worth the personal sacrifice (Wenar, 2011).[45]

The dissonance between personal and institutional ideals and reality is a source of moral angst or, to use Fechter's (2016) term, moral labour. To engage in moral labour is to continue with one's efforts to deliver aid despite knowing that it may in fact be impossible to achieve the goals of one's organisation.

> Simply inhabiting the situation and accommodating this knowledge while expanding one's effort on making strides towards them, and the awareness of at least partial futility of their professional endeavours can be understood as a form of immaterial labour.
>
> (Fechter, 2016: 231)

Crewe frames this in another way, by suggesting that engaging in development is full of "incongruities between rhetoric and practice, and between past, present, and future," which can generate intense emotions such as hope and despair (Crewe, 2014: 102).

The moral tensions described above all assume that part of the struggle of aid work is being able to live out one's altruistic intentions. Yet aid professionals themselves have sought to debunk the idea that they are selfless heroes, or that aid work is a purely selfless endeavour. In *Sharing the Front Lines and the Back Hills,* one humanitarian worker shares his real motivations for doing aid work:

> Some outsiders revere humanitarian workers as possessing an extraordinary measure of compassion. I am viscerally embarrassed at the implications of my own saintliness. In fact, the attraction to this field in my case is far less noble. It is a ghoulish fascination with the frightening moment of violent anarchy. It is a repetition compulsion that draws me toward what I fear, rather than run from it.

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[45] Singer himself has also acknowledged the possible harm caused by aid, in *The Life You Can Save*, a 2009 follow-up to his original article, and a book which Wenar also critiques.

Perhaps I am seduced by the sense of invincibility from escaping death's grip so near at hand.

(Martone, 2002: 178)

One of Baaz's informants in her study of international aid workers in Tanzania states:

I'm not going because I think that I can do good for other people. It's *absolutely* my egoistic will that drives me and I think it's like that for everybody.

(Baaz, 2005: 90)

In Malkki's study of Finnish staff from ICRC, when asked whether her job was some sort of "calling", one of her respondents alludes to the financial benefits of working for her organisation:

"Well, the Red Cross pays good salaries. So that already drops you from the pinnacles of self-sacrifice."

(Malkki, 2015: 27)

Other studies suggest that entering into this profession is as much to do with self-development as it is to do with the altruistic intention to help others (Bjerneld, 2009; Cook, 2007). Yet the seemingly more selfish qualities of self-development or chasing an adventure are viewed in the sector as immoral and undesirable (de Jong, 2011). Again, this image of the aid worker as an altruistic hero presupposes that it is a huge sacrifice to choose this profession, and that the gains from such a career – whether monetary, spiritual or any other – are secondary to the primary goal of ending the suffering of those in need of assistance. To put these motives on an equal footing, or to reverse their importance, would place the aid worker in the category of the immoral villain as described by de Jong (2011). Some studies (de Jong, 2011; Wigley, 2005) suggest that aid workers themselves are guilty of these sorts of judgements.

The 'altruists' tend to criticise the 'careerists' for their seemingly less pure motives. At times the two groups can become synonymous, inaccurately, with

those who are 'dedicated, work hard and sacrifice the most' and those who 'spend more time worrying about their career..'

(Wigley, 2005: 36)

These "false binaries" (de Jong, 2011) make the flawed assumption that aid workers – or any other professionals – do not have multiple, varied and changing motivations. They also mask alternative perceptions and meaning-making related to aid work, and overlook both social and structural realities which frame the aid worker's experience. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, aid workers from Africa, women in particular, at times have to work harder to prove themselves as able humanitarians – particularly in terms of their authority, expertise and mobility – when compared with their international colleagues from Europe or America. In addition, the common tropes associated with aid work pay little attention to the ways that a person's socio-economic situation – their class, their living conditions and their family life – may influence how they perceive opportunities for paid work; whether or not the work happens to also have the added moral value of being in the helping professions. As Arvidson (2014) suggests in his study of Bangladeshi NGO workers, seemingly altruistic motivations may be complicated by a person's positioning within their society, by the resources provided to them by their organisation and by their treatment within the workplace.

Yet the idea of 'the perfect humanitarian' is still steeped in imagery of selflessness and heroism, as much among those working within the aid sector as those observing it from the outside. It can be viewed in the awareness raising materials of aid organisations[46] and, as some studies of humanitarian and human rights organisations have found (Rességuier, 2018; Rodgers, 2010; Wigley, 2005), places expectations on staff behaviour.

In the following substantive sections I will uncover some of the ambiguities that lie beneath the common lexicons of aid work. I will also investigate to what extent these lexicons are shaped and enforced by aid organisations, and how staff respond to circumstances that call into question their own motives for doing this work. The chapter

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[46] Concern Worldwide, for instance, refers to its "humanitarian heroes" who "risk their lives to help others" (Concern, n.d.) whilst UNICEF's Careers page claims that "promoting the rights of every child is not a job, it's a calling" (UNICEF, n.d.)

thus pays particular attention to the motivations and values of aid workers, and illustrates how these are often determined by the conditions they live in and their positioning within their organisation. As I will demonstrate, these factors provide insights into the everyday challenges that arise, and the ways in which aid workers talk about and respond to them.

Where altruism begins and ends

Lars and Inger are a Norwegian couple, both in their sixties, who have worked in the aid sector since the 1970s. They have spent most of their lives working on post-conflict and development programmes in Latin America, Africa and Asia; Inger within NGOs and Lars within the UN, although when I met them he had recently retired and was spending his time supporting a global child rights network of which he was a board member. After having lunch with Inger in Nairobi one afternoon, she invited me to their house for dinner in September 2016.[47] We ate a Thai chicken curry and home-made carrot cake prepared by their uniformed Kenyan cook, and drank wine together in their spacious, immaculately arranged living room adorned with vases of flowers and family photographs. Their house is situated in Riverside Park, an exclusive gated community full of cream stucco buildings and grand outdoor staircases descending from their entrances, surrounded by well-maintained gardens and a private car park. It is a few kilometres up the road from Inger's office, where she works as the Regional Director of an international faith-based organisation. After having worked in several war zones and fragile states over the decades, including Colombia, El Salvador, Sudan, Somalia and Pakistan, Lars and Inger were happy to now be settled in Kenya; a country where they could easily travel around and go on safari holidays when their two grown up daughters visited with their families. Their daughters had spent most of their lives moving with their parents from one deployment to another, but Inger acknowledged to me that they had managed fairly well due to the financial security provided through Lars' job at the UN, and their ability to hire a full-time nanny wherever they lived. Our discussions over dinner and wine included Lars' many adventures on the road crossing dangerous borders, of negotiating humanitarian access with government authorities, and of implementing polio eradication programmes; as well as Kenya's rapid rates of growth and investment compared with other African countries, and the reduction of crime problems due to the Kenyan

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[47] Field notes, 7 September 2016.

government's shoot-to-kill policy. Despite the policy's apparent success, Lars and Inger still had an emergency bunker situated within their home, which Lars was quick to point out had never been used.

Lars and Inger's lifestyle and living arrangements are not so different from many other aid workers from western countries whom I met in Nairobi, and highlight the ambiguities of aid worker altruism. Although Lars and Inger had worked in many disaster situations over the years, they also clearly had chosen to have a comfortable life in Kenya and in other countries in which they have lived. They told me that they had spent long periods apart, including when their daughters were young – leaving Inger responsible for most of the childcare, along with her nannies – and that this had been difficult. But they also clearly loved their work, and Lars in particular spoke of how rewarding it felt to implement polio eradication schemes throughout the world, having been born himself to a woman who had the virus. Lars' positioning within the UN had meant that although he and Inger at times lived in unstable environments, their own personal and financial security was protected and as a result they felt able to raise children whilst they progressed up the career ladder; although Inger had taken time out of her career when her children were young.

Nairobi is a city where a fairly comfortable home life may be juxtaposed against more intrepid experiences in the field; where aid workers travelling regularly to Somalia, Sudan, Congo and other nearby countries can come home to a compound with a gym and swimming pool, an array of yoga classes and exercise groups, a vibrant night-life with many bars and restaurants on offer, and the support of life coaches and therapists – many of whom are expatriates from Europe or the United States. The house that I myself lived in during my field research, along with two aid professionals, was a two-storey, six bedroom building, with a large well-maintained garden, that came with Kenyan staff including a cook, gardener, cleaner and guard. It was also the site of lunch and dinner parties and yoga workshops, attended primarily by European aid workers.

A yoga workshop held at my house in Nairobi, 14 May 2016
[author's own photo]

In addition, Nairobi is also the site of the UN headquarters for the Africa region, located in Gigiri – a leafy suburb that draws in many officials working for the UN and the diplomatic community. The UN complex has its own neatly clipped gardens, swimming pool and gym within its highly securitised entry system, and several cafés and restaurants to choose from. It appears a peaceful place to work, an oasis of calm away from the regular traffic, pollution and stark economic inequalities that characterise much of Nairobi. It also highlights, according to one writer (Kazado, 2008), the stark differences in living conditions for international aid workers and the local community. Comparing the rental cost of properties in Gigiri – an estimated $1700 a month in 2008 - with those of informal settlements and low-income estates (between $10 and $100 a month) , she argues that there is "a two-tier society in Nairobi - one for the non-elite locals and the other for the local elite and international expatriate crowd" (Kazado, 2008: 94).

The UN complex in Gigiri, Nairobi. The top photo shows a welcoming sign playing on the Swahili word for 'Welcome' and the lower photo captures one of the complex's cafés and popular meeting points [author's own photos]

As discussed in the methodology chapter, although there are dangers and insecurities associated with living in Nairobi – from the crime problems, which are frequently a source of angst and concern among expatriates, to the unfamiliarity of living in an African country far from home – it is nevertheless a place where many international aid workers feel

sufficiently comfortable to settle with their families. There are plenty of international schools where their children can be educated, and an array of expatriate social gatherings and networks in which to make new friends. Thus whilst Lars and Inger, and other international aid professionals I met in Nairobi, were undoubtedly committed to and passionate about their work, their living arrangements and working conditions at times highlighted certain rewards that come with making this career choice.

These rewards do not appear to be available to everyone in the sector, however, as the previous chapter also suggested. The living and working conditions of Kenyans I met in Nairobi were often quite different. Similar to those I met in Kakuma, they were usually married and some had their spouse living in another part of the country. This included Dennis, whom I referred to in Chapter 3. His wife lived several hundred kilometres away in Kisumu, because that was where she worked as a teacher; suggesting, as with my informants in Kakuma, that a secure job often entails significant sacrifices with regard to a regular family life. The Kenyans I met in Nairobi usually lived in suburbs on the other side of town from where they worked. This was at times due to the cheaper cost of living in these areas, and also due to their spouse working there. One Kenyan man, Martin,[48] who is the country programme manager at a large British faith-based organisation, told me that he lived in Eastlands – a long way from his office in Westlands – because it is cheaper. He has to leave the house by 6 a.m. each day in order to get to work at 8 a.m.

A typical traffic scene from Nairobi's central business district

[Creative Commons: Howard Cambridge, 2010; some rights reserved]

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[48] Interview with Martin, Nairobi, 15 April 2016.

Whilst many INGOs have made an effort to standardise their pay scales for international and national staff (McWha-Hermann et al., 2017), the situations described to me by the Kenyans I met in Nairobi indicate that they remain with less disposable income than their international counterparts. They related similar stories to Martin of living in suburbs far from their office, where it was cheaper, and where they would leave home at 6 a.m. in order to miss the morning rush hour traffic. The apparent limited finances that this suggests may be due to Kenyans often having greater family responsibilities – with some of my informants looking after four or more children, as well as supporting other family members – and possibly also due to continuing discrepancies in remuneration. Even for aid organisations implementing a single salary system for all their staff there is the recognition that national staff receive fewer benefits and allowances than their international colleagues (McWha-Hermann et al., 2017). These differences suggest that it may be far harder for Kenyans to afford the lifestyles and living arrangements enjoyed by many of their international colleagues; even if they are on the same salaries.

Kenyans I met who had young children would hire domestic help whilst both parents were at work. This appears not dissimilar to Inger and Lars' arrangements when they were raising young children. Yet some variances emerge when comparing their situation with one of my Kenyan informants, Janet.[49] She is in her late twenties and works as a humanitarian programme officer for the same organisation as Martin. She told me about how in a previous job she received only three months statutory maternity leave when she was pregnant with her only child, whilst her regional programme manager, who was on an international contract, was away from the office for a year when she had a baby. She also had a driver who would take her to work. Janet told me she would look at this situation and think, "if I could only get half of what she gets." Janet also lives on the other side of town from her office and in her current job was catching a train to work, from a station that was a car journey away from her home. Whilst her manager's extended maternity leave may have been unpaid, this nevertheless raises the question of who can afford to take these sorts of long breaks from work and who cannot. In addition, Janet indicated to me several instances where staff were given different medical or maternity cover

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[49] Interview with Janet, Nairobi, 21 March 2016.

according to their national or international status; although this was less of a problem in the organisation she was working in when I met her.

Martin believed that NGOs needed to do more to support the living costs of national staff, particularly as he saw so many international aid workers having their rent – for luxurious apartments near their office - covered by their organisations. He told me that he thought all staff should be sufficiently rewarded for their performance and if there were inequalities in this regard, national staff are more likely to lose motivation and seek employment elsewhere. Dennis made a similar suggestion, in relation to his job working as a research and policy officer with a large British NGO.

> "I feel so dedicated to what I do, and I deliberately decided to stay longer [in current organisation] because I love what I do [...] I really love what I do. And I know, and I know very well that I'm not being compensated adequately for what I do. [...] The reality is that while human beings may have passion for what they do, at the same time there is that selfish bit in you that really thinks of what am I getting out of all this? I'm trying so hard but am I being compensated adequately, do I still want to leave?"
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 3 December 2015]

Arvidson's study of local NGOs in Bangladesh also speaks to the importance of adequate compensation in keeping people passionate and motivated.

> The high turnover of staff in some NGOs is the result of staff finding increased security, professional status and higher salary in other NGOs or in other sectors. Formal recognition through the professionalisation of people working in local NGOs, with the subsequent leverage to demand a salary and secure contracts, may be one way of resolving the frustration that can lead to a lack of commitment to work.
>
> (Arvidson, 2014: 254)

Arvidson refers here to secure contracts being another source of concern for national staff; this too was a problem for some of the Kenyan aid workers I met in Nairobi. Janet, for instance, told me that whilst she was on maternity leave in her previous job she was told that her contract would not be renewed because of budgetary constraints. The Kenyan staff participating in the stress management workshop that I facilitated in Nairobi also

referred to the uncertainty of what were largely one year contracts for the national staff as a main cause of stress in their work.

There are far-reaching implications for national staff on lower salaries and with less generous benefits packages and allowances than their international counterparts. The fact that Martin, for instance, lives far from the office in what he described as a fairly modest house with his wife and children is telling. He told me that a lot of the time staff are advised by their organisation to work from home in the event of security problems increasing the risk of travel; the Kenya elections that were due to take place in 2017 was one example where this was likely to happen. This was problematic as Martin lives in a small place and has two young children living there and would therefore have little privacy to work. He also told me that living in these areas was difficult because he was unable to invite colleagues – particularly managers who were visiting from the organisation's head office in London – to his home as it was too far away and not safe for international staff. This is in stark contrast to Lars and Inger's home in a gated community, with plenty of space and quiet and well protected and maintained surroundings. Other European aid workers I met did not necessarily live in quite the same luxury as Lars and Inger; but they nevertheless were usually situated fairly close to their office, in a comfortable and secure house or apartment in one of Nairobi's wealthier suburbs.

These situations highlight that the popular image of the selfless, usually western, aid worker, belies some of the realities of the material gains that can be made from a career in the aid sector. Particularly for international aid professionals, there are benefits attached to living in far-off locations in the developing world, particularly when living in a capital city such as Nairobi. With what are usually higher salaries and more generous living allowances and benefits – including childcare and education, and health insurance – what is dangerous or unfamiliar can be offset by the comforts of a secure house and a choice of nearby luxury shops, restaurants, sports and therapies. It is possible that the international aid worker's desire to feel at home and supported in strange surroundings may in fact explain the popularity of therapeutic activities such as life coaching and yoga classes among this group compared with Kenyans, who have their own family and friends supporting them. Regardless of the reasons, the lifestyles of my international informants were in clear contrast to the Kenyans I met in Nairobi, and demonstrate that there are often material rewards that come with being in a seemingly selfless profession.

Kenyans too stand to gain from this profession, as it provides them with a steady income in a country which suffers from high rates of poverty and unemployment. Indeed, it was the opportunities presented by being in full-time employment that caused some of my Kenyan informants to describe their work in ways that were far from the familiar lexicons of heroism and self-sacrifice. When I asked Dennis, for instance, how his family perceived of his work with an INGO, he told me:

> "They actually think I'm a millionaire! The mindset is this: You travel, you get out of this country, you're rich. You can afford to travel. You can be on a plane, yet some of us have never even seen one, you know. So they're like, 'ah you, you're a very rich man'.."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 3 December 2015]

Rebecca expressed similar sentiments about her family when I met her in April 2016.[50] She is a Kenyan woman working in the regional office of an international NGO. She told me, "they see NGOs, they see money" and that as a result, they often come to her for financial help. These perceptions of NGO work are not wholly unrealistic, given the lifestyles I have described of some of the international aid workers I met; lifestyles that are acknowledged, with some unease, among people in the broader sector also (Kanbur, 2010). And as Dennis suggests, the ability to travel is part of what gives an aid worker status and respect, both within the sector – as discussed previously (Kothari, 2005; Peters, 2013) - and beyond it. These elements of aid work – regular, paid employment, and mobility – have little to do with heroism or altruism when viewed through the lens of financial gain and career progression; a lens that has added weight and importance in a country where poverty remains a common experience, including for those who make it into the aid sector.

Yet this interpretation of aid work – as a profession that brings financial rewards – is often viewed as 'bad' by aid workers themselves. Some of my European informants in particular would at times make the distinction between aid workers with 'good' altruistic

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[50] Interview with Rebecca, Nairobi, 13 April 2016.

motivations, and those with 'bad', financial motivations; with Europeans often belonging to the former and Africans to the latter.

Mario, an Italian development consultant, talked to me about his experience working with Kenyans when I met him in October 2015.[51] "I had to fire people in Nyanza [in western Kenya]. We think local people care, but I notice it's more focused on salary first," he told me. When I asked Mario why he thought this was the case, he responded, sympathetically, "It's a job, they need it. From being Italian, I see more motivation from expats than locals. They do care up to a certain point, but there is motivation if there is the right compensation. In general, the way the expat interpret motivation, locals are less motivated." I asked Mario how he thought expats would interpret 'motivation.' Paraphrasing, he replied: "I care for beneficiaries, I want to change their life, I want to make a difference."

