High Aspirations and Low Expectations:
Coping and Living in the Everyday Politics of Humanitarian Fieldwork

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Dedication
To Li Zhang and Yujie Bian

Acknowledgement

"If you are feeling helpless, help someone."
- Aung San Suu Kyi

Abstract

My thesis strives to explore the everyday practices of humanitarian professionals within crisis environments. I focus on one main question: to what extent does the varying identities of humanitarian professionals influence their everyday practices within the aid workspace? I suggest that identities of humanitarian professionals affect ways which they perceive professional and security risks within their employing aid agencies under crisis contexts that, in turn, significantly influence their everyday practices. In particular, I focus on three types of practices to which I typologize as 1) inward socializing, 2) overworking and 3) self-censoring. Each of these practices are taken on by humanitarian professionals of different racial, gender, sexual and professional identity profiles in response to their unique perceptions of security risks within their workspace. I argue that the everyday risks faced humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts vary dependent on their identities, and that altruistic values and inclusive narratives do not automatically erase structural problems for a humanitarian space that has evolved into a professional industry. The main purpose of the study is to challenge the broad-based assumption that the everyday experiences of humanitarian professionals working in conflict contexts are unproblematic, and to emphasize that aid agencies and humanitarian professionals do not necessarily form unified fronts in face of the crises that they aspire to relieve.

Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur des pratiques quotidiennes des professionnels humanitaires en contexte de crises. La question principale à répondre est : dans quelle mesure des identités variées des professionnels humanitaires influencent-elles leurs pratiques quotidiennes dans leurs espaces de travail? Cette thèse suggère que les identités des professionnels influent sur leurs perceptions du risque dans leurs organisations et, par conséquent, affectent leurs pratiques quotidiennes. En particulier, trois types de pratiques sont mises de l'avant : 1) socialisation interne, 2) surmenage et 3) autocensure. Je soutiens aussi que les risques quotidiens rencontrés par les professionnels humanitaires dans les contextes de crises varient en fonction de leurs identités. Chacune de ses pratiques est utilisée par les professionnels humanitaires de différents genres, ainsi que de diverses identités sexuelles, raciales et professionnelles. De plus, cet ouvrage souligne la réalité où des valeurs altruistes et des discours inclusifs n'effacent pas les problèmes structurels automatiquement dans un espace humanitaire qui est devenu une industrie professionnelle. Le but de cette étude est d'une part, contester la perception courante que les expériences quotidiennes des professionnels humanitaires sont sans difficulté en contexte de conflits et d'autre part, pour renforcer que les organisations d'aide et leurs professionnels n'ont pas nécessairement une relation harmonieuse dans leurs efforts pour soulager les crises humanitaires contemporaines.

Introduction

The Puzzle

The end of the colonial era saw the emergence of a new paradigm for humanitarianism in the global South.[1] As former imperial states retreated from their occupied territories, newly independent states found themselves in dire need to establish their own institutions to govern their development. Vast institutional vacuums appeared in states of the global South, which were quickly filled by liberal, Western non-government and international organizations that pledged to not only relieve the suffering caused by man-made conflict and natural disasters, but also help communities with moving towards modernity and development.[2] As aid organizations continued to navigate through complex humanitarian crises, namely those that took place in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda, their experiences in the field not only challenged the international perception on the sacrosanct identity of humanitarian organizations in being able to deliver aid wherever needed, but also brought realization to organizations themselves that an altruistic humanitarian ideal alone might not be a sufficient enabler for aid operationalization.

The processes of improvisation, adaptation, and learning-by-doing were not always reliable, and that more structured, coordinated, and standardized understanding of how aid organizations should maneuver in varying contexts to deliver aid was needed.[3] As a result, the international aid apparatus gradually institutionalized, and humanitarianism saw its professionalization over time.[4] The humanitarian operational process has moved to a secularized era where institutionalized organizations contractually recruit, train and deploy professionals to implement aid programs through standardized frameworks that can be tracked, monitored and evaluated.[5] Career positions, such as program coordinators, gender

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[1] For this paper, "global South" is understood as areas of the world hosting states with shared colonial pasts and experiencing considerable underdevelopment as a result of social and political instability. This paper also takes on the perspective of Dependency Theory, seeing the root causes of global South underdevelopment and instability to be the dominance and dependency relations between poorer, weaker states and richer, more powerful states that are mostly situated in the global West.

[2] Barnett, 2005

[3] O'Flaherty and Ulrich, 2010

[4] Walker, Hein, Russ, Bertleff and Caspersz, 2010

[5] Barnett 2011.

consultants, nutrition specialists and country directors, as well as finance officers, human resources and procurement managers, came to characterize constituents of the contemporary global humanitarian landscape.[6]

However, there may rarely be standardized knowledge for humanitarian professionals to navigate within the organizational structures of their employing agencies and function optimally within an environment where security is few and far in-between. In response, particular practices emerge as a result of the own attempts of humanitarian professionals at coping with the difficult and complex dynamics that surround them on a daily basis. It is also likely that not all humanitarian professionals confront insecurities and risks in the same way. Indeed, interveners of conflict at large have shared experiences that are unique due to their professional paths. However, their differing individual identities – namely gender, race and sexuality – can notably differentiate their working experiences in the field, and particularly within the aid agencies that employ them. To what extent does the varying identities of humanitarian professionals influence their everyday practices within the aid workspace?

In this study, I suggest that identities of humanitarian professionals affect ways which they perceive professional and security risks within their employing aid agencies under crisis contexts that, in turn, significantly influence their everyday practices. In particular, I focus on three types of practices to which I typologize as 1) inward socializing, 2) overworking and 3) self-censoring. Each of these practices are taken on by humanitarian professionals of particular identity profiles in response to their unique perceptions of security risks within their workspace.

Who are Humanitarian Professionals?

Humanitarianism by itself has traditionally been understood as a value that professionals follow instead of a concrete skill or expertise that could be practiced. However, there is a growing body of literature that suggests humanitarianism as its own category of professional domain. For example, Walker

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[6] James, 2016; Weiss, 2013

et. al. indicate that humanitarian professionals share a set of core values, skills and knowledge areas that enable them to deliver aid in crisis contexts, indicating the growing professionalization of the sector. For the purpose of the research, a humanitarian professional is defined as individuals who are contractually employed to facilitate a humanitarian aid programme. Their employers can be NGOs, specialized agencies of an international organization such as the UN and, in some cases, state government institutions. In this research, "humanitarian professionals" and "aid workers" are used interchangeably.

The Aid Workspace

The aid workspace covers contexts where international humanitarian agencies deliver short-term, life-saving aid to communities suffering from man-made and natural crises. In particular, the study examines environments where man-made crises – such as armed conflicts and insurgencies – are the primary cause of local insecurity. The study also recognizes the existence of a workspace for humanitarian professionals *within* the aid agencies that where they are employed. The aid workspace that does not only encompass beneficiary communities, but also compounds, offices, cars and other spaces situated within the aid agencies under the broader conflict contexts [7] The internal organizational dimensions of humanitarian aid agencies also play an imperative role in affecting professionals' everyday practices.

Theoretical Framework

Within intersubjectivity, identity emerge as a key determinant of risk perception and driver of action. Katzenstein offers a constructivist perception towards social norms as "a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity."[8] In turn, the study takes on a constructivist lens, seeing identity as a representation of an individual's understanding of who they are, which in turn influences their perception of the contexts they are situated within and their according practices.

Emmanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot outlines five core characteristics of practice in international relations. They are 1) "a process of doing something" that is 2) patterned in a way that exhibits certain

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[7] Smirl, 2015.
[8] Katzenstein, 1996. p5

regularities over time and space. They are also 3) socially recognized in which its competence is "attributed in and through social relations." Lastly, they 4) rest on the "intersubjective background knowledge" of practitioners 5) in both discursive and material worlds.[9]The characteristics of practice, particularly 3), 4) and 5), provide us with insights on the origins and nature of specific practices: they are normative, actionable products of what practitioners think they know based on their experiences of their social interactions and contextual understandings relevant to their identities. In turn, practices "enable agency, namely, they translate structural background intersubjective knowledge into intentional acts and endow them with social meaning."[10]

For humanitarian professionals, their identities affect the security risks they perceive within crisis contexts. They may not always have homogenous perceptions towards the security risks in the field. As a result, different kinds of practices emerge – including self-censoring, inward socializing and overworking – as they work to mitigate with the risks they perceive in relations to their individual identities. For Vincent Pouliot, practices in international relations are not necessarily always derived from "conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection", but instead "the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear 'self-evident' or commonsensical."[11] Therefore, the everyday practices of humanitarian professionals do not always result from rational choice-making of humanitarian professionals based on deliberate assessment of risk factors, as they can also be tacit, resulting from pre-existing assumptions that they hold. It is an important aspect to note for this study, as not all practices outlined in this study are consciously enacted by humanitarian professionals; some of them can also be passive, coping mechanisms towards more structural issues within the aid agencies that they work for, although they consider such practices to be a normal part of their daily professional activities.