This is quite a different interpretation from one provided by a Ugandan man I met in Kakuma, Michael, who is the area manager of an international NGO there. He has worked in the aid sector for 20 years, and been in Kakuma for 3 years, whilst his family live in Uganda.

> "Sometimes I think you are motivated because there is…a pay, something that you are earning because of what you are doing, which may not easily be the case. For example, in places like Uganda where I come from, of course employment is not easy to come by. […] So you'll get motivated because it's….apart from you serving others it's also an employment. It is something that is giving you and your children and family […] that also becomes a motivation."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 22 August 2016]

Michael's comments imply that financial motivations are not inherently 'bad,' particularly in circumstances of poverty and high unemployment; they may in fact be the driving force for some aid workers, and what helps them maintain their passion for what they doing. Yet the comments made by some of my European informants repeat the familiar tropes of

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[51] Interview with Mario, Nairobi, 15 October 2015.

altruism and selflessness in aid work, which celebrate these 'good' motivations and in doing so suggest that any other reasons for entering the sector should be viewed with contempt. These sorts of distinctions were made by Mario and several other European aid workers, who believed that for Kenyans, in particular, "it was all to do with money", to quote one of my informants, Chiara.[52] These stark distinctions allow little space for the consideration of where motivations come from, and how they may be shaped by socio-economic circumstances. Furthermore, Mario and Chiara's comments overlook the fact international aid workers also receive financial benefits for their work, which shape their choices about what jobs they wish to take. This may be exemplified in the lifestyles of some of the European aid workers I met in Nairobi, such as Lars and Inger. And a comment made by Mario also illustrates the monetary considerations behind his own decision to move from working within NGOs to becoming a consultant.

> "People go in (to consultancy work) because you get skills, it's better paid and it allows you to have a family […] With Italian NGOs, you might initially be motivated by the salaries – you're paid $2500 a month and think you're given gold. But when you get older you realise you have no pension – you look for other opportunities and a way in which you can feel more appreciated for your work."

[Interview, 15 October 2015]

Mario's decision to become a consultant was thus tied to seemingly 'selfish' motivations – a desire for a higher income, and a more comfortable life with his family; motivations which he had suggested were deserving of punishment in the case of some of the Kenyan staff he was previously managing. This could indicate double standards on his part; or more simply, the need for recognition by internationals and Kenyans alike that aid work in some respects is like any other job in which people wish to feel appreciated, rewarded and compensated for their efforts, regardless of the intentions behind those efforts.

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[52] Interview with Chiara, Nairobi, 27 October 2015.

Where heroism begins and ends

Whilst many aid workers I met were undoubtedly passionate about their work, and motivated by humanitarian ideals, some situations recounted to me suggested a loss of faith, or a questioning over whether this profession is as morally sound as is often assumed. These situations echo the literature and studies that highlight the problematic moral complexities that are part of aid practice (Barnett and Weiss, 2008; Bornstein and Redfield, 2011; Vaux, 2013), and which can result in aid workers making decisions that go against their personal values and beliefs. These problems present another way of understanding 'stress' in the aid sector, and indeed were raised by different research participants as a key challenge in their work. At the stress management workshop in Nairobi, one Kenyan participant described this challenge in the following words:

> When the programme or project one is working on is not in line with an individual's beliefs and is also not susceptible to change. Most of the projects are programmed to be static and not dynamic. Many a times the aid worker feels that the approach and design of the project is not going to yield favourable results but he/she is not in a position and/or does not have the authority to make changes therefore just complies with the donor requirements.
>
> (Rapporteur notes from workshop, 30 August 2016]

Indeed, donor requirements – such as project reports and proposals - may at times take aid workers away from the field-based activities with affected populations; activities which they would far rather be undertaking, as suggested by one of my informants, Lavinia, who is based in Kenya but works on an education programme in Somalia.

> "Here [in her office in Nairobi] is just money money, coming and going, reports, relationship with the donors. I mean now I know that I will have to write an EU project. I don't put, not even a drop of love or passion in what I'm going to do. It's just project, grids, money. I don't like it."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 10 September 2016]

Lavinia looked forward to her visits to Somalia, as it was a chance for her to interact directly with colleagues and programme 'beneficiaries' in a way that wasn't possible in Nairobi.

> "I love it. I recognise the smells, the flowers, the vegetation, the culture. I like it, in a way. [...] And then because you can talk to people. It's not emails, you are there! [...] And you move, you physically move! This is something also that I, like why I have always liked my job, is that I am free to move. Talk to people, move, you know interact. Here [in Nairobi] I am just sitting...I mean I could do it anywhere. I could be working in a bank right now, I could literally be working in a bank."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 10 September 2016]

Her remarks illustrate the discomforts of both prioritising donors over aid recipients, and of living in a capital city, far from the target population. As Fechter argues (Fechter, 2017), in these situations aid workers may feel disenfranchised and distanced from the communities that give them a sense of moral purpose. This feeling of distance is common in regional offices, of which there are many in Nairobi, owing to its status within both the corporate and non-profit sector as a regional hub. As another of my informants, a Dutch woman called Erika who works for a large humanitarian organisation, suggests:

> "I think if an organisation becomes too big people lose track of what the call is that they're working for, and especially in a regional office as we are in, you're quite distanced from the actual goal that you're working for, which is actually alleviating human suffering, and helping people who are in need."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 26 June 2016]

Chiara, an Italian woman I met in Nairobi, had a more cynical perspective. She had left the aid sector when I met her in October 2015 and was working with her husband on his photography business. She had worked for NGOs in Somalia, South Sudan and Kenya, and her experiences had made her question the moral validity of aid organisations with supposedly humanitarian ideals.

> "For myself, the biggest stress, if you can call it like this, it was the lack of purpose, the lack of meaning, and the subtle feeling that we're actually doing something wrong sometimes. Sometimes I had the feeling, I don't want to be part of all this.....this development co-corporation is something bigger than us, and we are

just actors, playing. But you don't know who holds the thread. It's difficult to explain but sometimes I felt we are doing something that is taking the world not into the right direction. Sometimes I felt like working for NGOs on the one side was perpetuating poverty, and on the other side widening the gap between rich and poor."

[Interview, Nairobi, 27 October 2015]

A source of Chiara's doubts appeared to be the incongruity between the stated aims and values of aid organisations and the realities in practice, as well as the sense that there are powerful structures within aid that dictate the terms of assistance to populations in need, with little accountability to aid recipients or interest in the concerns of practitioners on the ground. As a result, the programmes she worked on appeared to have little meaningful impact on the communities they were targeting.

Chiara's discomfort with this experience challenges the assumption at the heart of the "Singer Solution" (Wenar, 2011) that aid giving is morally commendable. Her account suggests that supposedly charitable work at times has very little to do with saving or improving the lives of others and more to do with fulfilling the interests and preferences of donors. It is a concern raised by Mutua within the context of Kenyan NGOs as well as INGOs working in the country, when he writes that excessive donor influence "distorts their vision, plays havoc with their loyalty, retards creativity, confuses lines of accountability, and encourages the development of a 'fat cat' mentality among NGO executives" (Mutua, 2009: 31).

Chiara related one particular example of when she stayed up late for several nights in a row writing a funding proposal, then sped through Nairobi traffic on the day of the deadline in order to send it by courier to Brussels. The pressures of donor requirements made her question the morality and effectiveness of the NGO sector.

"If you want to get money from the donor then you have to oblige, and abide by the rules so you have to write in the proposal all this bullshit….'the poorest of the poor', 'the least advantaged' [...] 'less than a dollar per day' those things don't really mean anything to me. Yeah I remember that, especially this proposal – we would stay up until 2 a.m. trying to fit all these magic words the donors want to hear from you, but in a way that would be kind of a cover-up [...] you have to paraphrase the sentence. And I would think, what a waste of energy!"

This account is interesting as it also points to an alternative conceptualisation of heroism; one that is framed by institutional goals and objectives, and the delivery of donor-led outputs and results, rather than responding to the realities and agendas of target populations (Crewe, 2014). In this respect, as Crewe argues, progress is measured in terms of whether tightly defined problems and solutions are successfully addressed, and whether "[the project's] architects are heroes or incompetents" (Crewe, 2014: 95). In this reading, what is viewed as heroic is not only courage and resilience in the field, working directly with communities receiving aid, but also the ability to achieve results or outcomes that can easily be measured in order to convince donors and supporters that their money is being well spent (Crewe, 2014: 95).

Stories from my informants demonstrate how the practices Crewe describes are played out in the day-to-day lives of aid workers. Janet told me about the high expectations placed on staff in some of her previous jobs with different organisations.[53] When she was heavily pregnant in 2013 her employers at the time had pleaded with her to travel to Dadaab refugee camp in north eastern Kenya to conduct a training, as the member of staff who was due to undertake this activity had fallen sick. Janet reluctantly went, travelling in armoured convoy on an uncomfortable and unsafe bumpy road rather than flying – as was the usual mode of transport there – because she was in her final trimester and therefore couldn't travel by plane. She stayed in Dadaab for two days to deliver the training, then hours after her return to Nairobi she gave birth, 6 weeks prematurely.

In a different organisation she experienced tensions with her manager because he expected her to work long hours in her role as capacity-building adviser and programme officer, at a time when her child was not very well. Janet related one occasion when her nanny called to say her son was sick and needed to go to hospital. Janet wished to leave work early to see to her son, but her manager – a Kenyan man who did not have a family – refused because he wanted her to be present in a meeting that afternoon. Janet left anyway, and the following morning she received a warning letter from her employers.

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[53] Interview with Janet, Nairobi, 21 March 2016.

After this incident, Janet told me her manager made her feel as if she was incapable, and during a performance evaluation criticised her professional abilities, including her English language skills in writing reports to donors. Janet felt this was unfair given that most people working at the organisation – a German aid agency – were Kenyans and were therefore likely to struggle to use a second language to write technical reports. Janet told me that other staff went through similar problems and five of them had left during her time there. Although she was more positive about other organisations she'd worked for – particularly in terms of the support they provided for female staff – these examples indicate how seemingly innocuous activities such as trainings and meetings took precedence over her own health or personal needs.

Aneta is a European woman in her early thirties, who was working for a large international NGO when I first met her in early 2016. Describing her job to me when I interviewed her in October that year, she said:

> "Let me tell you, I have never been so stressed out in my life. And it's a variety of reasons. A, it's a huge bureaucracy. It's so inefficient. I mean, just to get your contract I think I fought with them for like three months […] Incompetent, overworked, bureaucratic, political, manipulative, bullying, the work ethic is horrible."

[Interview, Nairobi, 8 October 2016]

Aneta believed it was the culture of the organisation to push staff too hard and have little concern for any personal problems they may be having. Aneta's job was focused on developing partnerships with donors and advising the organisation's fundraising teams, and covered eleven countries in the Eastern, Horn and Central regions of Africa. Her relationship with her manager at the NGO - who was also from a country in the global north - was clearly very problematic. Aneta related to me several incidents: of requests to visit her family in Europe being refused, despite working through the year without any annual leave; of being sent to South Sudan for the first time, during a very tense period in the civil war, without proper security clearance; of having to develop a funding proposal worth millions of dollars on top of her usual workload, for a programme that was not within her remit; of being ill in bed with flu but continuing to receive text messages and emails from her manager. In addition, the organisation was going through a major restructuring at the time Aneta was there, with the merging and renaming of different

regional and programmatic units, which further contributed to tensions in the office. Aneta lost all motivation in her work.

> "It was just like...you know after a while you've been treated so badly, as in you've sent me into a conflict zone, wouldn't let me come back, you wouldn't let me go on leave, when I'm sick you harass me and bully me to come back to work. You know after those three experiences in a row, I don't even feel that I can work, you know?"
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 10 October 2016]

I had seen the effect that her job was having on Aneta over the course of my field research. When I went to yoga classes held at her apartment I would find her looking quite flustered and tired, with packets of cigarettes sitting on shelves and wine ready to be opened immediately after the class. She would very often yawn her way through most of the yoga class. On a couple of occasions when I met her she was recovering from a cold or flu. Another time, Aneta told me how she'd been for a massage because of a bad pain which started in her right shoulder and travelled down to her back and chest; the masseuse had told her she was clearly suffering from severe stress.

When I interviewed Aneta in October she had left her job with the international NGO and was about to start a 6 month consultancy position with a UN agency. I met her again in April 2017, after the consultancy had ended, and she had chosen to focus exclusively on a social enterprise she had established whilst working for the NGO. Her small business employed Kenyans from Nairobi's informal settlements – including its largest one, Kibera – to design and create artefacts to be sold in boutique shops and arts and crafts markets. This story is interesting as whilst the aid sector is built upon assumptions of selflessness and the prioritising of the needs of affected populations, Aneta had found greater moral advantage – in terms of directly assisting people living in poverty – from setting up a private enterprise that created jobs and a reliable income for people living in the poorest neighbourhoods of Nairobi. Her story may not be typical of all people in the sector who share the sorts of challenges outlined above; but nevertheless points to how the pursuit of meaningful work with a tangible impact on people's lives, for which one can feel appreciated, at times is unsuccessful in the aid sector. Aneta's decision to devote all her time to her business may thus be giving her the recognition and reward (Fechter, 2017:

276) that she failed to receive in her job at the INGO, which was largely far removed from the populations receiving the NGO's assistance.

These accounts could be interpreted as a reframing of what heroism actually means in the aid sector. Some of the struggles and challenges they describe are less to do with being on the frontline saving lives and more to do with the pressures experienced in the office, responding to the whims and preferences of their managers. These pressures often lie within a larger context of donor-led agendas and priorities, which trickle down into organisational strategies and working practices; as Crewe suggests (Crewe, 2014), what is thus 'heroic' is often the ability to meet targets and deadlines and deliver outputs such as trainings or meetings whilst remaining unflappable. The following section will build on this idea further, by situating it within a broader context of the aid sector's struggle to sustain itself, where organisations are forced to compete in a market of players each vying for public attention and support.

Institutional struggles for survival and legitimacy

The stories recounted in this chapter suggest that a large source of mental angst, frustration and exhaustion is associated with living up to the agendas of employers in the aid sector; agendas which can at times have very little to do with relieving the suffering of target populations and more to do with the efforts by organisations to uphold their image in the public eye. Articulated in ways that are appealing to donors or taxpayers, these agendas often emphasises growth and impact and an organisation's ability to increase their reach to impoverished populations around the world. Aid organisations regularly undergo ambitious internal change processes as a result of cuts in donor funding, or because they wish to increase their public appeal – or both. This can be accompanied by poor management, lack of leadership and a sense among staff that they are under-appreciated and easily dispensable, as the accounts that follow suggest.

Elizabeth is a Kenyan woman in her fifties who manages a community health programme for a large faith-based organisation in Nairobi. When we met in 2016 her organisation was undergoing a restructuring process, which directly put her job at risk. The organisation's main donor was withdrawing its 'core funding', which meant that anyone whose contract

was not tied to a particular project – particularly more senior positions such as programme managers – were likely to lose their jobs. Elizabeth, along with several other staff at managerial level, had been put on redundancy notice.

> "I'm annoyed because this has been happening almost every 3-4 years within [my organisation], for the 10 or 11 years that I've been working there. It always comes, so I get this frustration that, why have we not gotten it right? And what is even more annoying this time, is that the restructuring is affecting the staff who have fundraised for the same funds that are keeping the majority of the staff."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 13 October 2016]

Elizabeth explained that she had helped to expand her programme from three to nine programme officers, thanks to her successful fundraising. Yet she was more likely to lose her job from the restructuring than the programme officers, as her role is more costly to the organisation. Elizabeth also noted that these restructuring processes, which often arise from donor funding cuts, lower staff morale.

> "When something like this happens, how do you treat people? I know for sure that whereas I feel I've been treated well myself, because I'm assured every time I talk to people they always tell me, 'oh Elizabeth you know your skills are so important, we don't want to lose you', you know? But the rest of the staff they feel bad. They want to leave, like yesterday. They feel so unappreciated. You know? All those admin people, they feel so bad."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 13 October 2016]

Staff from another organisation I was in contact with during my field research had similar stories. They worked for a large humanitarian organisation focused on natural disasters, which was undergoing a restructuring process when I met them at their office in Nairobi, whereby particular job roles and departments were being redefined and streamlined. Much of their conversations with me revolved around office politics, and the lack of transparency that had arisen from the change process. The accounts of members of staff there doing very different jobs highlight how perspectives can vary, and how the impact of these sorts of organisational transitions can affect aid workers in multiple ways, depending on who they are.

Rita is a Kenyan woman who was 26 years old when I met her in June 2016. She was the assistant to the Regional Representative – a role reserved for international staff – but was due to leave within a month, due to the likelihood that her job would no longer exist once the restructuring was completed. Rita had started at the organisation as a communications intern, and had then been appointed as an advocacy officer, but on a contract that only lasted three months due to funding constraints. She believed she had largely "stumbled upon" her current position, and it wasn't ideal for her, given that she had a public relations degree and had always hoped to work in a role that involved greater public engagement.

Reflecting on her time there, Rita echoed a comment made by Elizabeth concerning lack of recognition of administrative staff:

> "I think, for me it's been…trying to be really brutally honest with myself, seeing that you've been here for almost, maybe two years, what have you…what has this place given you, that you can't find anywhere else or, do you feel you've given all you can give, and you're overstretched, and for me, I think you come to a point where…I mean, you're not at your limit you know? I mean, I can't give you more and I don't think I can receive anything else."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 20 June 2016]

In other words, Rita believed that although she had more to offer, her positioning within the organisation had limited the opportunities to develop and expand her experience and skills. She felt that her current manager had not been particularly encouraging in helping her to progress within the organisation, whilst other managers who she'd found more inspiring and supportive had left because they were dissatisfied with the restructuring process.

> "For staff who are younger within the organisation, we also feel a bit shaken because you wonder who will you look up to. And then you know when you start with a team and you have already created your group synergy and whatnot, and then people just up and leave. And then when my former boss left, that was it, I mean he was at least the glue that stuck most of us together. So with him leaving as well it's also, you know, it's also a bit shaken.."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 20 June 2016]

Part of the challenge of advancing within the organisation for Kenyans was the lack of opportunities, as the majority of senior management and programme roles were international positions. These positions came with a benefits package where extra costs such as accommodation and phone bills were covered. "And yet if someone is asking for a salary increment and you are telling them there is no money, then you see the bad feelings coming out," Rita told me. Due to the funding structure of the organisation, the international positions would usually last two to three years, with staff moving on to another position in a different country when their contract ended, which contributed to a lack of consistency in strong leadership, according to Rita. These circumstances were problematic for Rita because it took a long time to build a new team when someone had left, and in addition there was a lot of "politicking" among the remaining staff in response to the restructuring, with people at times competing with each other to secure their jobs. Rita felt she was too young to be taking on these sorts of problems, and would rather look for work elsewhere. As she was living with her parents, she had the advantage of not having to rush to find a new job in order to pay living expenses.

Erika works for the same organisation as Rita. She attributed many of the restructuring problems to poor leadership.

> "There's a complete lack of a leader that knows where we're going, that is bringing a team together, that says 'OK, this is who we are, this is what we stand for, this is what we want to reach this year, this is our objectives, this is how each and every one of us, like let's think how each and every one of us is going to contribute to reaching these objectives,' you know. Having people on board…having a dedicated team because you actually understand where you are going…That is what I feel is lacking and that's why people are leaving in my opinion, because there is not this inspiring leadership around."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 26 June 2016]

Erika's comments suggest that her organisation's drive to reinvent itself had been at the expense of a sense of shared vision and goals among the staff, leaving Erika and her colleagues to question the purpose of their work. Both she and Rita shared similar concerns over the lack of leadership that had arisen as a result of the restructuring process. However the consequences for them are different. Unlike Rita's largely administrative role, Erika's job revolves around planning, monitoring and evaluation and reporting, and she travels frequently to countries within her remit, including Rwanda,

Tanzania and the Seychelles. Her contract was due to finish at the end of that year, but she had been told that there was an interest in extending it. Erika had already worked as a consultant on disaster response programmes in the Netherlands, so there were other options available to her once her contract had finished.

These examples suggest that in these situations, international staff may have more career choices, despite the restructuring process; ultimately, they were able to move on to another country, to a similar position – including possibly within their own organisation. This doesn't disregard the fact that the process underway at their organisation was destabilising and unpredictable for them as well. Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction to be made between their respective situations. As an administrative staff member on a national contract, there was little opportunity for career progression for Rita; what she and Elizabeth describe in their particular positions within their organisations suggests employers are far less invested in the national and administrative staff than they are in international staff who can cross borders and thus be of use in other countries. European aid workers do of course also often start off in administrative positions, based in their own countries at head office; but as I've suggested already, through my ethnographic material and through relevant literature (Peters, 2013; Redfield, 2013; Roth, 2015), the circumstances and opportunities for their career progression can be quite different.

The seemingly unfair consequences of organisational change for national staff is also a source of discomfort and concern for middle managers who are responsible for implementing staff cuts, as the account of one of my informants in Lodwar in Turkana demonstrates. Clare, the Ugandan woman based there who is referred to also in Chapter 3, told me about the difficulties she'd been through with staff cuts at her organisation as a result of restructuring.

> "Changes mean that the whole support network is affected. It's a lot of pressure on me, how you manage the tensions from it, the emotional issues that come. You have to make hard decisions but you have to be humane."

> [Interview, Lodwar, 31 May 2016]

Clare was clearly conscious that her Kenyan staff were likely to have several dependents and that redundancy would directly affect them. She told me that she herself had struggled

as she grew up in Uganda to reach the position she is now in, implying she understood what it is like to have an uncertain future. Clare had overseen the reduction of her office in Lodwar from 80 staff to only 19 when I met her in 2016. Some had been working on donor funded projects lasting 3 years at a time, but with their contracts – and the projects – being renewed after that period. So there had been an expectation that their jobs would still be secure, which made it even harder when Clare had to tell them that "this time, no."

> "Transitions are never easy, they're very difficult. When you go back at night, you think about this man with a wife and children, how will he provide for them […] As long as it's about people, it can never be easy […] and the emotional stress it comes with, it never gets easier."
>
> [Interview, Lodwar, 31 May 2016]

Clare had attempted to find other job opportunities for staff who had lost their jobs, or write them recommendation letters, but she nevertheless expressed guilt over not being able to do more. She gave me an example of when she was closing the Uganda programme, for the same organisation, before she started her new job in Kenya. It was the last two weeks before closing, and one night a few of her team were together, along with the office cleaner. The office cleaner approached Clare and said, "wherever you go, please find me a job". "When she left," Clare told me, "I turned and my tears just fell."

These accounts demonstrate that personal suffering, guilt or self-doubt are not always directly related to the emotional difficulties and challenges of attempting to support impoverished or war-affected populations. Aid workers are also often grappling with the uncertainties and insecurities that arise from time-bound contracts and the constraints of donor funding and managerial priorities; factors that, whilst present in other professional environments, are particularly pronounced in a sector where funding for any particular project or position often doesn't last beyond a few years, and where the whims and interests of donors directly affect an organisation's ability to continue supporting and saving lives, and to sustain its workforce. For Kenyan staff in particular - who often have fewer job-seeking options than their international counterparts - this may threaten their economic survival and the ability to support themselves and their families, as Clare's reflections suggest.

The localisation agenda

Localisation of the workforce has become a priority for many INGOs in the last few years, as part of efforts to address compensation disparities and ensure their programmes are more informed by local expertise. Localisation has entailed job losses for international staff as organisations increasingly favour drawing on and expanding capacities of national staff in aid interventions. It is an agenda which the Kenyan government has got behind (Aden, 2016; Kajilwa, 2016), with more cynical commentators suggesting this was part of a calculated effort in the run-up to the country's 2017 elections to force out international aid practitioners who are critical of government policy (Iacoboni de Fazio, 2016). These claims are made against a historical backdrop of animosity towards NGOs, which have largely been viewed by the Kenyan government as "an unelected nuisance or the agents of foreign interests or powers" (Murungi, 2009: 37).

Whilst there is scant research on the effectiveness of the INGO localisation agenda in increasing the presence and capacities of national staff (McWha-Hermann et al., 2017), there are clear implications for international staff, as stories from my own informants indicate. Their accounts demonstrate how the power and status that often comes with being an international aid worker can at times be quickly removed at the whim of institutional and political interests. It also highlights that whilst aid workers are often on the receiving end of much hero-worship in the public domain, there is a backlash from state actors with alternative perspectives.

Feleke is an Ethiopian man in his sixties, who has worked for the same international faith-based organisation since 2002. During that time, he has been a programme officer, a regional programme manager and more recently a senior policy adviser for Africa. Although at times he was offered the choice of relocating to Ethiopia or another country, Feleke preferred to stay in Nairobi, where he lived in a furnished one bedroom apartment; this was primarily because he valued the professional networks in Kenya and the opportunities this brought to engage in issues that he was working on, and because from there he could easily travel to countries within his remit.

However when I met Feleke for lunch in June 2016,[54] he was about to leave Kenya permanently, because the immigration authorities had refused to renew his work permit. Although Feleke was one of only two international staff at his organisation of approximately 40 people in the Nairobi office, the authorities had defended their decision by claiming that Feleke's job could be given to a Kenyan rather than a foreigner. His organisation had fought hard to renew the work permit but had exhausted all avenues when I saw Feleke in June, and so he was preparing to leave the country and relocate to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, despite not having lived there for well over 30 years. Eighteen months later, I would find out that Feleke had left the NGO that he had been employed with for 16 years and started a new job that would require him to relocate to another country as the work was too politically sensitive to be conducted in Ethiopia.

The Kenyan government's policy in this regard appeared not to discriminate according to the length of time living in the country, nor a person's nationality. Indeed, a British woman I spoke to, who was a senior manager in an INGO, told me that two of her African staff were refused work permits by the authorities. She had chosen to move to another organisation that offered diplomatic protection, to avoid these sorts of risks to her remaining in the country.

In April 2016 another of my informants, Marie,[55] told me that she and another European colleague were nervous about their future in their organisation as their work permits were up for renewal by the end of that month but no paper work had yet been completed. She told me how irritating it was that now they were being told to apply for a visitor's pass, which is usually assigned to tourists and requires a home address outside the country. Marie expressed to me her exasperation with her office colleagues' apparent lack of understanding that she did not have any home address in Europe as her home is in Kenya.[56] It had also been suggested by her colleagues that the international staff awaiting new work permits should work in a different part of the office during this period, so they

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[54] Interview with Feleke, Nairobi, 14 June 2016.

[55] Phone conversation with Marie, 20 April 2016.

[56] This difference in perspective regarding her real 'home' is made more problematic by the conversation she relates in Chapter 3, regarding her colleagues' advice to return 'home' to seek medical advice for her health problems; action which she did eventually take.

could be more hidden away if the immigration authorities turned up unannounced. Later on Marie was told to avoid coming in to the office altogether, or moving about in Nairobi too much, whilst her work permit was being renewed. According to Marie, her European colleague was particularly distraught about this situation and had complained about never feeling secure in Kenya.

These incidents highlight the increasing job insecurity among international staff of INGOs in Kenya. They occurred in a climate of hostility from the Kenyan government towards international aid workers, with an announcement in June 2016 that it would be tightening work permit restrictions (Kajilwa, 2016). Such restrictions have considerable impact on organisations such as Marie's, which recruit a high number of international personnel to cover different geographical programmes. Marie's concerns reflected her awareness of the Kenyan government's hostility in this regard, as well as her disappointment with the apparent indifference of her colleagues towards this situation. Her story, and Feleke's, indicate that for international aid workers in Kenya, their authority, status and mobility aren't guaranteed merely through the ownership of a passport and the ability to travel; nor through the seemingly commendable values they and their organisation espouse. It is increasingly recognised that Kenya is becoming a more difficult place to do NGO work (Avenue et al., 2013; Civicus, 2015) – for both national and international staff – and this affects aid workers' efforts to fulfil their humanitarian goals and ideals. These problems represent another challenge to the assumption that aid workers are viewed as heroes in the public domain; as some reports suggest (Aden, 2016), and as has also been argued by Kenyan development specialists (Kazado, 2008), there is increasing frustration with the seemingly luxurious lifestyles of international aid workers in the country, whilst the Kenyan government sees many NGOs as a nuisance and a threat, particularly as government leaders pursue their own political interests (Iacoboni de Fazio, 2016).

The localisation agenda in Kenya thus adds an extra dimension of uncertainty around how aid work is viewed, and valued, in the public domain. Institutional and governmental policies aimed at building local expertise and presence in the aid sector possibly indicate efforts to reinvent the heroic aid worker as someone who isn't white nor from a wealthy country or privileged background. It is a means through which alternative conceptualisations of who the aid worker is, and what motivates them, may be realised. In particular, it brings to the forefront the desire by nationals from poor countries to serve

their communities; a desire which has little prominence in the classical imagery of the aid giver. Some of my own informants expressed this concern for the development and wellbeing of their community as a key motivating factor in their work.[57] In the case of the aid sector, they could also be part of efforts to reduce staffing costs and free up money to spend on aid programmes. The effectiveness of this agenda, in terms of providing more jobs to Kenyans and more money for programmes, has yet to be fully assessed or understood.

Concluding Remarks: The good, the bad and the personal

The stories and accounts in this chapter highlight how aid workers are at times forced, against their better judgement, into serving the whims and priorities of their managers, their organisation or donors. These pressures may be interpreted as part of the aid sector's struggle to maintain a certain image in the public eye: one of moral authority and legitimacy. This image is what informs many of the policies, practices and work ethic of aid organisations, with an underlying expectation – as characterised by my informants' experiences – of unbending commitment to one's job at the expense of personal priorities or values. The aid sector's dependence on growth and sustainability can at times be poorly managed in organisations. Indeed, an organisation's quest for survival and legitimacy in the eye of funders may lead to policies and practices that undermine the values which often motivate staff to work there; values of equality, justice, fairness or empathy.

At the same time, the sector's drive to help others, and its pursuit of funding in order to fulfil this goal, can be at the expense of personal wellbeing. Aneta's story is instructive. Her experience with her manager evokes some of the common images and tropes associated with aid work: where staff are expected to work long hours and not show their emotional selves or let their personal problems get in the way of their professional lives (Patni, 2011; Wigley, 2005). It also points to ways in which personal struggles and challenges are structurally written out of aid work. This might, as Rodgers suggests in her study of Amnesty International (Rodgers, 2010), be attributed to organisational cultures that view

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[57] Comments made by, among others: Elizabeth (Interview in Nairobi, 13 October 2016); Ezekiel (Interview in Lodwar, 25 May 2016); and Philip (Interview in Kakuma, 25 August 2016).

staff wellbeing as an unsightly personal indulgence in the face of far greater human suffering. However, the stories in this chapter suggest that this silencing of "the personal" (Fechter, 2012a) is also associated with the upholding of a certain image of how aid is to be practised and delivered. In this image, personal concerns and interests that go beyond simply 'doing good' are dismissed or unseen, and it is often national aid workers that suffer most as a result. For example, the accounts of some of my informants - such as Janet or Dennis - indicate that family duty is a large component of Kenyans' day-to-day concerns, in a way that is perhaps quite different from Europeans who are likely only to have close family members with them in Kenya. These realities of Kenyan life are at times treated with indifference, or even contempt, by their employers.

In addition, the material rewards for Kenyan aid workers I met were less obvious when comparing their living arrangements with international aid workers. Yet Mario's comments about the motivations of national staff compared with their international, European, counterparts, suggests Kenyans may be judged more harshly for pursuing these rewards. European aid workers such as Inger and Lars, and Kenyans such as Janet and Dennis, all talked passionately about their work. However the variances in their experiences and challenges illustrate how motivations for doing aid work cannot always be clearly categorised between what is purely altruistic and good, and what is money-minded and bad; there are a range of different histories and circumstances that prevail over a person's desire, and ability, to enter and stay within the aid sector (Ong and Combinido, 2018).

The relative wealth of many of the international aid workers I met raises further questions about how people working within the sector are expected to live and behave. A debate in 2012 (Green, 2012) regarding the possible re-opening of a swimming pool situated at Oxfam's staff guest house in Nairobi highlights the unease concerning comfort and privilege in a sector whose aims are ending poverty and inequality.[58] Whilst there are many foreigners working in corporate jobs, as well as a growing Kenyan middle-class, who live in large houses with swimming pools and other leisure facilities, these sorts of

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[58] In the blog From Poverty to Power, Duncan Green puts this issue to a public vote. 58 per cent voted in favour of opening the swimming pool provided there was no extra cost to Oxfam, whilst 7 per cent voted to keep it shut.

luxuries among aid workers provoke public ire partly because of the images of altruism associated with this profession. At the same time, within the sector itself, aid workers express considerable unease about the luxuries and rewards that come with this profession (Kanbur, 2010); yet it appears often to be national staff who are judged more than their international counterparts for wanting these rewards. The accounts of my informants in this chapter indicate that monetary and material interests feed into the career choices of both Kenyan and international aid workers; and these interests may emerge, and change, alongside the desire to be of service to others. The localisation agenda in Kenya also illustrates how aid work may be viewed as a job like any other: one that requires recognition and reward in the form of job security and adequate compensation. This agenda also suggests a growing awareness that the common tropes of aid work should no longer foreground the white, western aid worker and instead recognise the prevalence, and efforts, of nationals working in their own countries, at the scene of extreme poverty, war and natural disaster. They too may be making difficult decisions, and sacrifices, regarding work commitments and career choices; but in ways that are not always acknowledged in the popular image of the perfect humanitarian.

This image is also plagued with questionable assumptions concerning moral duty and the responsibility to help end the suffering of others. This chapter has shown that a sense of duty does not always equate to positive results in ways that are envisaged by the Singer Solution. Examples from my research demonstrate that positive results cannot always be easily measured, nor can aid workers themselves see the moral value of their actions; forcing some to leave the sector altogether.

The accounts presented in this chapter highlight how aid workers are often juggling a mixture of personal and professional responsibilities, whilst attempting to remain committed to the goals of their organisations, all of which can contribute to inner turmoil and self-doubt. Yet these complexities are rarely noticed in the aid sector, where the employers' interest is largely focused on maintaining a professional workforce that can achieve commendable and measurable results. The chapter therefore reiterates, and builds upon, the problems raised so far in this thesis concerning the aid sector's tendency to foreground certain behaviour whilst silencing and dismissing the vulnerabilities and personal concerns of staff. In a profession so focused on understanding and responding to the socio-economic and wellbeing needs of others, it is problematic that staff in many

ways are left out of these efforts; instead, as I have tried to demonstrate, their behaviour is understood and judged within tight, gendered and racialised parameters concerning what constitutes 'the perfect humanitarian.'

The next chapter will expand on some of the issues and problems raised in this and the other empirical chapters, by examining how aid workers find purpose in what they do, despite some of the moral and structural obstacles already discussed. I am particularly interested in examining what processes of self-reflection or reflexivity occur to support aid workers in their efforts to resolve some of the contradictions and problems of aid work outlined in this thesis. Given the specific difficulties that face international and national aid workers, I will explore what are the key elements and tools which enable each of these groups to believe in what they are doing, in spite of the struggles they face.

CHAPTER 6

KEEPING THE FAITH: PASSION AND PURPOSE IN AID WORK

One afternoon in Kakuma refugee camp, a Congolese man walked in to the office of a humanitarian organisation where Moses, a counsellor, works and refused to leave. He complained that he had not received any assistance from the aid agencies there. Moses' manager called in some security guards and asked Moses to supervise the man's departure from the office. It was April, when there were heavy rains in Kakuma, and as Moses watched the security guards drag the man out of the office, he could see he was crying. The following morning, Moses found the Congolese man lying close to the office, cold and shivering after having spent the night outside in the rain.

As Moses recounted this story to me when we met in Nairobi during his rest and recuperation period in August 2016, he explained that sometimes there are not enough funds to help a refugee who comes asking for assistance, so they simply have to be turned away. When this occurs, Moses told me:

> "You find conflict….you have conflict in your head. Something like that, if you do not have a superior power where you can say, 'God, forgive me for just feeling like this. Or just give me the strength to survive for just one more day.' […] You need extra strength that you might not get in books, you might not get in people, you might not get in supervision. It's the passion, it's the conviction, it's the value to want to make the world a better place."
>
> [Moses, Interview in Nairobi, 12 August 2016]

As discussed in the previous chapters, moral dilemmas and feelings of guilt or self-doubt are common in the aid sector; this may partly be attributed to the realities of working in a system that often fails to live up to expectations, and where staff are often left feeling under-appreciated. However, the way in which aid workers respond to and make sense of these problems is varied and complex; as I've attempted to demonstrate through my ethnographic material, social and cultural factors, as well as institutional policies and practices, all play a role. In this chapter I will focus in greater detail on the ways in which

aid workers draw meaning, and learn from, their experiences; how they maintain a belief in the value of what they're doing despite all the shortcomings. As is suggested in Moses' remarks, recourse to a higher power beyond mere human reasoning and experience feature strongly in attempts by aid professionals to understand the challenges of their work. In this chapter, I am interested in understanding the inner worlds of aid workers; how they perceive themselves in relation to others, and how personal soul-searching, and sometimes religious faith, help them to transcend the problems of aid work and reinstill a sense of purpose.

The chapter thus poses the question: what forms of soul-searching, or self-reflection, do aid workers undertake to understand and manage the moral difficulties of the aid and development system? I will examine the role of religious faith in framing the actions of some aid workers, and consider how socio-economic conditions and career trajectories influence the ways in which my informants draw meaning from their work.