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[9] Adler and Pouliot, 2011.
[10] Pouliot, 2008.
[11] *Ibid.*

Risks for humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts vary. There are *physical* risks, such as gender-based violence and targeted attack, pertaining to their presence in the field. There are *operational* risks – stemming from internal mismanagement of funding, lack of specialized expertise and ineffective decision-making. There are also *professional* risks – factors that may jeopardize their ability to remain functional, efficient in the field and, ultimately, remain employed within the humanitarian aid profession. It is crucial to recognize that aid agencies themselves are part of the crisis environment, and that humanitarian professionals may also perceive risks to originate from within the aid agencies that they work for, amongst their colleagues, peers and leaderships that they interact with on a regular basis. In fact, while risks from environments external to aid agencies may be contingent and acute, internal risks from within aid agencies can be perceived by humanitarian professionals as what they have to mitigate with on the daily basis.

To outline the risk perceptions of humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts, the study aims to understand what and who professionals trust and fear. The study will perform a preliminary revision of existing literature to identify areas of concern – for example, the extent professionals trust the expertise of their colleagues (or organizations), and the stakes related to their career security when their programs fail to deliver aid objectives determined by their employing and donor agencies. The indicators of trust and fear, in this case, can be directly what professionals admit through existing testimonials, interviews and their own publications. The study also features an interview component in order to collect first-person accounts of professionals on this subject.[12] Various identity factors play a role in the way which humanitarian professionals perceive risks in crisis contexts. They are all a) *humanitarians* with altruistic agendas to aid communities in crises; they are also b) *career professionals* contracted by their agencies for their expertise to perform certain functions. At the same time, they identify with different c) *genders*,

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[12] Please see the Methodology section for details regarding how interviews are conducted for this research.

d) *sexualities* and e) *racial profiles*.[13] Each of these identities play important roles in how humanitarian professionals formulate their risk perceptions and according practices in the crisis contexts that they share.

Methodology
Literature Review

Most existing humanitarian literature do consider the experiences of humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts as unproblematic.[14] Such literature predominantly concerns the designs of humanitarian programmes or the impact of humanitarianism of at the organizational and international levels. Many of them also examine the influence of the objective conflict contexts on the behaviours of the constituents within the humanitarian aid apparatus, while considering the humanitarian identity alone as the main driver behind the actions of professionals in the field. [15]

There is a significant volume of academic and policy research that have evaluated specific cases of aid operationalization both from country-level perspectives and programme-level perspectives. They often offer detailed analyses of particular incidences of humanitarian crises response, but the focus is often concentrated on how certain aid initiative are designed and implemented instead of the humanitarian professionals who designed and implemented them.[16]

A select number of research, notably the works of Séverine Autesserre, Lisa Smirl, Abby Stoddard and David Mosse,[17] have shed light into the practices, habits and narratives of the constituents within the contemporary international structures of aid and conflict intervention. However, there remains a pronounced gap within existing literature related to the varying personal identities of aid workers, as the

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[13] All humanitarian professionals possess racial, gender and sexual identities, but their diversity remains under-recognized in the aid sector. These identities are particularly prevalent in discussions of marginalization and discrimination in social environments. Other identities, such as ethnicity and disability statuses, are also notable areas to examine for future research.

[14] Smirl, 2011

[15] For example, Barnett 2011, and Weiss 2013, Middleton 1998, Choi and Salehyan 2013, although each offering valuable research in the aid sector, all approach humanitarianism from historical, macro-level perspectives that assume the experiences of aid workers to be uniform, and that relationships amongst them are cohesive.

[16] For example, Doocy et. al. 2006, Brocco 2010, Seybolt 2009, as well as Philips and Markham 2014, examine specific cases of Cash-for-Work post-disaster humanitarian response, institutional development of UNRWA, international response to Rwandan Genocide and the Ebola epidemic from a systematic perspective instead of one that specifically recognize humanitarian personnel identity and diversity.

[17] Autessserre 2014, Smirl 2011, Stoddard 2020 and Mosse 2011

humanitarian aspiration is not the only driver in the decision-making of the constituents of aid. In turn, ways which the sexual, racial and professional identities of aid workers impact their decision-making within their employing agencies remain an under-explored area in existing humanitarian literature that this study seeks to contribute to.

Interviews

Recognizing the limited availability of empirical data on incidences of gender-based violence targeted against female aid workers to the reality where the discussion revolving aid worker protection and security being notably nascent, the study also interviews current and former humanitarian professionals to gather additional first-person accounts of their perceived personal and professional risks in conflict contexts, as well as what they do in response. The list of interviewees includes humanitarian professionals of various levels of past experience, different fields of expertise, as well as distinct identities of gender, sexuality and race, working in different country operations with different ranks within the organizations.

The interviewees are asked to describe their daily activities in the field – elaborating on how they prepare to for field missions, the specific risks that they perceive, as well as what they plan to do to avert them. In addition, the interview questions will also directly explore how they think their individual identities have influenced their perceptions of risk and, when possible, will ask interviewees to directly relate their identities to their practices. Interview responses will then be compared on the basis of the individual identities of the interviewees. The interview component of this research has been approved by the McGill University Ethics Board, File number: 20-08-009.

Although the research aimed to reach as many interviewees as possible, the size of the respondent pool remained limited. In particular, it could significantly benefit from ethnographic investigations into larger numbers of female and gay professionals, as well as local professionals at large. It is also alarming that we currently do not have reliable empirical data on the incidences of gender-based violence against female aid workers, and that few research concerning aid worker security recognize the existence of LG

professionals in the humanitarian sector. In turn, a potential large-scale survey could be facilitated for female and LG humanitarian professionals to anonymously report incidences of identity-based discrimination and violence that they have experienced within their workspace during their assignment. In addition, the research could further investigate the extent to which local and expatriate staff categorizations could translate to differing workloads and standards of professional performance in crisis contexts.

Contribution

This paper seeks to contribute to the existing literature by establishing a causal linkage between the *multiple* identities of individual humanitarian professionals and their everyday practices. There is an invisible, race-based divide between Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) and white humanitarian professionals. In Section One, I will examine how the expertise and professionalism of humanitarian professionals are perceived along racial lines. BIPOC professionals, occupying both expatriate and local positions, can face particularly covert racial prejudices that will affect how other actors within the aid apparatus recognize their competency. Drawing on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial formation theory in the 21st century, I suggest that there is a colorblindness both in the humanitarian discourse and policy structure that undermines the ability for the expertise and experience of BIPOC professionals to be recognized in the humanitarian space.

In Section Two, I examine the unique challenges that humanitarian professionals of female, lesbian and gay (LG) identity profiles experience while working in a humanitarian space that is particularly hetero-normal and patriarchal. Both LG and female aid workers take on similar strategies of identity management – self-censorship – not only for physical protection, but also to avoid complications that emerge for when they interact with local stakeholders and professional peers. Female professionals may take on additional practices to reduce risks of sexual violence from not only exogenous environments but also from their male professional counterparts. For LG professionals, working in countries where homosexuality is illegal (or even punishable by death) forces them back to the closet.

In Section Three, I seek to emphasize that humanitarian professionals are, in the end, as much career professionals as they are humanitarians. They carry a multitude of expectations bestowed upon them by donor agencies to deliver fast and demonstratable live-saving results in an insecure and unstable context that they themselves struggle to cope with. However, their failure is assessed through a singular quantitative indicator – the number of lives lost during their presence that their work does not fully control.[18] Human resource selection is a competitive process within a field that emphasizes individual expertise and experience. Combined with precarious job security – a result of short-term contracts that are predominantly a few months to a year with uncertain opportunities of renewal – humanitarian professionals face immense pressure not only to meet the performance expectations from their employing agencies, but also to keep their jobs.