I first outline a body of literature which proposes approaches to aid practice that challenge more linear and goal-oriented models and emphasise the importance of presence, reflexivity and connection. The scholars, aid practitioners and activists behind these approaches have an interest in human vulnerabilities and limitations and the degree to which aid workers can respond to these with greater compassion. Religious faith has an important role to play in this effort, particularly with studies of development projects in Africa. I will then move on to particular examples from my ethnographic material which illustrate where aid workers have resolved challenging situations with their sense of purpose intact, or clearer and stronger. Their stories present a different outlook and approach towards aid work compared with some of the accounts mentioned in the previous chapter; unlike individuals like Aneta or Chiara, for example, these informants continue to believe in their profession, and stay within the sector. I will investigate the conditions which prompt aid workers to reflect more deeply on the value of their actions, how they perceive themselves and their abilities, and what performative narratives enable them to endure the hardships of their work.

Aid Practice as Authentic Action

> In such a calling, the quest for authenticity need not be apologetic; instead a responsible politics and collective action is based on one's authentic being and one's quest for self-knowledge.
>
> (Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003: 260)

This section draws on literature that has sought to engage aid practitioners in processes of reimagining the value of their work, in ways which bring their whole selves into the frame of action. At the heart of these writings is the idea of authenticity; a concept that is somewhat contested in social science studies[59] but which has particular meanings in aid practice, which I will now evaluate through the literature.

In their book chapter, *Reconstituting Development as a Shared Responsibility*, Giri and Quarles van Ufford (Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003), drawing on Foucault and Habermas among others, argue for an aesthetic form of human engagement in social and political life. This aesthetic form contains several elements. It emphasises care of the self as well as care of the other as central to effective development work, and encourages a bridging of differences between aid givers and aid receivers, whilst acknowledging human limitations in the process. The authors believe that it is a process requiring transcendence of the restrictive boundaries imposed in aid discourse and practice; boundaries between self and other, and the boundaries of rigid, and often unrealistic, development outcomes. As suggested in the quote above, for Giri and Quarles van Ufford, aid work is an act of self-development, and an opportunity to engage in the world in an authentic manner which serves the personal and collective good. Authentic action entails reclaiming what they believe has been lost in development agencies – personhood. It is a belief not far from others who have written about the absence of the personal in aid discourse and practice (Fechter, 2012a; Harrison, 2013a).

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[59] It is a particularly critiqued term in Tourism Studies, referring to both the "genuineness or realness of artifacts or events" and "human attributes signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature" (Cohen, 2007). The literature in this section refers more to the second interpretation, but with a particular emphasis on what this means as an emic category within Aidland.

As scholars, activists and aid practitioners argue in the following pages, an approach that recognises the personal elements of aid work may encourage humility in one's actions, and an increased awareness of divisions between self and other, and ways of bridging these differences. It is an approach supported by women activists – African feminists in particular – as it seeks to bridge the personal and the professional, and to reclaim a sense of wholeness in one's work.

> Our organising needs to take into account our full selves, intellectually, physically and spiritually, whatever that might mean to us and not the fragmented selves we are encouraged to be in a world which assumes that private and public are separate.

(Chinyama, 2017: 118)

Allowing these elements of the self to emerge may be seen in contrast to an organisational culture where pressures and long working hours can leave aid workers completely consumed in what they do; unable to envisage their lives beyond who they are as professionals – a tendency that is referred to and evoked throughout this thesis. A desire for wholeness is also associated with a belief in showing one's emotional self in a sector that appears to have little time for vulnerability; a problem written about by a number of aid workers. In her memoir *Zen Under Fire* (Elliott, 2013), Marianne Elliott – a human rights lawyer from New Zealand who worked for two years in Afghanistan – describes the challenges she faces in expressing her emotional discomforts in a working environment where "there is a strong value placed on emotional detachment, [and] the ability to remain coolheaded under any circumstance" (Elliott, 2013: 104). As she struggles under the pressure of her work in Herat and the suffering she witnesses around her – particularly among the Afghan women she works with and supports – as well as trying to hold together a relationship with an American man who is also working there, her own mental health unravels and she finds herself unable to cope. At first she questions her emotional instability, comparing her situation with those of the people around her in Afghanistan:

> Harshest of all is the voice in my own head, telling me I have no reason to be depressed or anxious: I have a warm home and more than enough food to eat, my family is safe from war and I have a good job. I have no right to feel bad.

> The voice is so insistent that I immediately back away from any examination, or even acknowledgement, of my darker feelings. I learn to avoid the silence in which they would arise. I distract myself. I work. I watch *Buffy.*

(Elliott, 2013: 143)

In her study of staff at Amnesty International, one of Rodgers' informants echoes Elliott's unease. Describing the staff's "absolute driven-ness," he says: "It relates a little bit to this sense of guilt – you're letting the victims down. People are unforgiving of themselves, and they are unforgiving of others…" (Rodgers, 2010: 277). The quote highlights what aid workers are often up against when vulnerability arises, and which has been highlighted in other studies (Wigley, 2005) depicting the macho and unsympathetic working environment of the sector. Pigni also points this out with reference to one medical doctor working in Gaza whose "empathy, wisdom, and humanity" (Pigni, 2016: 192) help him to grow and maintain belief in what he is doing:

> Dr. Mads' humanity feels subversive in a sector that seems embarrassed by emotions, where too often we feel compelled to hide our tears to the point we never cry any more […] Doing humanitarian work without empathy, without engaging in the suffering of others, without touching our own suffering, without the support of those we work for and those we worth with – this leads to a sterile and technical approach to service, an approach that mistakes neutrality and independence with disengagement.

(Pigni, 2016: 192)

In Elliott's case, it is through reflecting on her own motivations and responses to particular situations, alongside a regular yoga and meditation and journal writing practice, that she began to understand and respect her own vulnerabilities. She understands the value of this self-reflection to her work as a human rights lawyer who is seemingly expected to have an "unbiased mind and heart," believing this isn't possible unless she also deals with her own "shit" (Elliott, 2013: 189). This entails acknowledging her own limitations – including the fact that she cannot always be purely professional and unbiased - and the reality that her work may only make a small contribution to improving the lives of others. After leaving Afghanistan, Elliott concludes that in order to be of service to others, it is important to face her own shadows and meet them "with the same compassion that I feel for all suffering everywhere" (Elliott, 2013: 328). She questions what she calls the "rhetoric of 'resilience'" and its connotations with toughness, and argues that it should

be reframed to include "the support to talk, freely and without fear of judgement, about the impact that emotion will inevitably have on our own well-being" (Elliott, 2013: 328).

In a collection of essays by aid workers, *Another Day in Paradise* (Bergman, 2003)*,* one contributor describes his emotional release as a form of healing and growth. Discussing his time in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide, treating its dying victims, Philippe Gaillard writes:

> The fact is that, under such circumstances, it is essential for one's own mental balance to be able to get rid of one's own shit with one's own tears. The pH of the whole body, and of the soul as well, then returns to normal. The night's acidity disappears and one can walk again, without stumbling.
>
> (Gaillard, 2003: 76)

This is in stark contrast to other accounts, in both the literature and my own ethnographic material – particularly in Chapter 3 - that indicate an active suppression of seemingly embarrassing emotions. Value and meaning is attached to emotional embodiment, as suggested by another aid worker in *Chasing Misery* (Hoppe, 2014)*.*

> I would learn to appreciate my tears. I would learn that being a 'neutral' aid worker did not mean that I couldn't show any emotion. While, at times, tears were still embarrassing at others they were the only appropriate reaction to what I witnessed. Tears might be considered a display of weakness but I have learned that they express more than that – they show solidarity and strength.
>
> (Philips, 2014: 29)

Her reflections suggest that there is a collective as well as an individual value to emotional embodiment; allowing for greater connection and solidarity across cultures. These accounts present a different image of aid work from the traditional 'hero' or 'white saviour' discourse described in previous chapters. They acknowledge personal limitations, and encourage the expression of vulnerability as a natural part of being human. These ideas are not far removed from Giri and Quarles van Ufford's conceptualisation of care of the self and care of the other. They evoke the belief in a shared humanity, where aid practitioners recognise both human differences – particularly related to power - and

human similarities, such as pain and suffering. They are also related to the interpretations of emotional struggle and collective wellbeing, and the individual's relationship with community and the wider material and spiritual world, presented in Chapter 3. These ideas emphasise guidance from the heart rather than the head, according to one aid practitioner, and transcend the rational boundaries of mainstream development practice:

> We can't do this work alone, so we must dwell more often where we are connected to each other. Take climate justice in the face of a warming planet. Change *won't* come from the perfect proposal you write, or even the stunning results your organization or even consortium achieves.
>
> It's so. much. bigger. than. that.
>
> Everything at the root of what we're up against – *severe, entrenched global inequality* – is bigger than that. It requires more of our hearts, where we believe in people, in a better future.
>
> (Lentfer, J. "In defense of the heart," 2018)

For Giri and Quarles van Ufford, belief in a shared humanity is framed as interdependence; an approach which recognises the importance of thoughtful and compassionate interaction – between goal and result, actors and target groups, and self and other - as a means to self-development (Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003: 273). This framing views the more subtle and less tangible elements of aid work as equally important to the quantifiable goals of aid programmes. One aid worker articulates what this might mean in *Chasing Misery*. Lucy O'Donoghue acknowledges that forming meaningful relationships with colleagues and people from the local community is just as important as the more obvious achievements claimed by aid agencies. Like Giri and Quarles van Ufford, she equates this approach with authentic action, arguing, "authenticity comes from recognising that we'll never be just the 'giver.' We have to learn to be humble and grateful receivers" (O'Donoghue, 2014: 84). She provides examples of celebrating the Easter break with the Muslim staff from her office after being unable to leave her field location following a bomb blast, and of resolving an antagonistic relationship with a colleague and recognising their concern for each other.

> It's not the show-stopping things or the statistics that you find in donor reports but it is the little things, the ordinary, daily gifts of ourselves to each other that leave us changed, for better or worse.

(O'Donoghue, 2014: 84)

In these reflections, O'Donoghue is finding ways to bridge the problematic spatial divides that exist between the international and the local; divisions which have emerged in other parts of this thesis. Building relationships is thus a way of reducing the "gaping chasm of otherness found between expatriate and national staff" as well as leaving everyone, including beneficiaries, "better off because that's simply being human, recognising our need to give ourselves in relationship and in community" (O'Donoghue, 2014: 85).

Pigni, a psychologist who has worked in different humanitarian settings, argues that these small acts of kindness are often side-lined in the pursuit of seemingly greater, more tangible outputs:

> There is a risk, with the professionalization of service work, that we lose sight of the importance of little moments of humanity as if they don't matter. They do. While our work may be more about sitting behind a screen than being out in the field, a cup of coffee, everyday kindness, genuine listening, presence, a light touch, and sense of humour are what make this work humane. [...] It's in everyday gestures, emails, the tone of voice; that's when we change things, for good or bad.
>
> (Pigni, 2016: 215)

Both Pigni and O'Donoghue's comments illustrate what Giri and Quarles van Ufford's ideas may entail in practice; they point to the meaning-making, and self-development, that can arise from subtle interactions and gestures that come from what Lentfer calls 'the heart' and what Giri and Quarles van Ufford call a place of authenticity. This approach has also been extended to organisations, where practitioners have located personal vulnerabilities within internal structures of power and considered processes to encourage dialogue and positive personal and collective change (Barefoot Collective (South Africa) and Mason, 2009; Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015). Reflecting on these change processes within organisations working on gender based violence, Chigudu writes:

> Is there room to discuss power dynamics related to age, sexual orientation, patriarchy, or location? What are the undiscussable issues? Is there room for co-creation, for harvesting each person's talents and skills and ensuring their voices are heard and respected? Are team members encouraged to set milestones and personal development goals? How do they develop their skills? Groups fighting

> gender based violence must also feed their own souls, so that they have something
> to share with others.
>
> (Chigudu, 2017)

The writers discussed in this section all evoke notions of 'authentic being' as conceptualised by Giri and Quarles van Ufford in the opening passage. They are interested in finding purpose in aid practice in ways that go beyond the proposed goals and outputs of organisations, and instead focus on everyday acts of kindness and compassion. Some (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015; Elliott, 2013; Pigni, 2016) also argue that these acts are essential for care of the self and care of the other. Their ideas have relevance for my research findings, and for this chapter in particular, as they point to alternative ways of reframing the aid paradigm to be more inclusive of emotional ontologies; and suggest that these ontologies may contribute to improved aid practice.

Giri and Quarles van Ufford believe that authentic action requires transcendence, or transcendality, which they describe as:

> An aspect of our day-to-day life and embodied experience, which helps us to
> understand the limitations of any particular location, position, worldview and to
> be open to another self, worldview and another world.
>
> (Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003: 269)

Building on the idea of transcendality, in a different publication (Giri, 2004), Giri argues that self-development entails seeing the self not only as an individual in the social and economic sphere, but also the transcendental dimension that sees one's actions as part of "interlinked globality and a cosmic humanity." (Giri, 2004: 112). This process may take many forms. Elliott's memoir (Elliott, 2013) points to a process of spiritual awakening that occurs through her regular yoga and meditation practice. And scholars (Ager and Ager, 2011; Bornstein, 2002; Buijs, 2004; Deneulin and Bano, 2009; Scherz, 2013) have suggested that religious faith may help alleviate some of the inherent flaws within the aid system, and inspire personal and collective development. It is to this literature that I now turn.

Tools for authentic action: the role of religion and faith

The problems associated with religion in development contexts – such as power, violence and patriarchy – are well documented (see, for instance, Deneulin and Bano, 2009; Roux and Loots, 2017). Whilst recognising these problems, I wish to focus particularly on religious and spiritual faith as guiding principles and tools which drive the choices and actions of aid workers, and support them in their wellbeing. This distinctive perspective on the role of faith in development contexts is important given the influence of religion – in Kenya, Christianity in particular – on the everyday lives of people situated in these contexts. As Chabal writes:

> Modernisers, both in Africa and outside, are impatient with customs they see as so many impediments to the adoption of a more modern and universal morality, one that is compatible with the socio-economic and political changes required for development. They fail to understand that religion is the glue that binds communities together and that it can only evolve in consonance - not against - social transformation.
>
> (Chabal, 2009: 68)

Ager and Ager recognise this influence and argue that the development sector's historical adoption of a secular discourse "fundamentally disempowers the voices – and the diverse traditions and understanding from which they are drawn – of the southern actors who have the greatest stake in the sustainable development enterprise" (Ager and Ager, 2016: 103). In another paper they call for a reframing of humanitarianism that is more inclusive of religious and spiritual faith (Ager and Ager, 2011). Whilst they and others (Tomalin, 2012) have discussed the practical benefits of this – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where faith-based organisations[60] have played a central role in development interventions since colonial times (Deneulin and Bano, 2009) – there is another dimension to this

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[60] There is some debate over the definition of faith-based organisation; a debate which is beyond the scope of this thesis which is largely focused on INGOs that identify themselves as faith-based (and Christian). However, Tomalin (Tomalin, 2012) is particularly instructive in highlighting the problems of using this term, due to its broad and varied connotations, and the risk it poses of essentialising the work of these organisations, or of imposing western understandings of the relationship between the religious and the secular in contexts where local interpretations may be very different.

argument which speaks particularly to the moral grounding and motivations of aid workers.

In her study of Kenyan women leaders in educational and development programmes, Wamburu Ngunjiri (2010) argues that African spiritual leadership – whether inspired by Christianity or another of the main religious faiths - includes four key elements. These are beneficence, or altruistic love (the idea of serving others, particularly the marginalised or oppressed); hope (as a means of endurance in the face of war, injustice and gender inequality); courage (to speak truth to power without fear); and *ubuntu*. This concept, derived from the Bantu language, the author describes as "humanness," and an African worldview which demands "that people recognize and relate to each other as people who share a common humanity" (Wambura Ngunjiri, 2010: 763). In this respect, *ubuntu* encourages solidarity and community engagement, implying that part of spiritual leadership is the ability to connect to the community's wellbeing (Wambura Ngunjiri, 2010: 764). These ideas have been put forward in other ways by scholars interested in the intersection of religion and development. Moyer et al, for instance, argue that hope is "perhaps one of the greatest gifts that faith can offer to the sustainability movement" in a sector that is often governed by "doom and gloom" (Moyer et al., 2012: 986).

Buijs refers to religious faith as an "expanded reality" (Buijs, 2004), irrational in quality, which orientates and legitimises the choices of religious followers. This cosmological viewpoint may be at odds with the technical and empirical methodologies of aid, and for Buijs this is problematic, as:

> Without some missionary zeal, be it Christian, socialist or otherwise, it becomes very hard to keep up the motivation for and in the practice. As soon as one cannot connect the longing for a better world for all humanity with the actual practice, cynicism creeps in.

(Buijs, 2004: 104)

Putting religious faith at the centre of motivations for action aimed at ending the suffering of others provides practitioners with the type of transcendence Giri and Quarles van Ufford believe is necessary to infuse aid work with a sense of humanity and purpose. This conceptualisation of aid work may also be viewed as a form of "moral selving" (Jakimow

and Harahap, 2016: 269); provoking "positive affective and emotional responses" which contribute to actualisation of the self, and the fulfilment of particular sacred truths and values (Jakimow and Harahap, 2016: 271). It may also override some of the moral ambiguities already discussed in this thesis, related to the aid sector's unrealistic goal-setting and limited capacities. In this respect the uncomfortable questions that may arise with aid interventions – around the reasons for, or effectiveness of, these interventions – may be more easily answered with recourse to a higher power; development is thus justified on the grounds of a religious calling, one that serves justice and morality. As Bornstein writes, with reference to the international NGO World Vision and the Zimbabwean NGO Christian Care, "faith becomes motivation and meaning for the development work, providing logic to its expression." (Bornstein, 2002: 14). Musimbi Kanyoro, a Kenyan who is the CEO of the Global Fund for Women and who has written extensively about feminist theology, echoes these sentiments when discussing her Christian faith.

> Without identifying the source of what we do as Christians, we render ourselves to become simply a social organization. I believe that when we do mission - whether it includes proclamation, advocacy or diakonia - we do so because our faith through our commitment to the gospel commands us to do so.

(Kanyoro, 2009: 224)

This understanding of the purpose of development work also extends to everyday practice; where – as has been argued earlier – the smaller, less tangible actions become just as meaningful as the specific goal-oriented actions of development programmes. Bornstein's informants discuss the value of NGO staff and aid beneficiaries from different faith traditions coming together to pray, as well as negotiate aid interventions, with one informant – echoing Giri and Quarles van Ufford's conceptualisation of care of the self and care of the other – believing that, "Now we have a changed mind. Fear of the other is lessened; we sit together and eat together. I am not just talking of buildings like this, or water points. I am talking of development of the mind" (Bornstein, 2002: 17). In her study of Franciscan sisters in Uganda, Scherz (2013) has argued that the emphasis on long-term, measurable goals in development discourse is at odds with Catholic notions of charity, which emphasise the intrinsic value of doing good in the present moment. She also suggests that:

> The sisters' vision of the limits of their own ability to affect the future through long-range planning provides a vivid contrast to the ideals of development and humanitarianism that envision poverty and suffering as problems with feasible solutions.