Ultimately, I hope to emphasize that altruistic values and inclusive narratives do not automatically erase structural problems for a humanitarian space that has evolved into a professional industry. While the humanitarian identity may be a main factor impacting the practices of professionals in the field, the study also sees them as individuals of different gender, sexual and racial identity profiles who are employees of aid organizations, aiming to perform well in their functions not only because they hope to contribute to a humanitarian cause, but also to demonstrate their expertise and remain in their career paths. Understanding the identity – perception – practice linkage can potentially enable aid organizations to better support the needs of the professionals that they dispatch to and employ in the field.

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[18] Gonçalves, 2008.

Section One
The Racialization of Expertise and Professional Non-Equivalence
in the Humanitarian Politics of Life

Positions within international aid organizations are occupied by two distinct types of professionals. There are the *expatriate staff* – deployed by humanitarian and development aid organizations to unstable states for short periods time, often from three months to a year, they are mostly seen in leadership, consultancy, advisory and decision-making positions. They are well-compensated – much more than their local counterparts – and speak in technical jargons that outsiders to the humanitarian aid apparatus can rarely understand, mostly accumulated through higher education and years of experience traversing different parts of the global South during their prior deployments. Most of them have their own cliques – often inwardly socializing within their own expat bubble, traveling in "big sport utility vehicles (SUVs) marked with the logos of their organizations"[19], spending their after-work hours in restaurants, cafés, and entertainment venues that mostly foreigners can afford to frequent.

The expat bubble, although invisible, is often impenetrable for *local staff*, who are nationals of the host state where aid organizations operate. They possess specific knowledge regarding the socio-political dimensions of local communities, speak local languages, and have mostly never worked for their organizations' other progammes abroad. Local staff members are found more commonly facilitating ground-level, physical aid delivery, monitoring and information retention positions, while it is uncommon to see local nationals occupying higher, country-level leadership posts, and even more rarely as chiefs of party or country directors. They are paid according to local market salary standards, meaning that often times, their compensations are significantly lower than those of their expat counterparts.

Even when no job posting description explicitly indicate that certain positions are reserved for professionals of particular racial identities, Western/, white personnel occupy large numbers of higher-level advisory, leadership and consultancy expatriate positions, while the majority of Black, Indigenous

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[19] Autesserre, 2014. p. 162

and People of Color (BIPOC) professionals are seen serving in positions in "the field", within the localities where they are born and raised, following the directory and supervision of their expatriate counterparts.[20] This is not a coincidence; professional categorizations of "expatriate" and "local" are not race neutral.[21] Instead, they are *colorblind* – organizations within the contemporary humanitarian aid apparatus have come to appeal to what Michael Omi and Howard Winant would characterize as a new racial discourse – one that does not require explicit references to race in order to be perpetuated, as racial subordination has been reconfigured to rely on implicit references to race woven within the everyday social fabrics of the humanitarian profession.[22] In this section, I suggest that embedded under the contemporary professional structure of the liberal humanitarian space is a covert power hierarchy fueled by perceptions of expertise and competency along racial lines – particularly around one's whiteness.

Racial Formation and Colorblindness

Much of the existing literature examining contemporary aid, as well as the everyday lives of humanitarian professionals, reflect on the hierarchical divide along the lines of class exclusivity and foreign status prestige.[23] However, its racial dimensions are lesser examined. For the purpose of the research, I reference Omi and Winant's view of racial formations in the 21st century.[24] Considering race as a social construct, it is a concept of consciousness and perception that are linked to other identities of class, nationality, gender, as well as professionality, expertise and competency. In addition, I also view the contemporary humanitarian space similar to a structure of "empire", in light of Michael Barnett's duly suggestion that although humanitarian governance legitimizes its actions through its purpose dedicated to emancipation and empowerment, it nonetheless "does not depend on a process of deliberation, dialogue,

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[20] Shevchenko and Fox, 2008; *see also* Benton, 2016
[21] Kothari, 2016
[22] Omi and Winant, 2012
[23] On the expat-local divide, as well as how such divide exhibits a class and nationality-based status elitism in humanitarian and development aid organizations, see Hoffman and Weiss 2008, Kennedy 2019, Voorst 2019, Harrison 2013.
[24] Omi and Winant, 2012

or even consent."[25] As historical European imperial states colonized the global South, they nonetheless legitimized their dominance through the discourses of bringing civilization to the "savage" population and free them from backwardness and destitution. In many ways, humanitarian governance today "has a chummy relationship with the very empires that it supposedly resists."[26]

In particular, this section will examine two areas within the professional humanitarian space where Omi and Winant's racial formation framework, particularly the concept of colorblindness, can be applied. I seek to 1) examine how the narrative of international "help" may perpetuate certain perceptions of (in)competency towards aid workers of different racial profiles. In addition, I will 2) review the impact of professionalization on status and expertise recognition within the humanitarian aid apparatus. Taking a historical perspective, I structure my examinations around local and BIPOC expatriate humanitarian professionals. I aim to demonstrate how expertise and competency is racialized within the humanitarian profession by reviewing relevant existing literature – particularly those that include ethnographic accounts on the everyday aspects of humanitarian work and life. In addition, I seek to present anecdotal accounts of current humanitarian professionals interviewed for the purpose of this research, all the while integrating my own working experiences in the field.[27]

The Narrative of Humanitarian Help and Devaluation of Local Expertise

In 2019, I was deployed by an international non-government organization (NGO) to its Ethiopia country office. During my posting, I worked extensively under the guidance of a local colleague, whom I will call Younus, on a programme that was soon to be concluded. After years of operation, the likelihood

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[25] Barnett, 2011

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] The next part of the section begins with one anecdotal account of Younus (acronym), my former colleague, as it embodies how racial perceptions are internalized amongst BIPOC humanitarian professionals. The conversation was very casual, and Younus' anecdote was particularly significant because of this informality, meaning that it is unlikely that he deliberately prepared for and crafted his responses to my questions. In addition, discussions regarding racial inequalities *within* the international humanitarian community is significantly sensitive – if not formally avoided – so intimate, personal, off-the-record conversations can yield more genuine responses than formal interviews.

for the renewal of the programme funding was low, which meant that Younus' contract would soon terminate, and that he would have to look for other employment opportunities.

To me, Younus possessed the qualifications for an expatriate programme director position in Kenya at the same NGO that we were working for. Holding a graduate degree on nutrition and agriculture from Addis Ababa University, he had been in the aid sector for more than a decade. He had worked for multiple well-known international organizations, namely CARE, Save the Children, World Food Programme, as well as UNHCR, managing and implementing a number of large-profile humanitarian and development aid programmes. With a professional English proficiency and extensive knowledge of Kiswahili and Amharic, he was well-qualified for the expatriate position. Naturally, I suggested that he might be interested in exploring similar career options, to which he responded:[28]

> Oh no… they [the organization] would not hire someone like me. Maybe some guy from Europe, or America, with a good education and have seen the world. Someone like the deputy country director, he is an expert. He is more qualified.

The deputy country director – whom I will refer by the acronym Andrew – was a white, British, heterosexual man in his mid-thirties who oversaw all programmes operated by our NGO in Ethiopia, and hence a supervisor of Younus. Although still a seasoned aid professional, it was Andrew's first time in Ethiopia. He was years younger than Younus – who was approaching his late fifties – and acquired the deputy country director position five years after he first entered the humanitarian aid sector. In one way or another, Younus felt that his decade-long experience was not sufficient to qualify himself as an expert in comparison to Andrew, a white colleague "from Europe" with notably less field experience in Africa. His Ethiopian graduate degree seemed also to be not enough – as he indirectly implied that it was not a "good education" compared to one acquired in the West. Although he did not explicitly mention his race, Younus' response exhibited a certain internalization of racial perceptions that devalued his work and experience as a black, African man.

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[28] Younus (acronym), in personal communication with the author, August 2019.

Historically, the influx of international humanitarian organizations into the global South filled the institutional vacuums in newly independent and post-conflict developing states with Western professionals possessing expertise in various aspects of developmental governance. For years – and continuously in the present day – "African, Asian and Latin American bureaucrats, practitioners and even some activists come to be taught about their countries' problems by people from the North." [29] Accompanied with this dynamics was a perpetuation of the discourse that emphasized international humanitarian help – a dominating idiom implying that the international (and mainly the West) knows better in how to materialize good governance and sustainable development than the communities that have found themselves in crises that they did not necessarily cause.