(Scherz, 2013: 625)

The approach taken by the Franciscan sisters entails a detachment from the results of one's actions, and instead a focus on doing one's job well in a way which, in the case of the sisters, at times transcends the restrictive, time-bound agendas of donors.

Religious faith and worship thus place value on present moment actions and interactions in the service of others, viewing such actions as also a service to God. These ontologies have little traction in the secularised, goal-driven discourses of most humanitarian and development agencies (Ager and Ager, 2011). The difference between goal-oriented actions, imposed by employers for a particular purpose, and actions conducted purely for the care of others is highlighted in Moyer et al's study of Kenyan faith based organisations. One of her informants commented:

> As opposed to the other approach, where people are told, you do A B C D, and scientific research and things like that, some people are bound to do it for the sake of others [...] You are convinced that you are doing this because it's sacred, because it's something that is pleasing to God.

(Moyer et al., 2012: 985)

The resistance of humanitarian and development organisations towards a more thorough and accepting embrace of religion in their understanding of aid practice is presented as ironic by some of these writers. They point to the historical role of religious leaders in the development of humanitarian thought and practice (Ager and Ager, 2011: 456), in establishing health clinics and schools in countries where the state had no capacity (Deneulin and Bano, 2009), and the linkages between the Protestant reformation and notions of participation among followers of social change in the NGO sector (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001: 174).

According to Ager and Ager (2011), the tension between religious or spiritual faith and humanitarian discourse is rooted in the latter's colonial undertones; its tendency to foreground the knowledge and reason of the coloniser (or, as a postcolonial reading, the western aid giver) and make these qualities the determinant of how assistance is delivered. It is this positioning of moral authority – also referred to in the previous chapter – which shuts out different perspectives or, more specifically to aid practice, any alternative, non-linear approaches to development. The implications of this include, according to Ager and Ager, a "splitting" of contexts for people of faith in humanitarian environments, as they are unable to connect the spiritual part of their lives to the materialist discourse of humanitarian practice (Ager and Ager, 2011). In other words, they lose the personhood, or wholeness, that others mentioned in this chapter have argued is central to the wellbeing of social change actors.

These discussions of the role of faith in development are particularly important in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, a region with a long history and ever-increasing presence of faith-based organisations (Olivier et al., 2015) providing basic services and, at times, advocating for political change on behalf of poor communities (Deneulin and Bano, 2009). These organisations largely arose out of the strong missionary presence in Africa; a presence which is often linked to Empire and colonial rule (Deneulin and Bano, 2009; Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Moyer et al., 2012). Some studies suggest that faith-based organisations have a growing influence in Kenya (Moyer et al., 2012; Olivier et al., 2015), and at the beginning of this century the country was believed to host the largest number of US Protestant missionaries on the continent (Hearn, 2002).

According to Moyer et al (2012), FBOs may be distinguished from other NGOs in a number of ways. Aside from their connection with local communities through religious establishments and networks, they often encourage engagement on spiritual and moral issues as part of their material support, "providing moral leadership and critical voices, influencing behaviour, and introducing hope to an often demoralizing effort" (Moyer et al., 2012: 962). As discussed earlier, Christian organisations such as World Vision are clear on the centrality of spiritual growth to economic development, and this perspective has relevance in Kenya, where World Vision has a long historical presence, particularly in

Turkana county where I conducted some of my field research (Hearn, 2002). In a country whose population is largely Christian[61] - the link between faith and development is important because, according to Moyer, "Kenyans hold faith, the Bible and church leaders in high regard. Words spoken from the pulpit are taken seriously" (Moyer et al., 2012: 985).

My own ethnographic material also points to the centrality of religion in the everyday lives of aid workers in Turkana. As I've described in previous chapters, it is viewed as an inhospitable region – with mainly rough, untarmacked roads, temperatures reaching up to 40 degrees Celsius, and regular security incidents involving warring Turkana and Pokot pastoralists. It is also the site of one of Kenya's refugee camps, Kakuma, where aid workers are exposed to regular accounts of war and violence from refugees fleeing neighbouring countries such as South Sudan and Somalia. Turkana is a region where the majority of aid workers are alone, away from their friends and families; either because they are in 'unaccompanied posts' or because they felt it was not an environment in which their loved ones could live in comfort and safety. This type of working environment had implications for how my informants spent their time, with many telling me that their main activity outside work was worship and going to church.

As I discuss next, some of my informants who were religious – particularly Kenyans – used their faith as a tool for transcendence as conceptualised by Giri and Quarles van Ufford. Others were not necessarily religious, but their accounts nevertheless suggested a significant degree of soul searching in order to make sense of their work and overcome some of the challenges related to unfair treatment, divisive policies and a macho working culture. In other cases, there were aid workers who appeared unaffected, or unmoved, by these challenges; they were passionate and committed, without feeling bothered by some of the aid sector's shortcomings. I will turn to each of these cases one by one. At the heart of this analysis is an interest in how discourses of stress may be reframed in ways which support aid workers in personal growth.

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[61] According to the Pew Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, an estimated 84.8 per cent of the Kenyan population is Christian. UN figures put this at slightly less. See (Pew Research Center, n.d.; United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.).

From Neglect to Care of the Self

The following accounts suggest that self-development in the service of others, as conceptualised in Giri and Quarles van Ufford's work on authentic action, at times comes in the midst of personal crisis. As some of the literature in the previous section suggests (Elliott, 2013; Rodgers, 2010), care of the other can at times be at the expense of care of the self. Whilst this can have negative repercussions for aid workers, it can also trigger what could be called an existential crisis, where the person affected eventually becomes more spiritually aware of what really matters in their lives, as the two stories that follow illustrate.

Valentina is an Italian woman in her fifties who has lived in Nairobi since 2008, working mostly for the same European NGO, as their regional manager. Over a number of occasions when we met in 2016,[62] she told me about her recovery from work-related illness and her new understanding of her purpose in the aid sector following this recovery. In 2010, Valentina realised that she was not coping well with her work. She was very immersed in what she was doing and the little spare time that she had was often spent in one of Nairobi's many bars and nightclubs. She was also a heavy smoker and drinker. She became ill and suffered what she believed was a form of burnout as she no longer felt motivated in either her work or her private life. When she sought medical advice, she was told that she had an auto-immune deficiency connected to her thyroid gland. The doctor indicated that she must take this diagnosis seriously, and avoid doing anything that caused her too much stress. She was advised to go on extended sick leave, and during that time Valentina became more and more committed to yoga, which she'd been practising on and off over the years. She went on several yoga retreats and also trained as a yoga instructor. Valentina told me that she didn't think she would have lasted in the sector, or in her organisation, if she hadn't been able to take this long break and return with a very different approach to the way she works.

Her belief in the importance of care of the self, as theorised by Giri and Quarles van Ufford, may be seen in different aspects of Valentina's day-to-day life. Valentina believed that her

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[62] 31 March 2016, 17 April 2016, 16 May 2016, 10 August 2016.

managerial style was far more relaxed than it used to be; she was no longer bothered about having to be a certain way just because of her position, and she didn't care about being 'professional'. She was more concerned about transcending hierarchical working relationships and being herself, with whomever she was interacting. Other staff I spoke to at her organisation confirmed this dynamic, telling me they regarded Valentina as a friend and confidante as well as their manager. Valentina had also set up a women's healing group which met at her house in Nairobi every month, and whose members included some of her staff. The group sessions, two of which I went to when I was in Kenya, were attended by around a dozen women, with a fairly equal distribution of Kenyans and Europeans taking part. The sessions' themes were diverse, ranging from racism to ecological awareness to the teachings of Kenyan elders.

Valentina's experiences – her illness, her recovery, her yoga practice and the other forms of healing she had embarked on - had helped her see aid work in a different way, she told me. She disliked what she felt was a largely masculine environment, one that was obsessed with what she called a 'security narrative,' that emphasises danger and risk over everything else. And whilst specific, quantifiable goals and outputs remained the modus operandi of her organisation, and the sector in general, Valentina believed that a lot of aid discourse and practice was unrealistic, donor-driven and patronising to people receiving aid. She gave the example of the term 'empowerment', arguing that this went against what she'd learned through yoga philosophy, that power rests within and it is essentially up to the individual to change their lives[63]. She believed that aid workers needed to reflect more on the realities of the system in which they work; that it was essentially self-perpetuating and self-benefiting and that striving to fulfil idealistic and over-ambitious goals was likely to result in disappointment with what they are able to achieve. Valentina related this issue to her staff and told me that she had organised an anger management training for the programme managers because she saw that many were getting impatient and frustrated with communities they supported who had not done what the managers had expected of them. She thought that staff needed to let go of this anger, as there was nothing they could really do to change things. Valentina believed that these problems were derived from the unrealistic and false claims that NGOs often have to make to their donors. She felt that aid

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[63] This could be interpreted as a very individualistic, and neoliberal, idea of power; a possibility which is given more consideration in the concluding chapter.

workers needed to be more honest with themselves and be willing to communicate some of the challenges they faced in implementing projects with their organisation's donors, instead of glossing over them and focusing solely on achievements.

Valentina's remarks indicate a reimagining of what is important in aid work, and her role within the sector, which has emerged from her own experiences of suffering and recovery. Her establishment of a women's healing group, whose participants included some of her own staff, may be viewed as a response to the tough, masculinised behaviour in the working environment, which she had found discomfiting; it was a safe space in which members could share their emotions freely. Valentina also applied her ideas directly to her work environment. Her NGO's office, a large converted house located in a quiet residential street in a wealthy suburb of Nairobi, indicated an awareness of how space and structure influence the ways in which aid workers behave and interact with each other. The office space included a garden with a long, neatly cut lawn lined with colourful plants and flowers, where a number of the organisation's meetings took place, or where staff would sit quietly working on their own. The interior included a couple of open work spaces and a large reception area with chairs for visitors and an array of the organisation's publications; including postcards featuring Somali artwork. Valentina told me she had gone to great lengths to find this office space - which they'd moved to fairly recently when I met her in 2016 - believing that a calm and healthy working environment would contribute to increased staff morale and job satisfaction. The importance that Valentina attached to this aspect of aid work may be seen as part of her efforts to link care of the self with care of the other; to recognise that being effective in the service of others requires an element of care towards one's own needs. Her attention to these factors may explain why she was keen to help me organise the stress management workshop with her staff in August 2016.

Isabelle's story is quite different. Her experiences do not appear to be inspired by any spiritual traditions, yet a series of incidents where her life appeared threatened, and the repercussions for her mental health, suggest that she too underwent a considerable transformation in the way that she understood her work and what was important in life. She is a French woman in her forties who has worked for an international humanitarian NGO in several different countries since 2006. Her job, as a logistics co-ordinator, entailed a lot of work around security issues in emergency situations. Her field missions have

included Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Somalia and Haiti. Isabelle described much of this work as being enjoyable, fulfilling and not stressful. However, there were a couple of incidents that eventually resulted in Isabelle changing her work patterns, so that she no longer went on extended field missions and was based more permanently in Kenya – where her Kenyan husband lives, in the western part of the country.

On her second field mission, in Chad in 2007, Isabelle and another female colleague were violently taken hostage. The national staff were held and watched by gunmen whilst Isabelle and the other woman were beaten by the hostage takers. She told me that when they were finally released and found each other, the national staff appeared more upset than she was.

> "Because even between us, when somebody was beating my friend I was just…you know…I was not feeling the thing for me I was 'Ah shish…poor one'. You know at the end we were all covered in blood and I was just, 'Oh my dear, come here, I will…' [gesticulates trying to clean her friend up and comfort her] And she was just 'stop that, you are the same'. And you know you are not…you are not realising what is happening."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

Isabelle returned to her home in Paris after this incident, and had a number of sessions with her organisation's counsellor. However, she was keen to get back in the field, because "if I'm not going now, I will never, and I think that it would not be good for myself," she told me. Isabelle added that she simply felt happy to be alive at this time, and so wanted to carry on with work as usual. She travelled to Kenya during the country's post-election violence in 2008, which is when she met her husband, and then proceeded to missions in other countries including Haiti, Congo and South Sudan. Being in charge of security on many of these missions, Isabelle told me that "you have to take care of the other ones, so actually you are forgetting yourself. You know, you forget the problem, the risk for yourself. You are just thinking about the other ones."

What emerges through this account is Isabelle's focus on taking care of others around her, at times neglecting her own needs. The only time that she had for herself was in between missions, when she was back in France usually for only a month. "I think you are losing

yourself a little," she told me. "Which is fine actually, because this is what we have chosen and nobody is forcing anybody to go. So you make your own choice." Whilst on mission, she remained primarily concerned with the safety and security of her staff, most of whom were nationals from the countries she was working in, and who like her were confined to the humanitarian compound during the mission.

> "We were there to help them, so I think you take this part of the stress without knowing it. Because you are in charge of these people, and when they are looking at you they are looking at you like, 'you are the one who knows, and who is going to...it's your job.'"

[Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

Isabelle thus felt she needed to live up to these expectations of her, to do her job well in protecting her staff in dangerous situations. And to be there for them if they needed emotional support.

> "Sometimes it's just, you are the first person or perhaps they are feeling better with you, and then they are talking to you and you are just there to listen because, OK...go, take it out because you will feel better after."

[Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

Her mission to the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2014 was particularly difficult, she told me. It had been very dangerous, with shooting occurring every night and stray bullets landing in the house where she and her colleagues were living. She had nevertheless thought she was managing the situation well, until she left CAR and started having nightmares again about her experiences in Chad. This took Isabelle by surprise, as she had thought she had resolved her trauma from that experience, and she had been seeing a psychotherapist.

> "Me I was thinking I was out of it actually, I was very happy, I could talk about it, I was able to talk about it. It took me two or three years to be able to talk about it without crying [...] and I was very happy with that. And I was sure that I was out of the story. And then CLACK! And the first nightmare it was just like, No way! No why? Why, why why?"

[Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

It was at this point, whilst she was on holiday in France and having nightmares about her experiences in the field, that Isabelle realised she had to stop what she was doing. The psychotherapy sessions were no longer essential to her, but a lifestyle change was; she decided she needed to spend more time with her husband and family, and to take greater care of herself. She refused the next mission she was invited to travel on, in Yemen, and started looking for work that could keep her in East Africa and close to her husband. She related her resolve to the hostage-taking incident in Chad; it was this that had made her realise that she was lucky to be alive, and that each day is important.

> "Since then, we had a second chance. [...] That is why when these things are coming out I am like 'go to hell' because I don't want to go back there, because I'm enjoying, I am really enjoying. So I just want to enjoy. That's why also, I really realised, two years ago [...] that, OK, stop, I don't want to do any more mission. I want to continue, but I want to do it from here."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

Isabelle also gave up smoking – which she believed would have been impossible when she was doing regular field missions – and eventually found a job in Kenya that only required short trips to the countries she would be covering in the region. She was keen to spend more time with her family, particularly her husband and his children in western Kenya, but also her loved ones back in France. She talked about these moments as if they were both precious, and an opportunity for her to behave in a different way from how she had done in the past: less confrontational, and more accepting.

> "When [my husband and I] are together, I am doing the effort, but we are never fighting [...] And we are building together something for us [....] It's quality time. And we need to change. When I am going to France to see my parents, quality time. I don't want to get angry at my Mum, like we can be...no, no....quality."
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 6 July 2016]

At the same time, Isabelle had learned that it was important to share problems with her friends in France, and talked about this in ways that suggested a deeper understanding of shared human suffering, and an appreciation for what one has in life. She described to me occasions when she would ask her friends in France about their lives and would be told

that what they had to say was boring or unimportant compared with what she was doing. Isabelle disagreed; she had learned that everyone has their problems and it was just as important for her friends to share these with her as to witness the suffering of others in the humanitarian contexts in which she'd worked. "You have the right to complain," she told me. "Even if there are people who have less in another country, it doesn't mean that you cannot complain. [...] you can complain, but you have also to realise what you have."

The last two examples in many ways represent what is common in the experience of European aid workers, as I've also shown in the previous chapters; their international status enabled them to take time out of their work, return to their home countries to receive emotional, psychological or physical support and, if they chose, to seek a different job that was more in keeping with a comfortable family life. These are the benefits of being a western aid worker. At the same time, there are considerable difficulties with this status, related to positionality and associated feelings of guilt or needing to prove oneself. Isabelle in particular is an example of a European woman attempting to give all she could to her job and not give up in the face of adversity; partly because she felt responsible towards her national staff, and guilty because she believed they were suffering more than she was. Valentina's current cynicism towards the aid system relates to an understanding that idealism will only lead to disappointment, and possibly burnout. In the case of both women, there is an underlying realisation that they could no longer define themselves purely by the work they were doing, in a sector where one can never do enough. Their whole-hearted investment in aid work in their early careers had led to a loss of personhood; forgetting their own interests or what else mattered in their life beyond their job. It took a serious illness to bring them back to getting to know themselves better, and to valuing certain experiences which made them feel more 'whole' and which they'd previously neglected, such as connection with friends and family and living in a nourishing environment.

This is not the experience of every international aid worker. I met few Kenyans either who had been through this sort of personal upheaval. The sections that follow tell the stories of those who stay within the aid system, apparently unfazed by the work pressures or the moral contradictions. They may be divided into two groups: the internationals, whose identity and sense of purpose is firmly tied to the work they do, but whose sense of emotional, as well as material, wellbeing is linked to their professional status. And the

Kenyans, often at a disadvantage in terms of income and benefits as national staff, but whose belief in their work transcends their identities as aid professionals.

Drinking the Humanitarian Kool-Aid[64]

Salim, an Ethiopian man working for the UN who I have referred to in Chapter 3, was clearly very dedicated to his job. One afternoon in April 2016, as we sat together at a café in Nairobi, he read from his phone an email exchange he'd had one or two years previously with a woman he'd worked with in South Sudan. The woman had claimed she was leaving the aid sector as she didn't want to be like Salim – always "chasing emergencies." Salim had promised this woman that he would remind her of this email every year, on the anniversary of her sending it. In his email to her, he had also admitted that she was probably right, because already he was thinking about how he could travel to Nepal to help the thousands of people affected by the earthquake there at the time. Salim told me that now the woman he'd had the email exchange with was already back at work in South Sudan, and planning to move on to her next humanitarian mission. Salim, meanwhile, had been working in Erbil in Iraq for nearly a year when I met him in April 2016, and in July 2018 was still there, visiting his family in Nairobi every two months during his R and R.

Salim talked to me extensively about some of the challenges and dangers of aid work, particularly in relation to the time he spent in Somalia, when he was kidnapped and ambushed. Despite these challenges, he told me:

> "I don't remember any day that I would think of changing my career and going to private sector and [...] I always knew that if I don't go what I'm going through, some boy or girl somewhere will either miss their meal [...] or some boy or girl somewhere would not have education, or [...] kids will miss their vaccination or immunisation and these are the vital services that children need…so this is what the drive has always been and still is, for all the aid workers."

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[64] The term 'drinking the Kool-Aid' has a somewhat sordid history, originating from a cult mass suicide in Jonestown in Guyana in 1968, in which the leader of the group convinced his followers to drink a poisoned drink made up of the American soda Kool-Aid and potassium cyanide. It has since entered the English dictionary as an informal phrase to mean when one demonstrates unquestioning obedience or loyalty to someone or something.

[Interview, Nairobi, 8 July 2016]

A sense of responsibility, and a strong belief in the value of the work, was thus at the heart of Salim's commitment to his job. This commitment appeared to entail an aversion to complaining about the work; in this respect, Salim spoke of his job as if it was a valuable gift for which he should be grateful. He suggested this when he talked to me in one Skype conversation about colleagues who seemed dissatisfied with working conditions in some of the disaster areas in which he'd worked. He'd told one colleague – another woman he'd worked with in South Sudan – that if she continued being so negative about her work, she should just leave and go home.

> Yes you are working in poverty, yes you are working with communities that are in a desperate situation, but you shouldn't complain about this, he said to me. […] He feels that if you are going to do this kind of work you have to put up with all the consequences, and certainly never complain about the populations you are trying to assist.
>
> [Field notes, 6 May 2016]

Salim's accounts of aid work thus emphasised the positive benefits of helping others – in terms of personal rewards as much as the impact on affected populations – and underplayed the less enjoyable aspects related to working conditions. The passage above suggests that he in fact sees these sorts of challenges as part of the job, what aid workers sign up for; and thus not worthy of complaint. This attitude also further contextualises his comments in Chapter 3 that he did not need counselling after witnessing a major security incident in Somalia. It is an attitude suggested by a few of my other informants, such as Jessica in Kakuma; when I met her in June 2016 she told me she believed that staff were generally expected to perform well and get on with the job regardless of the tough working conditions, and that if someone couldn't cope, they shouldn't really be there.

Lars, the Norwegian man who, along with his wife Inger, had worked in the aid sector since the 1980s, also appeared unsympathetic towards staff who expressed too much dissatisfaction with their work.

> He said that it only takes one person to be really negative in the workplace for it to have an impact on everybody and create a 'poisonous atmosphere.' Those who are having this negative attitude need to be 'weeded out,' he said.

[Field notes, 7 September 2016]

On the other hand, Lars had been impressed by the dedication of some of the international staff he had worked with in very difficult, isolated and dangerous areas; he referred in particular to colleagues in Southern Kordofan in South Sudan. He acknowledged that many of these aid workers remained unmarried, or had broken marriages, because it was too hard for them to form, or sustain, relationships when they were working in 'non-family' duty stations. He believed many stay in the field because of the adrenalin rush the work gives them; and indeed Lars himself spoke of aid work as if it was one big adventure – referring with a mixture of pride and glee to road trips he'd conducted in East Africa in the 1990s when few roads existed; to meeting the Ugandan president during the height of the war with the Lord's Resistance Army in the north of the country; and of negotiating with the Sudanese authorities temporary ceasefires to allow the safe passage of polio vaccination equipment. At the same time, he expressed satisfaction with what his work had achieved, referring specifically to his role in polio eradication in different parts of the world.

Lars claimed that he hadn't seen many cases of trauma or burnout among his colleagues over the decades that he had worked with the UN. He thought that generally staff were very proud of their work, putting this down partly to effective, motivating managers, and there weren't many incidents of people struggling to such an extent that they became ill and had to leave.

These accounts tell a particular story: one that foregrounds the morally good, rewarding and inspiring aspects of aid work and which treat the personal insecurities, doubts or emotional troubles as secondary or 'part of the job.' In this respect, these informants – Salim and Lars in particular – have embraced the traditional tropes of aid work, describing their experiences in ways that justify their presence in disaster areas and which focus on all the good that they contribute in the service of others. The fact that both men have worked for many years at the UN is worthy of consideration; it is an institution that in many ways epitomises the positive imagery of aid work – as projected in its own public

awareness campaigns – and which is sufficiently well resourced to instigate ambitious humanitarian interventions in disaster areas targeting thousands of people. Both Lars and Salim have been at the frontline of this work for decades, and in varying degrees acknowledged the toll this can take on the personal lives of aid workers. Salim admitted to me that this had affected his own private life, with his relationship to his wife and six children suffering as a result of his long absences. Lars' wife Inger also suggested that family life was disrupted as a result of her husband's regular periods in the field.

> Inger said that there were difficult times when she was at home with her daughters and Lars was away. That it takes time to transition back to normal family life when you've been away in these humanitarian contexts. She started talking in the third person at this point, saying how the husband may return and want things in the household to change, yet up until then the family has been getting on in a certain way without him. I compared this with war veterans and Lars interrupted that yes it can be hard but you have to find a way of quickly adjusting to that life.
>
> [Field notes, Nairobi, 7 September 2016]

There is thus a sense with both Lars and Salim that whilst they recognise certain challenges, these are not worthy of much attention or reflection when the work itself is so important and rewarding. Their belief in their achievements help support this narrative, denigrating the difficulties associated with the work as part of 'earning one's stripes'.

Their employment with the UN raises another significant issue which I came across with other staff working for UN agencies. Jessica (who also worked for a UN agency in Kakuma) and Seamus (who worked for a UN agency in Somalia) suggested to me that part of the work ethic was to dismiss personal problems, particularly related to mental health; with Jessica warning me that I might have difficulty in finding anyone working for the UN in Kakuma who was willing to talk about stress,[65] and Seamus telling me when I met him that at the UN "with mental health issues you're out the door."[66] A staff counsellor I met at the UN compound in Nairobi also advised me of an institutional policy which requires staff to

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[65] See Chapter 4.

[66] See Chapter 3.

seek official authorisation before speaking publicly about their work; a policy which could potentially make staff feel uncomfortable talking to me about work-related problems.[67]

All these remarks are more prescient now given recent reports regarding harassment and bullying of whistleblowers at the UN (Ratcliffe, 2018a, 2018b). They could also explain why some aid workers may have built a thick skin regarding the challenges of the work and the impact this may have on mental health. Salim and Lars' accounts suggest a deep passion for, and belief in, what they do which in many respects is admirable and desirable for any idealist entering the aid sector. In this respect, they are defining, and growing, themselves through their work; a form of meaning-making and authentic action that is in stark contrast to some of the perspectives that follow this section. Salim and Lars share a faith that does not have immediate religious connotations. Salim did identify himself as a Muslim, but more through his observance of Ramadan than as a guidepost for his everyday life. Their faith rests largely within the aid system that they have both benefited from and which, they believe, has benefited others; in this respect their missionary zeal is drawn solely from the act of aid delivery itself and their sense of self is collapsed within the goals of development (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001).

Their ascribed identities – as men, and international aid workers – are likely contributory factors. As suggested in previous chapters, this dual status gives them opportunities and benefits that may not be available to women, or to national staff. It is therefore perhaps easier for them to 'drink the humanitarian Kool-Aid'; to maintain whole-hearted belief in, and largely define themselves through, their profession. The fact that both Lars and Salim have worked extensively on programmes that support vulnerable children, while their own children were for much of the time being looked after by their wives, highlights the problematic nature of this unyielding faith. It raises the question of how this type of self-development translates into the more subtle forms of human connection which writers such as O'Donoghue (2014) and Pigni (2016) claim to be of equal importance to the grander gestures associated with aid practice. Considering the long periods they spend away from their families, it is unclear whether their status, and the opportunities this

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[67] Interview with UN counselor, Nairobi, 28 October 2015. I also discuss these issues related to disclosure by UN staff in the methodology chapter.

provides for self-development, contributes to greater connection and solidarity that travels beyond their workplace and into their own homes.

The next section expands upon some of the differences from other aid workers which are inherent in the accounts of Lars and Salim. Few of the Kenyan aid workers I spoke to shared their position. They were working at field level much of the time, mostly for INGOs that were far less resourced than the UN. Yet this did not render them powerless or unable to cope; whilst they saw the value of their work in the same way as Lars and Salim, their understanding of this value transcended their identity as aid professionals, giving added meaning to their actions and the challenges they faced.

Aid Work as Spiritual Work

Most, but not all, of the Kenyan informants mentioned in this section worked for Christian organisations. Whilst for some their Christian faith supported them in making sense of the difficulties they were going through with their work, for others it was an important element of adding meaning to their development activities, regardless of whether these activities were successful in achieving their organisation's aims and objectives. In this regard these aid workers were transcending the boundaries of aid and development frameworks, and the difficult ethical questions as to whether they were having an impact, in ways that motivated them to carry on believing in their work. Their accounts evoke religion as a source of meaning-making and comfort in similar ways as those described by Moyer et al in their study of Kenyan faith-based organisations:

> A sense of calling and purpose, the knowledge that the work is not being done by human power alone, and the powerful bond of communal prayer serve as defences against despair and sources of hope, enabling people to persevere.
>
> (Moyer et al., 2012: 986).

As Bornstein notes in her study of World Vision and Christian Care in Zimbabwe (Bornstein, 2002), a holistic conceptualisation of development views material improvements as gifts from God, and part of wider efforts by these organisations to change belief systems and practices. A holistic approach enables staff – through shared

worship and prayer - to be closer to, and build trust within, the community. This experience, of bringing themselves to the grassroots, community level through faith-based practices, encouraged transparency and vulnerability according to one of Bornstein's informants:

> 'Key to the process was the ability to respond to the questions 'how come you love us?' and 'how come you serve us?' with the response: 'Well, God cares about you. God loves you, and Jesus has sent us here. We're serving him and we want to serve you.'
>
> (Bornstein, 2002: 13)

The holistic approach to development was explained by one of my informants in Lodwar, the county capital of Turkana. Fred is the regional director of an evangelical Christian organisation there.

> [He] referred to an analogy they use of a tree, to show their belief in reaching the whole being in order to address their needs. The roots are one's core beliefs; the trunk is one's value systems; the branches are what people do and the fruit are the outcomes. The fruit must rely on the roots i.e. one's core beliefs encourages people to look at themselves and each other as neighbours – if you're dishonouring your neighbour, you're also dishonouring yourself and what created you.
>
> [Interview, 23 May 2016]

Fred's description not only highlights the idea of development as a channel to spiritual growth, but also how this influences his own, and his organisation's, approach to aid work. Fred had strong religious convictions also, and was a preacher at a Pentecostal church in Lodwar. I attended one of the church's gatherings one Sunday morning, along with several of my informants. Fred delivered a sermon, reading passages from the Bible that served to encourage his audience to remain steadfast in the face of life's challenges.

> "You are not of men's opinion, you are of God's making," he repeated several times, and linked this to the importance of fulfilling one's duties regardless of the circumstances. His point was to encourage the congregation not to worry about what people thought of them; the only judgement that counted was that from God.
>
> [Field notes, 29 May 2016]

Christian faith thus at times framed the way some aid workers I spoke to understood the challenges they were facing, and what this meant for the work they were doing. Faith played a central role in helping them to move beyond the thorny questions of aid effectiveness and the balance of power in aid relationships, and focus on the enriching everyday moments of individual and collective growth.

Aid work as calling

For Kenyan staff from faith-based organisations, there was a clear connection between their work and their religious values which informed their motivations. They often believed their organisation's values were reflective of their own, and this alone gave them a clear sense of purpose. Aid work was a way of reinforcing their identity as followers of their religion, echoing Scherz's observations in her study of the Franciscan sisters in Uganda. Quoting a contribution made by one of the sisters to their charity's commemorative magazine, Scherz writes:

> For the [Franciscan Sisters of Africa], [Mercy House] is a window through which their charism: to love and serve the poor and the needy of our world today, is lived and practised daily. [Mercy House] is the school where such lessons are learned and shared.
>
> (Scherz, 2013: 628)

Evelyn, a Kenyan woman who works on psycho-social programmes in Kakuma refugee camp, believed that it was the values and mission of her Catholic organisation that helped drive her work; because these reflected her own beliefs as a Catholic, "to serve, accompany and advocate."[68] A colleague of hers, Philip, made a similar remark when I spoke to him at a children's refuge where he worked in the camp.

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[68] Interview, Kakuma, 24 August 2016.

> "I think the Christian values also guide us in our work, and what we do. We are working for God, and we are an agency that is guided by Christian values. It also makes us do things straight."

[Interview, Kakuma, 25 August 2016]

Like Evelyn, he described these values as accompaniment and advocacy, and believed that these brought them closer to the refugee community than other organisations.

Kenyan staff I met at a Christian humanitarian NGO in Nairobi in May 2016[69] made similar remarks. They told me that they loved their work because of their organisation's Christian values, and the fact this shared faith brought them together as a "family"; with one man, Francis, referring to his job – providing logistical and administrative support to programme staff in Somalia – as "a calling." He had worked in the organisation for nine years, including in insecure and dangerous situations in Somalia and South Sudan - and told me it was fairly common for staff to stay there for a long time, or to return after working elsewhere. His organisation "makes me feel I'm home," he told me.

In this way, aid work was supporting some of my informants in living out their Christian values, and reinforcing their identities as pious followers. Regular prayers together helped in this process. Paul is a Kenyan man in his fifties, who is a technical specialist working on irrigation projects in Turkana county. He has been working there, with a large international Christian organisation, since 2015; but Paul has carried out similar work with both local government and NGOs, in different parts of the country, for nearly twenty years. Working for a Christian organisation nevertheless had added value for Paul. His organisation encouraged staff to pray together in the morning before work, and to pray with the communities receiving their assistance.

> "Being a Christian organisation, you know it keeps us closer to our Lord and so forth. So you find, you know, you do your things as per the will of God, so that is also another thing. It means that I'm being built up spiritually also."

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[69] Ethnographic material drawn from a day spent at the organisation's office on 13 May, 2016, which included discussions over a shared lunch and one-to-one interviews held with four Kenyan staff.

His remarks, along with others mentioned here, suggest that much of the difficulties of aid work, associated with its impact and effectiveness particularly, could be addressed by my informants through the notion that this was their calling; it was work in the service of God, and thus had value in and of itself, regardless of the outcome.

Faith and courage in the face of suffering and adversity

Many of my Kenyan informants referred to their faith in God, and to the power of prayer, in helping them overcome challenges and to feel empathy for the suffering that they witness; suggestions that are also made by Bornstein's informants in her study of faith-based organisations in Zimbabwe (Bornstein, 2002: 23). In Turkana in particular, confrontation with destitution and suffering was considerable, as the following accounts demonstrate.

Moses, who I referred to in the opening passage of this chapter, had heard a lot of difficult and upsetting stories from the refugees he had counselled in Kakuma camp. Relating to me one refugee's account of being told by a rebel group he must either rape his mother or watch whilst she was raped by the rebels, Moses reflected: "Those things frighten you. They make you think, are we really humans?"

The suffering Moses had witnessed had at times made him question his own faith.

> "There are moments I've asked myself, you know why…why do you allow some people to go through this? You know God, why? Some people you really find them totally helpless. I really find it hard."

> [Interview, Nairobi, 12 August 2016]

Moses was glad that given these sorts of situations, he had his Christian faith; as suggested in the quote in this chapter's opening passage, this had provided him with comfort and reassurance, and was a channel through which he could make sense of the suffering he

witnessed around him. It also helped him to recognise his own limitations, and the fact that he could not always provide the assistance that was needed. As illustrated in the passage, Moses could call on God to forgive him for feeling the way he did, and to ask for "strength to survive for just one more day". His faith also appeared to be a form of empowerment for Moses, something "you might not get in books, you might not get in people, you might not get in supervision," but which he equated with instilling in him a deep passion for and conviction in what he was doing, in spite of its challenges. Moses had studied Theology, and later Psychology and Counselling, at university and had worked in hospitals in Kenya before entering the humanitarian sector. He had applied for his job in Kakuma – with a large, secular international humanitarian organisation - because he wanted field experience, and had been working there since 2014. After my field research was completed, Moses was redeployed to Niger – his first posting to another country.

Evelyn was in a similar position to Moses, in that much of her work revolved around listening to harrowing accounts from refugees who had arrived in Kakuma. She told me,

> "There are touching cases where you can feel like, no….why…you start questioning God, why was this like this? So you feel it's part of you, the problem is part of you."
>
> [Interview, Kakuma, 24 August 2016]

Yet at the same time, Evelyn relied on her faith to guide her through these difficult situations, telling me that each morning she would pray to God, "help me, I'm going to serve the refugee community." Prayer as a form of support and guidance was referred to by others I met in Turkana. Women I met, such as Clare, the Ugandan working for a large INGO there, and Elisha,[70] who works for a Catholic organisation, were regular church-goers and were often busy with church-related duties when I met them in Lodwar. For Clare, her Christian faith had helped her overcome some of the difficulties of living there, particularly in relation to being a woman in a patriarchal society. "I find a lot of relief and comfort from just praying and just going to church," she told me.[71]

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[70] Interview with Elisha, Lodwar, 3 July 2016.

[71] Interview, Lodwar, 31 May 2016.

Other aid workers I met who were carrying out development activities in Turkana framed the dangers they experienced as tests on their faith. These dangers often related to travelling on the roads, where there was the risk of ambushes by the Turkana or Pokot pastoralists who were fighting each other. Paul told me that lives had been lost as a result of inter-ethnic violence, and projects had been delayed or cancelled. He had travelled along roads that were known to be very dangerous, and had at times been stopped by cattle-rustlers, but had never been threatened or harmed.

> "The issue of insecurity I started experiencing long time ago, so when I hear people say 'oh the place is insecure, oh!' I tell them no, it has to depend on God, if it's the will of God for us to encounter such, we will do."
>
> [Interview, Lodwar, 25 May 2016]

Paul's comments indicate that in some ways he felt protected by his Christian faith; as well as it giving meaning to his work, it also helped him face some of the dangers that were common to living in Turkana. Another Kenyan man I met in Lodwar gave a similar account related to his experiences of insecurity in the region. Emmanuel, who is from Turkana and works for a secular development NGO, described to me an incident when his convoy was ambushed by armed pastoralists in Pokot, a neighbouring county to Turkana.

> "It was so hard eh....OK we have passion to serve our people [...] we understand what are our problems, but at some point you tend to think, this is about my life [...] but again we say OK, let the will of God be done. I will go there some time, and if it's God's will that I go and come back then it's still OK."
>
> [Interview, Lodwar, 1 July 2016]

The belief that any form of suffering was God's will, and thus a test of their faith, was echoed by the Somali Muslim participants of the stress management workshop in Nairobi, as I discussed in Chapter 3. Recourse to a higher power to make sense of personal challenges was thus important to aid workers from different faiths, and appeared to be particularly essential for them when faced with danger and insecurity.