The 2010 Haiti earthquake in Port-au-Prince is a sobering example. The international – and in particular American – humanitarian response was significant, although it came at the cost of constant and extensive international broadcasting of the repleted state that the earthquake has left for the local communities, particularly in the global West. Images of destroyed homes, hopeless locals and seas of rubbles, although efficient in garnering public attention and sympathy, also inherently signaled black Haitians as subjects pertinently dependent on Western charity. [30] Haiti, already framed as a "lawless nation that could not function without assistance" before the earthquake, would become even more dysfunctional in face of a catastrophic natural disaster.[31] As international humanitarian agencies – often reliant on Western governmental funding – legitimize their presence and need to intervene in communities of crises through mediated representations of fateful destitutions in the global South, the development of a narrative that undermines the capability of locals to survive and recover from difficulties is almost inevitable.[32] However, this particular kind of narrative does not only influence how beneficiaries of aid and government administrations are perceived internationally. Local staff members working within the exact international

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[29] White, 2002. p. 410
[30] Balaji, 2011
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] See Mohanty, 1991

humanitarian agencies that aspire to relieve the crises are also significantly affected, as they can be perceived as less competent, insufficiently professional and more prone to corruption by their expatriate counterparts in their employing organizations.[33]

Mark Schuller extensively examines this dimension under the Haitian context through the accounts of thirty Haitian NGO employees, stressing that the reason behind expatriate professionals' condescension towards the competency of local staff members is ultimately a result of cultural imperialism within the humanitarian structure. Interviewees of Schuller's research indicate that Western (and often white) expatriate professionals still reinforce ideas, interventions and structures that are fundamentally foreign to Haitian localities.[34] Many aid agencies responding to the Haitian earthquake promoted "particularly green foreigners above Haitians who, themselves, had intimate knowledge of the needs of their communities."[35]

Bandyopadhyay and Patil further emphasizes how the humanitarian narrative, in which "whiteness is associated with progress, power, and higher status," and "those in the global South … have lower capacity for development", overly celebrates the altruistic emotional morale of international, expatriate humanitarian workers at the cost of devaluing the effectiveness of the expertise possessed by their local counterparts.[36] Peter Redfield accounts the observation of an Italian nurse working for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), reflecting upon her own status as a white, Western aid worker: "There's a status of color in much of Africa, your authority and knowledge are rarely questioned when you are white."[37]

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[33] Benton, 2016

[34] Schuller, 2016 and Roth, 2015, Autesserre, 2014, as well as Kothari, 2016 all present similar dimensions of non-equivalence of compensation between local and expat professionals in crisis intervention and humanitarian aid. For example, Schuller mentions the housing allowance for an expatriate NGO country director can be as high as 8,000 US dollars a month.

[35] *Ibid.* p. 173

[36] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017. p. 652

[37] Redfield, 2012. p. 372

Humanitarian aid and development organizations are aware of the importance of their local staff members. After all, they know the roads, the community customs, the language (particularly in communities where neither French nor English are spoken) and the broader domestic political landscapes that organizations need to navigate through. Local knowledge, in turn, have become extensively outlined by the operational narratives of most programmes in crises environments.[38] However, this narrative may perpetuate the existing local-expat hierarchical divide, as it further outlines the reason for local staff to continue serving in support-type positions, focusing on the coordination and implementation of program decisions made by expatriate leadership. In many ways, local professionals are valued for the field-level knowledge that they possess, but it does not necessarily translate to them being trusted with making administrative decisions based on their local knowledge to anchor the future trajectories of their organization on the ground.

Humanitarian aid agencies cannot possibly operate without local knowledge and expertise – although racialized perceptions of competency and expertise continue to undermine the presence of local humanitarian professionals. As agencies justify their presence in communities of crises through "repeated assertions of radicalized difference"[39] between the international and the local, a covert discourse emerges to reinforce the idea that local expertise would only thrive with the leadership of expatriate thematic knowledge. Professional categorizations "expatriate" and "local" are colorblind because they possess both separate and unequal statuses even when nowhere on paper – in contacts, regulations, policies – explicitly indicates as such. Yet at the same time, such separation and non-equivalence can be identified in structural and societal elements. The contemporary humanitarian discourse of international help overly emphasizes thematic, expatriate knowledge to specific, local expertise. Local professionals receive comparatively less compensation, benefits, protection and are almost perpetually bound to positions in the lower sections of the organizational hierarchy, often supporting the decisions made by expatriate professionals.

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[38] Harrison, 2013
[39] Heron, 2007. p.150

The power and status hierarchy between expat and local humanitarian professionals is also addressed by Iman, a national program officer for UNOCHA Syria. Expressing her concern regarding the decision-making process within her organization in light of the ongoing novel-coronavirus pandemic, she spoke in a hushed tone – even from her own home through a recent phone call with me:[40]

> *All international organizations would develop a country plan to mitigate with new pandemic challenges. However, for us – at least in OCHA's Damascus capital office – the country plan was developed in a closed-door meeting consisted of only expats. I was a bit shocked; I mean, at least they* [the expat management] *could have called some of the senior local staff to participate. After all, we have been around much longer than they have. But no, we were not even asked for comments or suggestions. What do they know about our country – where we are born and raised, in a conflict that we live through – that we do not know? Especially when most of them have only arrived several months ago?*

It is not uncommon that expatriate professionals arrive in a new country programme without familiarity towards local geographical, social and political dimensions. It is likely that most expats would have arrived in "the field" with no local knowledge at least once throughout their professional career. Some expatriate humanitarian professionals disclose this reality through their memoirs recounting their field experience. In *Emergency Sex*, Heidi Postlewait contended that she arrived in her posting as a secretary for the UN Mission in Cambodia while she "didn't even know where Cambodia was."[41] Leanne Olson, through *A Cruel Paradise,* she admitted that she "didn't have a clue about Bosnia" when arriving for her MSF position.[42] In turn, the extent which the expatriate professionals understand local situations depend on how much they reference the knowledge of local staff in the short term and how well they assimilate to local life to perform their own observations in the long term.

This can be further illustrated by Ruth, a Ugandan doctor working for MSF, who disclosed to Peter Redfield that the organization's expatriate administrative staff, and "particularly the French", seemed to be notably incompetent, almost as if they were hired from "just off the streets in Paris". Expatriate MSF staff in Uganda, during Ruth's assignment, were also highly suspicious of local staff, often accusing them

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[40] Iman (acronym), from interview with the author, November 2020.
[41] Cain, Postlewait and Thomson, 2006. p. 29
[42] Olson, 1999. p. 9

"when money had gone missing from a safe", while arrogantly ignoring local advice on the designs and organizations of important building layouts.[43] Silke Roth also noted that many local professionals would have to "train new international team members on a regular basis"[44] while they themselves rarely have access to opportunities of being promoted to leadership positions that expatriate staff often occupy.[45] In fact, Ong and Combinido indicate that even though local professionals are equipped with the mental aptitude in navigating through new and unknown circumstances and living conditions, they still have "limited professional mobility within the global organization."[46]

The most diligent few local professionals do manage to breakthrough into international postings or opportunities to pursue higher education in the developed world by excelling significantly at what they do. Their extraordinary achievements would be branded as "success stories" that justified the compromising work-compensation arrangements local staff often receive. The stories of the exceptional and lucky few serve as reminders for the majority of local staff who do not have international experience or higher education from recognized institutions in the global West to be content with their support and implementation roles, ultimately "reinforcing the idea that a job in a global agency is a 'blessing'."[47] Yet at the same time, most expatriate professionals from countries in the global West,[48] like Andrew, Leanne Olson and Heidi Postlewait, though undoubtedly experts with thematic competency, still manage to retain significant global mobility in the humanitarian sector without necessarily having specific local expertise.[49]

Without what Autesserre terms as the "knowledge hierarchy" that places thematic competency over local expertise, the idea of deploying expatriate professionals to a country that they have never lived in or even heard of would seem absurd. In reality, one NGO recruiter explained to Autesserre that

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[43] Redfield, 2012. p. 373
[44] Roth, 2015
[45] Shevchenko and Fox, 2008
[46] Ong and Combinido, 2018. p. 88
[47] *Ibid. p. 98.*
[48] For example, as Andrew is from the United Kingdom, Derrick and Olson from Canada, and Postlewait from the United States.
[49] See Olson

familiarity with local dynamics is "neither a prerequisite nor a necessity" for expatriate professionals in crisis intervention and relief at large.[50] In turn, it is fair to understand that their competency and knowledge are not the sole factors that determine the ability for local professionals to participate in organization-wide decision-making processes. Their "localness", associated with their black, brown, and non-white skins – can be the ultimate determinants to local experts' professionality being recognized and respected, as their racial profiles may reflect certain origins of under-development.

The Plight for Legitimacy and Recognition of BIPOC Expatriate Professionals

There is no race-aggregated information on the identity profiles of aid workers currently employed within the international humanitarian sector. Similarly, the 2017 report of the UN Secretary General on the staff demographics of the UN Secretariat also does not feature a race component in its data.[51] However, we do know that at the beginning post-Cold War liberal humanitarianism, Western, white personnel occupied almost all leadership, higher consultancy and advisory positions for humanitarian aid operations in crises contexts.[52] General Roméo Dallaire, the French-Canadian force commander for UNAMIR[53], is a notable representation of the imagery of an international humanitarian leadership. Another example would be the "cowboy doctor" imagery forged by earlier MSF operations – a rugged, cigarette-smoking French man, troubled by the conflict he has witnessed as he roamed through communities in crises, providing independent, emergency treatment for the sick in underdeveloped countries.[54] Predominantly Western, white (mostly male and heterosexual) humanitarians set a precent of what expatriate expert leaderships looked like for members of host communities, including local humanitarian workers. In

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[50] Autesserre, 2014. p. 72
[51] UN A/74/82, 2019
[52] See Barnett, 2011, Redfield 2012 and Kothari 2016. In *Empire of Humanity*, Barnett categorizes the end of the Cold War as a historical milestone for the institutionalization and non-politicization of global humanitarian governance. The professionalization of aid can be considered as a product of the post-Cold War institutionalization of humanitarian aid.
[53] United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
[54] Bortolotti, 2010.

addition, the existing racial perceptions of host communities internalized through their colonial pasts further consolidates the linkage between whiteness and humanitarian expertise leadership.[55]

In turn, whenever BIPOC and non-Western expatriate humanitarian professionals arrive, they challenge the *status quo* racial profiles assumed for the positions they serve in. Although not completely uniform, white professionals are nonetheless "often treated as if they have a higher status irrespective of their position."[56] Uma Kothari provides a concerning account of her personal experience working as a BIPOC development consultant, where her local counterparts had been "visibly disappointed when they realized that their expatriate consultant was not white."[57] She further notes that local staff often equate the appointment of a white consultant to represent a higher status to their work, and that receiving a consultant of other racial profiles would mean that their organization is devalued.[58] Amare Tegbaru also reflects on this issue based on his ten-year experience working as a BIPOC expatriate rural development advisor for FAO in Thailand, during which he was treated very passively by his local counterparts in comparison to his white expatriate colleagues.[59] As a Swedish national, Tegbaru did not deny his Ethiopian origins and was not hesitant to disclose that his partner is also not white. In turn, he did not possess the visual characteristics – nor connections to – the stereotypical profile of an expatriate advisor to his local counterparts. He was less attended to in his office, and at one point his workstation was moved from an area reserved for expatriate staff to a noisy corridor occupied by mostly local-level support staff, namely drivers, storekeepers and cleaners. Although he eventually gained the trust of his local counterparts through his work, he was always described based on his Western, Swedish background, while his African origin was noticeably downplayed. "They were not happy with me highlighting my African background while in their company in public; they preferred that I use my Swedishness and field of expertise as the

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[55] See David, Schroeder, and Fernandez, 2019. David et. al. suggest that racism, especially those developed through historical, colonial discourses, may perpetuate racial prejudice to the point where subjects of oppression internalize racist perceptions.
[56] Crewe and Fernando, 2006
[57] Kothari, 2016. p. 15-16
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] Tegbaru, 2020

most appropriate self-description."[60] In his case, Tegbaru's professional competency was almost a compensation for his blackness that enabled him to be perceived as a professional of equal capacity to other white expatriates.

Kothari and Tegbaru's personal accounts exhibit a concerning reality whereas white expatriate professionals receive initial leadership status recognition, BIPOC expatriate professionals can find themselves pressured to prove their Western connections and "whiteness" through demonstrating their expertise in order to garner the same recognition from local peers and political elites. A British, Asian development worker, in the words of Crewe and Fernando, would be described by her West African peer to "have a white brain"[61], while a Ugandan team leader would have to dress in "smart" Western attires and speak commandingly in English instead of the local language to assert the authority she needs to perform her professional functions.[62] There is hence what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o terms as the "colonization of the mind"[63] – whereas in the professional humanitarian space, competency, expertise, as well as higher moral values are associated to whiteness by people with past experiences of colonial oppression. In turn, when a BIPOC expatriate humanitarian professional demonstrates their expertise, they are not just competent – they are *competent like white expatriates*.

At the same time, they can also be subjects of racial prejudices from their white peers. Adia Benton outlines this dimension by presenting her own observations in the field, when her NGO received its first African country director after a series of mainly young, white male predecessors. Upon his initial arrival, the competency of the African country director was extensively questioned by white expatriate staff members in the organization, who held longstanding assumptions that personnel "from poor countries did not have the aptitude to lead complex institutions, manage diverse groups of people, and advance

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[60] *Ibid.,* p. 208
[61] Crewe and Fernando, 2006
[62] Redfield, 2012
[63] wa Thiong'o. 1986.

organizational missions." [64] For Clarke, Perreard and Connors, a core determinant of the professionalization that have taken place in the humanitarian space is the emergence of the discourse recognizing that communities in crises deserved the best care possible.[65] This would explain the existence of standards or requirements for certifications and degree diplomas for humanitarian work qualifications – which are nonetheless means that agencies have taken on to mitigate with operational risks and retain at least some forms of identifiability and legitimacy. This in turn creates an elitism that, Eric James suggests, "can negatively affect workers who have not had the same pay or education, or gained a similar level of disaster experiences and group memberships… people who do not possess the 'appropriate' status symbols may be seen as 'not professional'."[66]

In addition, the growing number of educational programs focused on humanitarian aid and peacekeeping in growing numbers of universities in the global West is a notable characterization of such professionalization.[67] However, who is able to access such type of institutionalized training? There are very realistic, resource-oriented concerns in training and certifications: those who can pay for entry fees and practice courses put them at a considerable advantage to those who cannot. Similarly, degree programs in humanitarianism or peacekeeping, as well as internships that are often unpaid, come at a cost that many cannot afford.

Assumed lack of professional experience and educational background are, therefore, not necessarily the fundamental reasons behind the covert disapproval subjected to BIPOC expatriate professionals by their white counterparts, especially for those coming from or visibly resemble the people of the global South. This becomes particularly visible when the expatriate professional has the same racial profile as the local population. Roth explained how a European professional of Asian descent was ignored when attending an expat party in an Asian country until she was "introduced as being from Europe and

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[64] Benton, 2016
[65] Clarke, Perreard and Connors, 2019
[66] James, 2016
[67] Walker, Hein, Russ, Bertleff and Caspersz, 2010

working for a UN agency", as she was initially assumed to be a local.[68] Although white professionals are automatically included in the expat bubble, BIPOC expatriates need to present connections to the West or other statuses known to be unattainable by locals first.[69] To be part of the expat bubble, they need to first "code-switch" their narratives, appearance and expressions to what are normatively-considered appropriate behaviours for expatriate professionals.[70] Essentially, the ticket to the expat bubble is not necessarily demonstrated expertise, but a status difference from locals. They may need to ride in SUV cars with special status license plates, have a local driver, and subscribe to a certain lifestyle afforded to them by their expatriate salary to symbolically compensate for their color.[71] Ultimately, in order to join the club and be recognized by their expatriate peers, BIPOC expatriate professionals often need to signal that while they look like locals or peoples from other parts of the global South, the resemblance stops there.