Nevertheless, faith in God's will also guided aid workers in the more banal, everyday aspects of their profession. In Nairobi, anticipating the loss of her job as a result of her organisation's restructuring, Elizabeth maintained a calm and cheerful manner when she talked to me in October 2016. She spoke about her achievements at her organisation, and her belief in, and commitment to, the work she was doing on its gender justice programme. She attributed her positive outlook partly to her identity as a Christian and her capacity to see the good in her actions, and to "count her blessings". Describing the role of faith in her life, she told me:

> "My faith is more important now than anything else. Mostly because my faith helps me affirm my beliefs of who I am and what I'm capable of doing. Such that, as I step out, whether I'm stepping out or not, or as I face this matter, I face it with confidence [...] We always say [...] when one door closes another door opens. So I encourage myself with the word of God!"
>
> [Interview, Nairobi, 13 October 2-016]

Shared humanity and spiritual growth

My informants at times spoke of how faith helped them understand both themselves more, and the communities they were assisting. Their reflections evoke Giri and Quarles van Ufford's ideas for bridging care of the self with care of the other, and Ngunjiri's conceptualisation of spiritual leadership and *Ubuntu*, or shared humanity*.*

Whilst Moses, for instance, was moved by the suffering he witnessed in Kakuma refugee camp, he was also able to compare their experience with his own problems, as a person with a disability, affecting one of his legs.

> "Sometimes you look at the good side of life. When you are exposed to this sort of thing. It might actually draw you closer to whichever values. You either come to value life more, or value a God more [...] because it tells you, I thought I had a disability, I thought I had a problem. But I can't compare mine with that one. That person who needs more support than me. So it kind of brings you to reality. It makes you try to have a balance. Or maybe not complain too much."
>
> [Interview, 12 August 2016]

Faith appeared to be a gateway for closer connection with others, and this was important in a sector that markets itself as being compassionate and acting in solidarity with disadvantaged people; even when, as suggested in this thesis, the opposite may seem more accurate. Giri and Quarles van Ufford (Giri and Quarles van Ufford, 2003) refer to responsibility as being an important marker to bridge care of the self and care of the other; drawing on the actions of Gandhi, they argue that this entails walking in solidarity with others less fortunate in order to truly realise oneself.

This imagery was evoked by Paul in Turkana. His organisation encouraged staff to worship together with the local community. The aid sector has historically had a very uneasy relationship with faith-based organisations that proselytise in this way (James, 2011; Tomalin, 2012). Recognising that there is undoubtedly merit in some of the concerns raised on this issue, the focus here is on the role of worship in helping aid professionals overcome their own personal struggles related to how they interact with others, particularly those with whom they sense an uncomfortable power imbalance.

Paul believed that praying together helped bring him to the community level, and gain their trust, in a way that may not have been possible otherwise.

> "If you keep close to the community they will feel your presence and they will appreciate what you're doing..[...] so if you keep in touch with them frequently, they'll feel your presence. And also the implementation bit of it will be very very easy. Unlike when you just go there, you appear technically, you are not there, you will not get things implemented the way you want. But if you get in touch with them, if you interact with them, you try to work with them [...] they'll appreciate you."

> [Interview, Lodwar, 25 May 2016]

Through his interactions with the communities where they were implementing the irrigation projects – interactions which often involved worshiping together – Paul told me that he had become well-known in the remote villages where he works. At the same time, he had encouraged community members to fully "own" the projects, so that they could see the successes of the irrigation schemes were as much down to them as to his own technical expertise. Paul was explicit about how the spiritual dimension to his work with a Christian organisation was an important element in his own self-development, bringing

him closer to God and enabling him to see the people he was assisting more as human beings and not just aid recipients. His reflections echo Bornstein's observations in her study of staff working for Christian organisations in Zimbabwe (Bornstein, 2002): development is a process of self-actualisation, for both aid giver and aid receiver. Whilst communities benefit not only from material assistance but also spiritual support in helping them build confidence to make better choices and develop their values, aid givers develop their minds and their understanding of humanity through coming together with local communities on a shared, faith-based, platform.

Concluding Remarks: Self-care and Selfhood in Aid

These stories all point to ways in which aid workers seek to maintain a sense of purpose in their endeavours. For some, this entails an act of humility; recognising that they cannot always be the hero, and that it is alright to suffer whilst recognising that others may be suffering more. Moses suggests this as he reflects on his own disability whilst recognising that others in the camp may be far worse off than him. The stories of Isabelle and Valentina demonstrate how suffering can lead to greater understanding of, and respect for, personal needs.

The two women also recognise that being of service to others starts in one's own backyard, in one's home or office environment; that small acts of kindness described by Pigni and others (Hoppe, 2014; Pigni, 2016), can be as meaningful to self and collective growth as the bigger (and often over-ambitious) actions of aid interventions. It is these more subtle interactions that are also given value by aid workers such as Paul, whose job satisfaction appeared to be derived as much from his engagement with the local community as from the actual results of these activities. Religion was clearly a tool of transcendence for people like Paul, heightening awareness of self, of positionality and of relationship to the other. As such, it may serve to bridge certain power divides and instil greater understanding and empathy for others in a sector where structures and policies often reinforce, rather than dismantle, these divides.

Religious faith was not always necessary for this type of transcendence. Valentina, for instance, sought to bridge hierarchies and divisions of power out of a consciousness of

personal limitations and vulnerabilities in a sector she understood as macho and paternalistic. Her efforts translated into specific actions, such as changing the office environment and creating spaces that encouraged open discussions and compassionate conversations. This may be seen as another example of Giri and Quarles van Ufford's conceptualisation of authentic action.

Sustaining commitment and passion for aid work is also tied to selfhood, and a belief that there are certain positive, worthy attributes associated with being an aid professional. These can be viewed in different ways, as I've tried to show through my ethnographic material. Part of Salim or Lars' dedication to their work comes from feeling strong and confident in their abilities – and there are gendered and structural reasons for this confidence, as I've indicated. In the case of some of my Kenyan informants, their belief in the value of their work is associated with their religious faith; their activities are in the service of God, and thus are bigger than what can be measured or assessed in a logframe or donor report. In some ways, in both cases – Lars and Salim, and Kenyans such as Paul or Evelyn – there is a leap of faith being taken; a signing up to a particular moral code that justifies their actions. The parallels between followers of religion and followers of the aid paradigm is not a new one. Equating modern day participatory processes in development with the Reformation and Protestant principles of believer's participation, Henkel and Stirrat argue:

> The dualistic cosmos of good and evil, the importance of reversals, the significance of personal conversion and the role of the community of believers are no accidents but intrinsic attributes of an old and powerful heritage.
>
> (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001: 178)

Faith, then - even of a secular kind - is central to aid workers' attempts to continue believing in themselves and the good of what they do. It is a channel through which 'stress' loses its relevance as a pathologised term, and is instead experienced as part of personal growth and transformation. These different forms of faith may guard against the problems of loss of personhood, as described by some in the literature and by my informants, Isabelle and Valentina in particular. In the case of religious faith, this may help aid workers express their vulnerabilities in a sector that often doesn't want to listen; their faith is a channel through which to share suffering with others, as well as to articulate

hopes, desires, fears and sorrows and to believe in a brighter tomorrow. As Moyer et al (2012) argue, this is in many ways essential in a sector accustomed to narratives of doom and gloom. The concluding chapter will evaluate further the potentiality of these approaches to aid that I've interrogated here. It will consider the key problems and themes that have emerged throughout the thesis, and what these mean for how stress may be understood and responded to in the aid sector.

CHAPTER 7

THE PERFECT AND VULNERABLE HUMANITARIAN: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

This thesis has investigated stress in the aid sector, and how discourses of stress and meaning-making are influenced by socio-cultural and structural factors; by institutions and systems which produce particular ideas and expectations about aid workers' behaviour. Using ethnographic methods, and working with a diverse range of people in the sector, has provided me with rich data which reveals, and contextualises, the complexities of emotional experience. What has been revealed through my data has also given me pause for reflection; on my positioning as a white, female aid worker from a wealthy country who has suffered from some of the structural challenges and emotional turmoil described in these pages. Rather than bracket these within the general experience of being an aid worker – as I may have been doing subconsciously as I wrote the diary entry from 2013 which started this thesis – my research has taught me that differences matter, and that generalisations are problematic in efforts to support the wellbeing of staff. Using ethnographic methods has been crucial in widening the discussion about whether terms such as stress, trauma or burnout are relevant or indeed restrictive in understanding the everyday challenges of the sector; and in providing alternative conceptualisations of the realities of aid work which disrupt these common discourses and terminologies. Whilst the thesis draws on a number of theories and ideas related to aid practice, feminist thought has been particularly influential because it has helped me to bring theory into my everyday understanding of what the personal means for aid practice, and for myself. To borrow Ahmed's words: "Feminist theory taught me that the universal is what needs to be exploded. Feminist theory taught me that reality is usually just someone else's tired explanations" (Ahmed, 2017: 29).

The thesis has shown that certain universals that are assumed within the aid sector need to be interrogated and upended. These false universals include the experiential and analytical framing of stress, and its causes. I have sought to challenge some of the traditional ideas and labels associated with stress in the aid industrial complex and the imagery and narratives that contribute to these universalised discourses. I have highlighted, and challenged, two specific and related narratives. The first is the image of 'the perfect humanitarian': a person who is independent, can easily cross borders, is

wholeheartedly dedicated to their job and little else, and who remains unflappable even in difficult or dangerous circumstances. The second is a universalised understanding of stress in the sector: one that uses Eurocentric language to describe the problems experienced by European and American aid workers travelling to far-off, unfamiliar environments. I have shown how these are gendered images, rooted in rational epistemologies that have a colonial history and which translate into forms of aid practice that have become accepted as the correct way of doing aid work. My thesis has shown that these discourses are felt, and resisted, by aid workers in different ways; at times offering new insights into how aid work and its challenges could be addressed.

Kenya was a pertinent research site to discover these complexities. It is a country where the localisation agenda has been underway for a number of years, and where the changes in staffing arising from this were apparent to me when comparing my period of field research with when I worked there in 2005/6. The increased presence of Kenyans – and other African nationals - in INGOs and in senior positions may be a positive indicator of the sector's commitment to giving more power and influence to aid workers from the global south. It may eventually help address some of the problems discussed by my informants, particularly in Chapter 5, about the difficulties of career progression. Yet my research findings also suggest that key problems of difference still exist, which are not easily resolved by implementing policies that merely increase the staffing of locals or Africans. My findings show that the challenges and stressors of aid work cannot be collapsed within simple dichotomies of national and international experiences; nationality, race and gender are intersecting factors. In addition, whilst particular assumptions remain about what constitutes 'good' aid work, structures of difference remain in place, affecting how people approach their jobs and how comfortable they feel talking about personal challenges. I will now turn to these problems in more detail, by considering how my research provides new insights into current theories and literature concerning stress within the aid sector.

Colliding and coalescing narratives of identity

My research has shown that identities are not clear-cut; no one aspect of a person's identity can easily explain their experiences. The importance of this statement can be seen

clearly when considering the tendency within aid discourse to make rigid distinctions between the experiences of national and international staff.

The national or international status is one that is assigned to staff by their employers, by virtue of where they are from and how far they have travelled. It entails a certain set of financial rewards and benefits, as well as different levels of organisational protection. This is seen most clearly in Kakuma, where international staff spend more time on their organisation's compound than in the camp, mainly due to perceived levels of risk, and are entitled to chartered flights to Nairobi during their R and R. But it was also present in Nairobi, where I talked to Kenyans who were struggling to advance up the career ladder from administrative positions, whilst their international colleagues appeared to have far more professional options available to them; an issue that was particularly problematic when faced with organisational restructuring processes. Yet how a person is positioned within this dichotomy is complex and uncertain, due to other factors such as which region in the world they are from, their class, their race and their gender. Many international aid workers in fact straddle different worlds – at times feeling more familiarity and connection with those they are helping than those with whom they work.

Some key examples illustrate this. Salim identified himself as a 'westerner' in Chapter 3, when he discussed his understanding of stress and trauma compared with 'local' aid workers in Somalia. He may have positioned himself in this way due to his status as an international staff member at the UN agency where he worked, which had exposed him to a variety of cultures; or his social class, which had secured him an education that may not be available for thousands of other people from countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia, where he grew up. His particular understanding of himself and local communities he has worked with in Somalia reveals how his international status is on a different footing from many of the European and American aid workers I met; unlike them, Salim was born into and grew up in contexts (in Ethiopia, then Somalia) where natural and human-made disasters, and humanitarian interventions, have had a dominant presence for many years. His references to the Somali people is steeped in embodied knowledge; a sense that he has been there – trying to survive in a situation of conflict – and he knows what it is like. These different factors challenge several related assumptions in aid discourse: that international aid workers are white and from the global north, and that they have a different set of expertise from their national counterparts. His story also demonstrates how the

knowledge of some international aid workers – as well as their national counterparts - is not merely from their qualifications or their years spent working in the field; it is embodied, drawn from personal experiences of war, violence or poverty.

This embodied knowledge is also present, in a more subtle form, in what I discussed with Japhet in Chapter 4. His difficulties with his work were often associated with having to resist interaction with the people to whom he felt closest in Kakuma – the Burundian refugees in the camp. This resistance manifested most demonstrably in his decision not to use his native language at work; setting him apart from other international aid workers such as Jessica who would not experience these sorts of difficulties, having come from a country that has no shared history with the refugees with whom she was working.

Conversely, many of the Kenyans I spoke to in Kakuma – who were national staff – were from another part of the country hundreds of kilometres away. Their families had little understanding of the environment of Turkana; an environment where the climate and terrain are far more challenging than southern parts of Kenya, from where many of the national staff originated. In this respect the problems faced by my Kenyan informants in Kakuma, and also in Lodwar, were not so dissimilar from the international staff. Aid workers such as Caesar, Moses and John (Chapter 4) all came from very different social settings to Turkana, and it was only their jobs that had brought them to this region. Their families remained in southern or western Kenya and only in rare cases had any of them come up to Turkana to visit. The paradox here is that despite their unfamiliarity with this region, their status as nationals means that they are assumed to have particular knowledge and experience that places them in a different economic and spatial position; able to travel into the refugee camp more freely than many of their international colleagues on the one hand, yet not provided with the same protection as them on the other.

My thesis contributes to the limited literature which addresses the racialised dimension of aid interactions and subjectivities (Crewe and Fernando, 2006; Heron, 2007; Kothari, 2006b; White, 2002), by arguing that systems which separate aid giver from aid receiver, and those with national status from those with international status, produce hierarchies of power and privilege within the aid sector and reinforce 'othering' narratives. This becomes apparent when considering Jessica's discussions with her friends in Kakuma in

Chapter 4; and the way Lavinia and her colleagues talk about Somalis and their desire to stay in Somalia as if they have choices like anyone else in chapter 5. Their comments evoke positions of privilege linked to whiteness as well as international status and country of origin which set them apart from aid workers such as Salim; these identities come together to influence how they view 'the other,' whether this is the Kenyan pastoralist on the kerbside or the Somali colleague working in Mogadishu. Some of my informants from wealthier European countries clearly recognised, and felt uncomfortable, with these systems of difference. Ideas of power, privilege and inequality were evoked in different ways by Chiara in Chapter 5 and Isabelle and Valentina in Chapter 6 as they discussed what they viewed to be problematic about the aid sector. Yet it was clear that all three had benefited from the privileges bestowed on them as a result of their identity and background. They were not stuck in one particular place – either physically or professionally. Isabelle could leave a war zone when her work became dangerous; she and Valentina could return to a safe and comfortable environment in Europe to seek any necessary support; and Chiara could leave the sector and pursue a different career path when she lost interest or motivation in what she was doing. Their positionality and privilege in this sense are unresolvable, despite the best efforts by some, such as Valentina, to bridge differences in the workplace and operate more as equals with Kenyans. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that it is not only aid workers from the global north who hold power; comments from some of my Kenyan informants, such as Dennis and Rebecca in Chapter 5, suggest that working in the sector helps them to gain considerable economic leverage which affects how they are perceived by their families and communities.

Gender also intersects with career choices. The findings highlight particularly the clear differences that exist between the experiences of African men and women. Kenyans such as Caesar or Peter (Chapter 4) or a Ugandan such as Michael (Chapter 5), had lived away from their families for many years. It is a situation which they dismiss as necessary in order to earn a regular income, whilst it is problematised by women such as Rosemary and Jane (Chapter 4), Janet and Clare (Chapter 5). Whilst their concerns regarding the impact of their career on their desire to have a family or look after their children highlight the inequalities that exist among national staff – and some African staff as well – this should not be the only reading from my findings. Their accounts destabilise common imagery implicitly referred to in classical western feminist discourse concerning the poor and powerless African woman (Mohanty, 1984) as well as reminding us that there are

some struggles which many African women share, regardless of their social class, or whether they are poor (Win, 2006). These realities provide the potential to consider how the localisation agenda can be leveraged to centralise the lived experiences of African women in policies affecting staff as well as in the design of aid programmes. I will discuss this potentiality more in the section on further research.

The analytical and intersectional lens within this thesis has highlighted the problematic assumptions that are often made concerning identities within the aid sector; by interrogating these assumptions we may be led to new and important insights into how stress is felt and managed. This sort of critical inquiry also leads to new formulations about what constitutes good, and meaningful, aid work; challenging traditional narratives associated with 'the perfect humanitarian' – an archetype I described in detail in Chapter 5 –which I will discuss in the next section.

The Perfect Humanitarian deconstructed

The imagery I have presented of the 'perfect humanitarian', and expectations of what constitutes 'good' aid work, needs to be located within a broader, neoliberal global order; where the workforce is a utility to greater outputs and successes at less financial cost, and any suffering this entails is viewed as an individual, rather than collective, problem. In the modern work environment, it has become normal for staff to take on three people's jobs, and for their time outside the workplace with their families to be increasingly diminished. Particular problems arise when considering these realities in the aid sector. Aid work is a profession whose justification hinges on the ability to fulfil a mandate of ending (or easing) poverty and suffering; thus any detraction or failure is subject to much scrutiny and judgement. This includes situations where the private or emotional lives of aid workers are seen to be encroaching on their capacity to fulfil this mandate.

Aid workers themselves appear to be conscious of living up to a particular image of both morality and efficiency. It is interesting to acknowledge that although seemingly dubious pastimes, such as casual sex and excessive drinking, are revealed in aid workers' memoirs (Thomson et al., 2006), they usually weren't discussed openly in front of me; and if they

were, my informants were largely referring to the behaviour of others, rather than themselves. The fact that I was rarely invited to social gatherings, in Turkana or Nairobi, where I may have witnessed this behaviour – I certainly knew of the existence of such social gatherings from my own time as an aid worker in Kenya and elsewhere – is telling; it indicates that there remains some nervousness about being judged as anything less than completely dedicated, squeaky clean and morally pure.

A common thread throughout this thesis has been that aid workers are not automatons, implementing the lofty ideals of their organisation without concern for their own lives or wellbeing. It is clear that many have motivations and interests that far exceed the narrow imaging of 'the perfect humanitarian,' and which undermine the myth of altruism and heroism at the heart of this image. The thesis has shown how the idea of 'the perfect humanitarian' is embedded in organisational culture, and has specific gendered implications for aid workers. My findings build on some of the literature concerning the masculinised environment of aid (Appleby, 2010; Partis-Jennings, 2017; Patni, 2011) by showing how aid organisations often set the parameters for what can be spoken about and what cannot with regard to vulnerability and stress. This can be seen in accounts by Seamus and Winnie suggesting they adjust their behaviour according to particular masculinised norms of social interaction (Chapter 3), Janet's stories of how managers approached her pregnancy and her need to leave the office early to tend to her sick child (Chapter 5), and Aneta's account of being forced to work whilst she was ill (Chapter 5). Women felt particularly uncomfortable in this environment as suggested by Winnie (Chapter 3), Clare (Chapter 5) and Valentina (Chapter 6).

The findings indicate that family life and romantic relationships – whilst clearly of concern to all aid workers – are largely written out of everyday practice; this is seen most succinctly in the 'non-family duty station' set-up in Kakuma, and in the lack of support towards Kenyan mothers such as Janet. In this way, my findings move beyond examining specific incidents that are seen as key stressors in the sector, and make important contributions to the more subtle challenges of aid work that arise from structures and social dynamics that are particular to this profession. These structures do not have solely negative repercussions; Chapter 4 showed how the setting of the humanitarian compound creates forms of collegiality, friendship and support as a result of the long periods of both work and leisure time that aid workers have together. Organisational policies and working

practices nevertheless create and reinforce ideals around 'good' aid work; and what is 'good' appears to be aligned with particular assumptions around what is professional. These ideals largely leave out, and silence, what is viewed as 'not professional': a person's health problems, their concerns regarding their family, or emotional markers of vulnerability, such as self-doubt, guilt or anxiety.

In addition, there are plenty of examples to highlight that personal desires and interests may be far from the assumed attributes of altruism and heroism, particularly in Chapter 5: including Lars and Inger's seemingly extravagant living conditions, concerns over adequate salaries and compensation expressed by national aid workers such as Dennis, but also implied by international aid workers such as Mario in his decision to become a consultant. The contradiction within these different accounts is that whereas financial interests and motivations were treated with contempt by informants such as Mario and Chiara, for many of my African informants – such as Jared (Kenyan) in Chapter 3 and Michael (Ugandan) in Chapter 5 – these concerns were treated as being normal, and justified in a context where jobs are scarce. The reflections of some of my Kenyan informants are particularly helpful in demonstrating that the imagery of the perfect humanitarian, created and popularised in western, aid-giving countries, is considerably flawed. For example, when I discussed with my Kenyan informants the degree to which they, or their loved ones, felt their work was heroic, their reaction was often one of surprise or dissent. Dennis and Rebecca (Chapter 5) indicated that their families focused largely on the financial rewards of their jobs, with Dennis' family assuming he must be "a millionaire," because of all the travel he undertakes.

Whilst Dennis and others in fact expressed dissatisfaction with the levels of compensation for the work they were doing – particularly when compared with their international counterparts – these assumptions made by family members demonstrate that the aid profession is generally viewed as fairly lucrative in Kenya. So although there is in many respects a national and international divide in terms of income, job security and benefits, as has been suggested by Dennis, John, Janet, Rita and others, it is a profession that offers opportunities for a comfortable income and lifestyle; this is at least how many Kenyans view the aid sector. From this perspective, aid work is less about giving something up – as is implied in the common narratives of white, western aid workers travelling to poor

countries – but about gaining stability in a situation of economic uncertainty and hardship. As Rosemary told me:

> "And even sometimes when you are low, you tell your family 'I want to leave this job, I'm tired!' They tell you 'no no no! Don't ever leave your job when you don't have another one.' That is what they will tell you – 'don't leave that job' – but sometimes you are like, 'aghh, I'm out of this place, I don't see it working, I'm out! I'm out!' You try to talk to someone and someone is telling you, 'no! you can't leave a job, where are you going to go without a job in Kenya. You are very lucky you have one, you have to be there.'"

> [Interview, Kakuma, 21 August 2016]

Her remarks not only challenge the traditional narratives about self-sacrificing aid workers; they also shift the lens of what may be viewed as 'stressful' in this working environment. In Rosemary's case – and for others I spoke to, such as Jared in Lodwar or Michael in Kakuma – the challenges of their work were assessed in terms of what for them were the far greater problems of not having a job if they were to walk away from those challenges. These concerns were behind their decisions to put up with long periods away from their families, at times in difficult and remote environments.

The suggestion also made by their remarks is that life in Africa is difficult, and a job should therefore be cherished; if it is one that has a moral purpose to it then this is an added benefit – and was clearly an important motivating factor for many of these informants. This points to a reconceptualising of stress that explores the wider context that many aid workers are born into; it is a different context from the white saviour that dominates postcolonial critiques of aid. As was implied by some of my informants, such as Kevin in Kakuma or the Somali participants at the stress management workshop (both of whom I referred to in Chapter 3), the challenges of living in tough, impoverished or dangerous environments are not necessarily new for many aid workers from African countries. Aid work may bring with it very specific risks and challenges to an individual's safety and wellbeing, but the way these are understood and responded to is socially and culturally situated.

In addition, aid workers I spoke to who would seemingly fit the image of the 'white saviour' from a wealthy western country indicated that their interest in their profession

was rarely solely about 'doing good.' They also questioned whether the sector actually did any good at all, and whether in fact they themselves were benefiting more than the people they were meant to be helping. This is seen most clearly in Chiara's account in Chapter 5 but also is implied by others, both international (for instance Valentina in Chapter 6) and nationals (for instance the Kenyan participant at the stress management workshop, referred to in Chapter 5). The thesis thus makes an important contribution to postcolonial literature concerning the motivations, expectations and realities of aid professionals by providing alternative perspectives that deconstruct what it means to be a 'good' humanitarian. These perspectives provide a better understanding of what really matters to aid workers and what supports their wellbeing, and have the potential to inform new ideas and visions for improved aid practice. In the following section I will expand on these possibilities in more detail.

Wellbeing and reframing what matters

An emphasis in this thesis on exploring diverse world views and cosmologies has not only challenged the common lexicons and discourses associated with who the aid worker is and how they should behave; it has also produced new ideas concerning what drives aid work, and what really matters for the protagonists. These ideas offer insights into how aid workers view humanity and human suffering, and thus are instructive in deepening an understanding of how they approach their own personal struggles.

Chapter 3 and 6 explored why many of my Kenyan and Somali informants appeared to brush off certain difficulties in their working lives, and this was partly attributed to their religious faith. "God's will" was both rationale for doing the work, and a way of gaining strength from its challenges. We can see this with the Somali Muslim participants at the stress management workshop (Chapter 3), who saw personal upheavals as the will of God and a sign that they needed to pray more; and with Kenyan Christians such as Paul and Emmanuel (Chapter 6), whose faith helped them face security threats without fear; and with staff from Christian organisations, such as Evelyn or Philip (Chapter 6), who believed their work was helping them to fulfil their religious values. Their accounts echo those from Jakimow and Harahap's study of volunteers from an Indonesian community development project:

> The feeling of anxieties and the sense of risking oneself are non-cognitive resources that enable a new self-imaginary or that reaffirm one's true calling.
>
> (Jakimow and Harahap, 2016: 275)

These examples suggest a different dimension to aid work that supports people of faith in understanding the purpose of their actions; regardless of whether these actions ultimately are of benefit to target populations. In this way, the accountability shifts from 'beneficiaries' to God. This perspective thus transcends the need for measurable impacts and results and instead focuses on a far less tangible element: personal and spiritual growth. It is a way of understanding challenges throughout one's life, not just in one's job, and helps some aid workers to find purpose and meaning in their profession.

Academic studies (Eriksson et al., 2015) and literature addressing humanitarian staff welfare (McKay, 2007) have argued that spirituality may contribute to the wellbeing of aid workers and their ability to overcome stressful conditions.   My findings would appear to support this claim, not only from the perspective of Kenyan and Somali aid workers who specifically framed their emotional experiences within the context of their religious faith. Valentina is another example of someone whose spiritual faith – in her case, the following of yogic philosophy – was supporting a "new self-imaginary" as an aid worker, to borrow Jakimow and Harahap's phrase, and in this respect was also supporting her efforts to conceptualise the profession differently, both in intent and in action. Her reflections, and those of some of my Kenyan and Somali informants, suggest that working on themselves – the way they view the world and act within it – was central to how they understood and responded to the challenges of working to help others. My findings add a critical dimension to literature that posits value in the role of religion in development (Ager and Ager, 2011); I have demonstrated how a part of an aid workers' ability to reconceptualise aid in a way that is more positive, and less rigid, and contributes to a sense of purpose, is through their religious or spiritual faith. This is clear in the accounts of Valentina, Moses and Paul in Chapter 6. Rather than dismissing these approaches as irrelevant to aid practice, perhaps more can be learned from them, and indeed from broader conceptualisations of stress discussed in Chapter 3; they may provide new imaginaries, not just for the self, but for the sector, in how aid may be articulated and performed. In particular, resituating what is seen as 'good' in aid work from the achievement of long-term goals to the more subtle processes of everyday giving and receiving between aid practitioners and the individuals and communities with whom they

interact; and from delivering outputs to help 'the other' to spaces and opportunities for personal and collective growth.

This potential nevertheless presents problems. There is the risk that the spiritual dimension of wellbeing that I've discussed here and in Chapter 3 and 6 may be misinterpreted, and appropriated by aid organisations pursuing effective self-care strategies for staff. The problem of viewing religious or spiritual faith purely as a helpful act of self-care, is that it conveniently loses any value in addressing the structural inequalities which I've described throughout the thesis. This narrow interpretation of the role of spirituality instead aligns itself with much-critiqued neoliberal discourses that argue that human wellbeing and happiness is essentially an individual endeavour – an inside job – that absolves institutions of any responsibility (Ahmed, 2010; Davies, 2016). Such a reading means that hierarchies of power remain intact, and individuals are assumed to remain happy and content within their allotted positions. In the workplace, this entails maintaining a healthy workforce, reducing absenteeism or loss of motivation among staff, without any changes to unfair pay structures or institutional policies; changes that might threaten productivity. The aid industrial complex may be seen as no different from any other sector in this respect, with its emphasis on achieving specific goals and outputs in as economical a way as possible. But the sector *is* different, largely because of the humanitarian and moral values it seeks to uphold. This prompts the question as to how aid organisations can practise what they preach in terms of equality, fairness and justice; how aid worker wellbeing may be considered not just as an add-on that makes employers look like they care about their workforce, but a means through which staff and managers can consider new ways of working and of planning and delivering aid interventions which support staff, as well as 'beneficiaries', in their development. These questions form part of the final, conclusive section of this thesis, where I consider avenues for further research. In this concluding section, I will return to some of the contextual and thematic areas that have been central to my findings – particularly the localisation agenda, alternative conceptualisations of stress and the problems of the silencing of the personal within the sector – to raise a number of questions that could steer the direction of future research on aid worker stress.

The Vulnerable Humanitarian: future research

An underlying problem concerning stress in the aid sector, which has been discussed throughout this thesis, is the silencing of the personal and the difficulties aid workers have in truly being themselves. From Dennis' claim in Chapter 3 that few of his colleagues would want counselling due to fear of losing their jobs; to the pressures on Janet in Chapter 5 to travel to a refugee camp when she was heavily pregnant and to stay in the office when her child was sick; to Aneta's antagonistic relationship with her boss in Chapter 5 – these are all examples of aid workers feeling forced to shut off a part of themselves in order to live up to a particular image of professionalism. It is indicative of an organisational culture where vulnerability is viewed as a sign of weakness – to paraphrase Seamus in Chapter 3 – and where family and personal life are supposed to be locked away from view, particularly whilst in field locations such as Kakuma. These and other examples throughout this thesis present a saddening paradox in a sector that prides itself on fighting for social justice and alleviating human suffering; but may also signal to managers and staff within the aid sector that particular working practices and approaches need to change if it is to truly practise what it preaches.

My research findings raise two important questions about future directions in aid practice. These questions come at a crucial moment in the history of aid and humanitarian interventions; a moment where the entire sector has been subjected to widespread scrutiny and criticism on the back of allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct, with its legitimacy and accountability in grave doubt.

The first question is: how can alternative conceptualisations about stress, wellbeing and meaningful work inform aid practice? My thesis discusses a number of positive examples of how aid work may be approached in ways that transcend the unrealistic, goal-driven boundaries of discourse and practice; where informants believed in what they were doing, where their jobs were part of their spiritual growth and where their actions were helping them to deepen connection with others, including aid 'beneficiaries.' These perspectives echo Giri and Quarles van Ufford's (2003) ideas concerning authentic action in development praxis. However, we are left unsure of what these ideas actually deliver; how they may translate into the everyday working practices of aid organisations and overcome

some of the structural problems that have been discussed in my findings. As I indicated in the previous section, these new imaginaries about aid work, its challenges and how to respond to them, only have real legitimacy if they go beyond mere self-care mechanisms and serve to challenge the way aid is structured and delivered. Because the traditional systems and working practices of aid remain so dominant in the sector, there are few voices providing alternatives. Nevertheless, there are some promising contributions from aid practitioners.

The US-based non-profit organisation Thousand Currents ("Thousand Currents – Exchanging grassroots brilliance," n.d.) partners with grassroots indigenous, women and youth movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It emphasises the embodied knowledge of people within these groups and what this has to offer in reframing the aid paradigm, and provides them with global platforms aimed at strengthening their visibility and reach. For Thousand Currents, these groups "reimagine wealth, power and well-being to offer solutions that draw from ancestral wisdom. Through their innovations, they reflect the needs of today and the possibilities of tomorrow" (Thousand Currents and Bartram, 2018). Its vision is also inherent in the organisation's working practices, which include self-reflection, learning by trial and error and respecting multiple ways of knowing (Thousand Currents and Bartram, 2018). Their Communications Director, Jennifer Lentfer, is quoted in Chapter 6 of this thesis and her reflections there on the value of operating from the heart in activism and development work echo the ethos of Thousand Currents.

Focusing particularly on the integration of self-care into development programming, Jessica Horn's work with the African Women's Development Fund and the African Institute for Integrated Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls and HIV/AIDS pushes for wellbeing to be at the heart of gender equality efforts, and encourages African feminist approaches to health; this includes exploring new methodologies to understand trauma in African societies (Horn, 2014) and calling for a right to rest for African working women (Horn, 2018).

Another example is Hope and Rudo Chigudu's work on creating an "organisation with soul" (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015). Rooted in the experiences of the women's movement in Africa, their intersectional feminist approach highlights and challenges the power relations existing within organisations and movements. They call for an organisational

culture where staff are more conscious of these dynamics and able to discuss them freely with the intention of bringing about individual and systemic change. Linking personal and collective wellbeing with an increased awareness of different manifestations of power – including feeling disempowered, feeling power within, and feeling power over others - they argue:

> Comprehending the different forms of power is one way of raising our political consciousness. We learn what makes us strong, what weakens our spirits and how to prevent loss of personal power. We also learn how to re-create ourselves, particularly when we have gone through a rough patch of a disempowering context [...] Understanding, harnessing and transforming different forms of power is essential in the struggle against oppression, domination and exploitation.

> (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015: 29)

Chigudu and Chigudu's handbook, *Strategies for Building an Organisation with Soul*, provides examples of where women's organisations have failed in their vision and mission, and in sustaining staff motivation and morale, as a result of problematic power dynamics; and offers tools and practices to identify and cultivate an organisation's "soul song" (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015) - a sense of purpose that is rooted in equality, justice and wellbeing both within and beyond the workplace. Case studies such as theirs, concerning the practical application of tools and methods that challenge traditional development methodologies and practices, are largely missing from broader development studies research. Applying these gaps to my own research, questions arise over how the approaches taken by some of my informants, such as Valentina, Fred or Paul in Chapter 6 actually translate into the transformation of working culture and power imbalances within the aid sector. These questions demand further analysis in a context of increasing dissatisfaction with aid structures that appear to perpetuate these imbalances and inequalities.

Related to this point is the second question relevant for future research: To what degree is the localisation agenda challenging traditional discourses and practices in the aid sector? My research findings suggest that in many respects, national aid workers continue to have their power and agency manipulated and restricted by institutional structures and systems that favour the knowledge, expertise and authority of white western practitioners. Their interests, both as aid implementers and as human beings with family

and financial concerns, are given little space to be articulated or responded to within this system. In Kenya, as in many other countries, this is particularly problematic when kinship and family are vital resources for a person's wellbeing. If the localisation agenda is to be successful in shifting power and agency to local people in Africa and other development contexts, more consideration needs to be given to local conceptualisations of wellbeing within the aid sector. This should include analysis of what constitutes meaningful work, how best to balance work and private life, and how to address the specific challenges faced by female staff living in patriarchal societies.

This thesis is merely a starting point in illustrating the diverse cosmologies and ontological viewpoints of aid workers and how these feed into their approaches towards stress. Further research could build on some of the findings - including faith-based interpretations of emotional wellbeing by my Somali and Kenyan informants, and the role of job security and family duty in motivating some Kenyan aid workers – to consider how these ideas may become more centralised in programmes and policies aimed at enhancing local staff agency and wellbeing. The localisation agenda therefore presents opportunities to explore alternative formulations and approaches in development praxis which challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power. It may also help overcome the problems of "dual identity" outlined by Win (2006), whereby non-poor African women are forced into 'othering' the women they assist in development programmes, due to the privileging of certain northern-led epistemologies and discourses in these programmes. As is implied in Win's analysis, non-poor African women – who are widely represented in my thesis – are likely to share many of the same problems of patriarchy as the women in the communities in which they work, and for this reason their stories are worth listening to:

> Just looking at non-resource-poor women, who do not need income-generating activities, and yet suffer from domestic violence or are infected with HIV/AIDS, would answer the question: So, what else needs to change?
>
> (Win, 2006: 85)

The localisation agenda may thus allow for these stories to emerge, and in doing so may help reframe what matters in aid and what matters in particular for the wellbeing of African women – both those working within the aid sector and beyond it.

This thesis presents a starting point from which to consider the problematic assumptions about the multitude of personalities comprising the aid industrial complex, at a time when misconduct, poor management and widespread staff health problems, absenteeism and turnover plague the sector. In this concluding chapter I have tried to show that these problems do not necessarily signal the sector's death knell, but may provide opportunities for reflection over how power within the sector may be reimagined and a more inclusive and compassionate working culture created; one that places diverse methodologies of individual and collective wellbeing at the centre of aid planning and practice.

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