In most scenarios, BIPOC expatriate humanitarian professionals find themselves delicately positioned between 1) having to demonstrate their professional competency, and 2) needing to signal their expatriate status in order to garner the recognition they need to function in their leadership positions. The former often requires them to work closely and learn from local staff serving in support and implementation roles, while the latter would likely require them to distinguish themselves from local staff. This "double-bind" is a challenge often unique to BIPOC expatriate humanitarian professionals, requiring them to find a delicate balance between signaling the expatriate status and duly fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

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[68] Roth, 2015. p. 142
[69] Heron, 2007
[70] See Carton and Rosette, 2012. In their work, Andrew M. Carton and Ashleigh Shelby Rosette, Black employees in the United States code-switch to appear more professional, avoid negative racial stereotypes and ultimately appear fitting for their positions.
[71] Tegbaru, 2020

Concluding Reflections

The contemporary humanitarian apparatus has always subscribed to the narratives of diversity, inclusion and equality that rendered overtly racist remarks in the workplace inappropriate. The problem, however, is that it often obfuscated *all* discussions regarding race, even those that sought to reasonably address legitimate non-equivalences between expatriate and local professionals within organizations founded upon racial prejudices at the structural level. This dynamic resembles an ideological frame that Omi and Winant emphasizes as *colorblindness*, within which "any hints of race consciousness are tainted by racism; hence most anti-racist gesture, policy or practice is to simply ignore race."[72]

The expat-local divide exemplifies a deeper racial prejudice within the internal structures of international aid agencies that is not purely contingent on a professional's foreign or local status. The practice of inward socializing amongst white, Western professionals within the exclusivity of the expat bubble highlights how status and recognition for expertise is very much centered around one's whiteness and the mistrust towards the aptitude of BIPOC professionals. The examination of racial dimensions of expertise and competency in humanitarian governance can potentially yield broader contributions. For instance, post-development theory can be particularly applicable for the area of research presented in this thesis. In fact, I isolated race specifically for the purpose of this discussion, believing that it is notably under-examined in the context of contemporary global humanitarian governance, where the "crude modernization view of the global South nevertheless lurks within the 'discursive bricolage' of development."[73] Examining humanitarian aid as a career industry can also allow us to apply existing theories on organizational structures, professionality, human resource management and workplace dynamics to better understand how existing practices, narratives and habits of individual humanitarian professionals are not only based on what they know – but also what they perceive and assume.

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[72] Omi and Winant, 2012
[73] White, 2002

BIPOC humanitarian professionals, both local and expatriate, see and feel the racialization of expertise and professionality through daily encounters – such as when they newly arrive in their country office, during lunchbreaks, when meeting with local political counterparts for the first time, and through daily conversations with other constituents of aid. Although expertise and competency are not directly visible, it is often associated with visible characteristics – and in many cases, one's whiteness can be a very covert yet common prerequisite for professional recognition in the contemporary humanitarian space.[74] Michael Barnett duly suggests that "humanitarianism is a creature of the very world it aspires to civilize."[75] In an avid attempt to move forward towards a world that we aspire for, we have perhaps left the reality behind, unwilling to acknowledge that the impact of colonial, racial prejudice persists in the posts-colonial world. Within the contemporary humanitarian space lives a certain colorblindness, ignoring that racism is still very much alive and, more dangerously, covertly woven within our social fabrics, implicitly disadvantaging BIPOC professionals hoping to contribute to an altruistic humanitarian cause as much as their Western, white counterparts.

Section Two
The Invisible and the Underreported:
Lesbian, Gay and Female Professionals in the Humanitarian Workplace

In the previous section, I have examined the covert racialization of expertise and competency in the humanitarian profession. This section seeks to explore another hidden, invisible dimension within the organizational structures of humanitarian aid agencies that are contingent upon the gender and sexuality of humanitarian professionals working in crisis contexts.

An overwhelming number of humanitarian aid programmes are operationalized in communities where homosexuality is criminalized, punishable by jailtime and even death, such as Ethiopia, Syria and Sudan.[76]Lesbian and gay (LG) professionals working in the humanitarian and development sectors around

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[74] See also Benton, 2016. In her work, Aida Benton duly suggests that "ideas about black inferiority precede professional encounters" in the humanitarian space. (p. 271)
[75] Barnett, 2011
[76] Kumar, 2017

the world are faced with challenges and significant security risks much harsher than their heterosexual and cis-gendered peers. At the same time, women humanitarian and development aid professionals are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, with all reported incidents to date specifically targeting women professionals.[77] It is reasonable to assume that security risks for LG and women professionals originate from outside of the organizations they work for – after all, it is often the local customs, social perspectives and crisis conditions that determine whether homosexuality is taboo subject and whether women's rights are equally protected as their male counterparts.

However, we often forget that humanitarian aid agencies, although contingent with its international status, are nonetheless parts of the local context within which they operate. Humanitarian aid agencies do not work in a vacuum – as they interact with local constituents of crises, including aid beneficiaries, ethnic/religious/community leaders, political elites and employ local professionals, the line between the internal organization and the external community context becomes blurred. In addition, not all expatriate professionals, coming from various international backgrounds, hold inclusive attitudes towards LG individuals, while women professionals' perceptions of gender-based security risks can become particularly acute when the workplace demographic is primarily male.[78]

In this section, I seek to argue that LG and women professionals perceive security risks to be both internal, within the organization they work for and external, within the broader locality where their organization operate. In many cases, they may even consider internal risks more immediate than external ones. When they perceive that their employing organizations are unable or unwilling to protect them from risks of discrimination, aggression and violence, they would take on a particular kind of practice, which I term self-censoring, to ensure that they can best minimize specific security risks based on their identities.

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[77] GISF, 2018
[78] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2016

Organizations as Social Spaces

Organizations are spaces of socialization in the sense that their operationalization is dependent on the mutual interactions and communications amongst its members based on shared discourses and values. International organizations, in particular, are social spaces with "relatively dense and durable configurations of social practices, systems of symbols and artifacts"[79]The particular discourses of an organization can be transmitted not necessarily only through active talking, statement-making and reporting, as they can also be signaled through silences, acquiescence and non-reporting. In many ways, one may also understand organizations as *unspoken forces*, dictating their own values, principles, and more relevant to the discussion of this section, the identities of its members – including gender and sexuality.[80]

In turn, a core characteristic of an organization would be *membership*. Organizations are spaces of socialization where a recognized membership are contingent for an individual's credible presence and engagement with existing members.[81] According to Masterson and Stamper, an individual's perception of their membership within an organization is based on whether they think they belong to, they matter for and if their needs can be fulfilled the particular organization, which would involve recognition from other members.[82] In addition, an individual's perceptions of need fulfillment, mattering and belonging are contingent upon their understanding of their organizations' willingness to protect their rights – while recognition from other members can significantly depend on daily relationship-building. Erving Goffman also suggests that individuals with stigmatized identities are viewed as inferior and hence discredited by those considered to be "normal" and in the majority of the societal structure. In turn, when individuals view that their identities are misaligned with what are normatively considered to be "appropriate" by the

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[79] Pries, 2001, p. 4
[80] Hearn, 2001
[81] Stamper, Masterson and Knapp, 2009
[82] Masterson and Stamper, 2003

majority group, they may conceal or undermine that specific aspect of their identity in order to avoid stigma and even attempt to pass as members of the majority.[83]

Aid agencies, with the increasing prevalence of cosmopolitan humanitarian codes and standards of operation, have also come to "embody the core characteristics of the organizational life."[84] In fact, the operationalization of any organization in highly insecure crisis contexts is dependent on the socialization, interaction and communication amongst its members, which would be the professionals that it employs in its particular locality. It is fair to understand that the security of a humanitarian professional working in crisis contexts can be significantly dependent on the layered dimensions of where they are situated, what identities do they possess, and who they work with.[85] To work in crisis relief in general, one would need to well-interact with their colleagues in the workplace *and* after work. This may be particularly challenging for women professionals working in an environment where its majority demographic is male, and for LG professionals, in any assignment for humanitarian operations situated within communities where homosexuality is a taboo topic culturally and criminalized legally – which are many.

For the purpose of this research, I take on the understanding of when LG and women humanitarian aid professionals perceive that their identities do not possess the *status quo* characteristics for what are normatively considered to be acceptable or appropriate within their employing organizations in crisis contexts, they attempt to manage the disclosure of both their own identities (specifically for LG professionals) and their livelihood and professional needs that are unique due to their identities (for both LG and women professionals). Specifically, when LG and female humanitarian professionals perceive their specific working environment and the broader humanitarian space as hetero-normal and male-centric, they take on practices of self-censoring to conceal or manage their sexual and gender identities for risk aversion.

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[83] Goffman, 1963
[84] Kennedy, 2019
[85] Renegers, Heyse, Otten and Wittek, 2019

There is almost a lacuna of empirical evidence portraying the everyday plights of LG and female humanitarian professionals working in crisis contexts. Sexual violence against women professionals remains significantly underreported,[86] while assessments of security risks specific to LG professionals are few in existing literature examining the field of humanitarian aid operationalization.[87] Consequently, this research, while still reviewing available literature with relevant discussions, also relies on the analysis of anecdotal evidence collected through interviews with professionals working in humanitarian aid and crisis intervention.

The Underreported Female Humanitarian Professionals[88]

As of 2019, the number of sexual violence incidences against women aid workers recorded by the *Aid Worker Security Report* total to twenty-nine, which is "assumed to be artificially low due to underreporting."[89] The reality where empirical data specifically focused on the insecurities of female professionals across the broader crisis relief and intervention sector represents two concerning issues. First, many female professionals are not speaking up to their employing agencies about their experiences with sexual violence. Second, security policies of humanitarian aid agencies are responsive, not preventative, as any investigation of assault would require initial reporting from victims first.

In addition, there is a misconception that risk of gender-based violence for women professionals predominately originate from external communities outside the scope of the organizations they work for. However, internal risks from within aid agencies have not been given sufficient attention.[90] When women join workforces to take on family responsibilities of revenue generation in opposition to cultural and institution norms that undermines their professional working ability, they are highly likely to experience

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[86] *Ibid.*

[87] GISF, 2018

[88] It is important to remember that male professionals can also be victims of sexual harassment and assault, and it is an important issue deserving of further examination. For example, Ravi Karkara, a senior advisor for UN Women, was dismissed after a 23-page complaint was filed featuring testimonials of male UN employees who had been sexually harassed by Karkara in 2018. See Summers, 2018.

[89] Stoddard, Harvey, Czwarno, and Breckenridge, 2019.

[90] Mazurana and Donnely, 2016.

gender-based aggression from their male counterparts. This predicament becomes particularly acute for local women professionals, as they are more bound by the socio-cultural prejudices against women in local communities than expatriate women professionals. Particularly when the male perpetrator is within a managerial position, and that most similar leadership positions are occupied by men, the women professionals may likely consider leaving instead of reporting. [91]

Mavzuna, a former officer at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Syria, detailed how her male, local director of human resources would not release salary or provide promotional opportunities to local women professionals without sexual relations:[92]

> *It was quite well known amongst the women who worked in the office at the time that he* (the human resource director) *is quite touchy, and that if you want to be paid fully and promoted, you have to sleep with him. I rejected his advances every time he made a "move" – once he even invited me to his hotel room after a conference. So for the three years I was there, I was not promoted once. He also started spreading rumors that I am a lesbian.*

In fact, Mavzuna's predicaments can potentially be shared by most women professionals working in conflict intervention and relief. Ellie, a former officer for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), detailed how she was not advised to stay overnight in one of the military peacekeeping mission compounds upon her arrival during a short field assignment:[93]

> *They told me they couldn't guarantee, if I spent the night at the compound, that "the guys" would not rape me. It was quite several years before the sexual assault issues from UN peacekeepers made headlines internationally, so you can tell that this problem has been around for a long time. My colleagues and I eventually camped right outside the compound, as we had to leave the next day. But it was still quite ironic, and counterintuitive security-wise.*

In addition, the plights of female humanitarian professionals in aid agencies are not limited to sexual exploitation alone. Rebecca Tiessen's account on the gendered dimension of staff relations within

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[91] Korff, Balbo, Mills, Heyse, and Wittek, 2015.
[92] Mavzuna (Acronym), from interview with author, October 2020.
[93] Ellie (acronym), from interview with author, October 2020.

NGOs operating in Malawi indicates that women professionals are affected by a "Malawian culture" that dictated a status of subordination of women below men in local societies. This socially perceived gender role can slip into organizations that are supposedly international. For example, Tiessen finds that female staff members often have to repeatedly ask for their travel allowances from male funds managers, which resembles common household practices where "women have to ask their husbands for money three or four times before he will give her any."[94] As how socio-cultural expectations for men and women can significantly influence how they can be treated by their colleagues, aid organizations do not operate under gender-neutral and rational frameworks – instead, they are managed by individuals who subscribe to varying gendered perspectives on the social status men and women.[95] Insofar, aid agencies operating in communities where women are socially subordinated can still very much be male dominated in their staff demographics and values.

It is necessary to understand that risks for gender-based discrimination and exploitation for female humanitarian professionals can originate from other professionals within the humanitarian sector, and that the vast majority of perpetrators come from those occupying leadership and managerial positions, as well as those in charge of security details, in the same organization where female humanitarian professionals work.[96] Indeed, there are gender-specific external security risks for women professionals in external crisis contexts as well. However, most female humanitarian professionals who were sexually perpetrated by fellow colleagues *within* their workplace do not report the incidences to their employing agencies.[97] Neither Mavzuna, Ellie, nor all Malawian female professionals interviewed by Tiessen spoke up or reported their experience, be it micro-aggression or downright sexual exploitation from male coworkers, to their employing organizations. Particularly in offices consisting of predominantly male staff members, female professionals may likely refrain from extensively socializing with male colleagues both during and

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[94] Tiessen, 2004, p. 698
[95] Burrell and Hearn, 1992
[96] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2016
[97] Nobert, 2016

outside of work – a self-censoring practice that not only significantly isolates them from their colleagues, but also limits their ability to retain more information that can be useful both for their work and their own self-protection.

The Invisible Lesbian and Gay Humanitarian Professionals

As female humanitarian professionals underreport their experiences of sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace, LG humanitarian professionals conceal their sexual identities altogether while deployed to country operations where local cultural acceptance is low. Similar to female professionals, they also view the most immediate security risks being from within the organizations that they work for, and that they are particularly fearful of disclosing their sexual identities to local staff in general and international staff working in faith-based organizations, or organizations that host employees with non-inclusive views towards homosexuality.[98]

Some of the most common self-censorship practices that LG professionals working in crisis relief and intervention at large take on include avoiding conversations with colleagues regarding marital status, dating, having children, or lying about the gender of their partners. In addition, some LG professionals would even reset privacy settings on their social media and delete photos with their partners on their digital devices.[99] For example, a confession from an UN employee at a 2016 UN Globe event shares that predicaments revolving around his sexuality surface even during his deployment application processes:[100]

> *I've seen that not all hiring managers at the UN are as LGBT-friendly as the Secretary General – and I am afraid that I will be eliminated from the hiring processes because of my sexuality. So, when I apply to the vacancies in the field, I routinely wipe out my spouse's gender before scanning and sending my application to hiring managers.*

In most cases, and particularly for single LG professionals, the choice is to arrive to a field posting alone and keep their sexual identities tightly undercover, so that they are able to manage their sexual identity disclosure as they gain better understanding of the extent which homosexuality is stigmatized

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[98]GISF, 2018
[99] Kumar, 2016
[100] UN Globe, 2016

within local societies. In most locations of the world where humanitarian aid agencies operate, LG professionals would likely come to the conclusion that openly disclosing their sexuality would negatively implicate their ability to collaborate with local colleagues and counterparts while highly endangering their safety.[101]

There is a pronounced clash between humanitarian principles of international aid agencies and local cultural dimensions where they operate. On one side, LG professionals are not necessarily openly barred from working in the humanitarian sector; on the other side, it is also difficult for aid agencies to retain local and expat professionals who are important for aid operationalization but are not inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals.[102] The consequence of being openly homosexual in the humanitarian space is grave – Raquel Moreno, having experienced workplace discrimination twice in his career, was refused by a local finance manager to release family spousal allowance in Lebanon and saw himself being subjected to bullying by his expatriate colleagues in Ethiopia, making both his professional and personal life extremely difficult.[103]

Anna, a former consultant for a World Bank programme in the Philippines for women's protection and gender equality, was outed by her local colleague after he saw her computer screen, which was a photo of her and her partner. It resulted in wide-spreading rumours on the reason behind her motive to work as a gender consultant, and many local staff was not willing to integrate her suggestions in the implementation of the programme:

> *Apparently, there were rumours that I chose to work on gender equality because I "preferred women" as a lesbian. Since then, I became very cautious about to whom I disclose my sexuality. Now, I have been working on this poverty alleviation programme in Myanmar for more than five years, and not once did I talk to my local colleagues about my family, because it is a crime to be a homosexual there by law. We have a very healthy working relationship, and I am always afraid to lose that if they knew this part of me.[104]*

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[101] GISF, 2018. An additional area that could be investigated concern the security insurance premium policies for homosexual partners of employees assigned in high-risk humanitarian areas. Insurance companies may charge a higher premium arguing that the homosexual staff and their partner may expose the organization to higher risks.
[102] Anonymous, 2013
[103] Moreno, 2015
[104] Anna (acronym), from interview with author, October 2020

Although there are few formal research investigating the unusual plights of LG humanitarian professionals working in crises contexts, there have been growing numbers of anonymous online platforms where they are able to discreetly share their experiences in the field.[105] Available relevant research, namely reports produced by the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) and Feinstein International Center (FIC) also find that LG professionals, especially locals, are gravely at risk to sexual violence and blackmailing based on death-threats. Mazurana and Donnelly discovered that there are cases of "corrective rape", where local homosexual staff "are raped and told to keep quiet because otherwise they can be stoned to death."[106] In turn, such incidences of violence are much more complicated than what simple reporting can solve. It is a fear – fear of ostracization, physical harm and sexual violence from their colleagues that prevents LG professionals from disclosing their sexual identities in the workplace and speaking up if they had been victims of discrimination and sexual violence.

The Safety of Self-Censorship

Why are female humanitarian professionals reluctant in reporting their experiences of gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence? What are the structural influences behind LG humanitarian professionals' non-disclosure of their sexual identities? LG and female professionals evaluate internal security risks specifically related to their identities based on antecedent incidences of discrimination and assault – as well as how involved organizations responded accordingly, to estimate the consequences of disclosing sexual identities or reporting incidences of sexual violence and manage their identities accordingly. In addition, current security policies of most aid agencies do not encourage voluntary reporting of identity-based harassment and violence.

For LG professionals, it is very likely that they are unable to report such incidences of targeted violence at all due to "sexual identity blackmailing", a strategy used by perpetrators to "pressure victims to do what they told them to do, or face having their sexual identity revealed to their anti-gay colleagues"

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[105] Namely the Secret Aid Worker forums on *The Guardian* and *The Gayd Worker* blog
[106] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2016, p36

in countries or communities where homosexuality is criminalized or punishable by death.[107] Having heard of or read about such situations, most LG professionals would take on an elaborate identity management strategy that often involves non-disclosure of sexual identities altogether to order to protect themselves from potential discrimination or even aggression from colleagues.[108]

In addition, there is a dangerous culture within the humanitarian sector where victims of gender-based violence are blamed instead of the perpetrator. From the argument emphasizing the relativity of "local cultures" that subordinate women, as well as the downright suspension or firing of victims for reporting, can signal significant antecedents for female humanitarian professionals that remaining silence may be the only choice should they wish to keep their jobs. For example, Sarah Pierce, who was sexually assaulted by a fellow aid worker in South Sudan while working for the Carter Center, faced questioning from her superior when she attempted to report the incident:[109]

> *She wanted to know: why my tent hadn't been locked, why had I been in the compound and why I didn't call and report it immediately as it happened? Why I didn't fight back more? It wasn't "Are you OK, do you need medical attention." She asked if I had led him on.*

Pierce was fired a week after an article from *The Guardian* about her experiences were published.[110] Similarly, Mazurana and Donnelly found that survivors of sexual violence are almost always immediately questioned by their superiors on their competency in self-protection when focus should be on the acts of the perpetrator instead, which would in turn normalize acts of sexual harassment and violence in the humanitarian workspace. If victims decide to speak up further, they could risk consequences, such as losing their jobs. This issue is particularly applicable in Mavzuna's working experience in ICRC Syria – when she reported the director of human resources to the expatriate higher

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[107] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2016
[108] Rengers, Heyse, Otten and Wittek. 2019. Also see Ragins and Cornwell, 2002
[109] Leach and Laville, 2015
[110] *Ibid.*

management team for his harassment, the director in question was made aware – and she was soon pressured to quit, while the director remained.[111]

The current structure of most aid agency staff security guidelines have yet to comprehensively address the risks unique to LG and female professionals within the internal structures of the aid agencies that they work for, requiring them to find their own ways to protect themselves from potential discrimination and harm that their employers are responsible to safeguard them from. By requiring victims to report experiences of identity-based discrimination and assault in the workplace, agency security guidelines can discursively relegate the responsibility of protection to individual humanitarian professionals themselves.[112]

In addition, most management teams within aid agencies are not trained in responding to complications that arise when an LG staff is outed in the workplace within a social environment where homosexuality is not tolerated or not legally recognized. A deployment manager of an aid agency admitted that as an adviser at headquarters, he was very ill-equipped to deal with dilemmas surrounding the deployment and security of LG humanitarian professionals in areas of the world where their sexual identities is discriminated, and that the only suggestion that other managers provided was to advise LG professionals to hide their identities.[113] Across the sector, employees need to receive more extensive security training that focus specifically on LG individuals and assisting employees who are victims of sexual assault.[114] Combined with the reality where aid work is significantly dependent on the cooperation and collaboration amongst humanitarian professionals, the formal confrontation that would result from reporting of discrimination and abuse would jeopardize the victim's ability to cohesively socialize with other members within the agency's organizational structure.

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[111] Mavzuna (Acronym), from interview with author, October 2020
[112] Gaul, Keegan, Lawrence and Ramos, 2006
[113] Anonymous, 2016
[114] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2019

In fact, many aid agencies' security risk management strategies focus mainly on external threats against humanitarian professionals from outside of the organization, while often omitting to comprehensively evaluate how their individual identities can affect their security risks from both within and outside the agencies.[115] In many cases, the only gender-specific aspect of a security manual concern sexual assault, while very few or no agencies specifically highlight targeted violence against LG humanitarian professionals.[116] In turn, this has led to fragmented and inefficient reporting systems created upon the assumption that identity-specific security risks originate mainly from external environments, resulting in their inability to process reports on internal identity-based security incidences. This reality leaves many perpetrators within aid agencies unpunished while "victims and survivors lack support to speak out, report and seek justice."[117]

Concluding Reflections

In this section, I sought to suggest that LG and female humanitarian professionals, censor their own identities and underreport experiences of identity-based discrimination and assault in order to avoid risks of ostracization and physical harm from their colleagues in the workplace. Understanding aid agencies as spaces of socialization and membership, stigmatized identities and topics of discussions, such as homosexuality and gender-based violence *within* such spaces are at significant risk of systemic silencing.[118]

If they perceive their employing organization to be male-dominant and hetero-normal, female and LG humanitarian professionals will take on practices to adjust their daily behaviours in order to ensure their standing as a member. For LG professionals in workplace, concealment of sexual identity is part of an elaborate identity management strategy that they take on in order to minimize risks of overt ostracization by heterosexual colleagues that they perceive to be intolerant of their own sexual

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[115] GISF, 2019
[116] Mazurana and Donnelly, 2019
[117] GISF, 2019
[118] See Hearn and Parkin, 2012

identities.[119] Female professionals, on the other hand, may not actively report incidences of misogynistic remarks, sexual harassment, exploitation and violence in fear of the consequent complications that would arise. These practices all encapsulate different levels of self-censorship, undermining aspects of identities that women and LG humanitarian professionals suspect would endanger their position within the organization they work in.

Often times, humanitarian aid agencies operate within social contexts where discrimination and violence based on individual gender and sexual identities are prevalent, making the protection of LG and female humanitarian professionals significantly challenging. In addition, current aid agency security policies and guidelines overwhelmingly focus on external threats to humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts, while internal security risks are largely overlooked.[120] This is likely a result of a top-down approach in policymaking within agencies' organizational hierarchies that often does not involve comprehensive surveying of individual humanitarian professionals' perceived risks and needs in crisis contexts.[121]

The protection and inclusion of female and LG humanitarian professionals are under-recognized within aid agencies not necessarily due to limited funding, as open dialogues addressing the discrimination of female and LG professionals do not require significant resource investment. Instead, there is still a lack of political will in initiating relevant conversations – as they will jeopardize aid agencies' ability to appeal to a number of key actors – particularly local professionals and political figures – who play significant roles in enabling aid delivery but remain unaccepting towards homosexuality and gender equity.[122] In the end, the lack of empirical data related to this discussion is in itself concerning. Why is there limited information available regarding the identity-specific risks of LG and female humanitarian professionals working in crisis contexts? The reality where incidences of identity-based discrimination and sexual

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[119] Tatum, Formica and Brown, 2016.
[120] Speers Mears, 2009
[121] *Ibid.*
[122] GISF, 2018.

violence in the humanitarian workplace are underreported, as well as the assumption of humanitarian professional community as cohesive and homogenous may be results of extensive identity-management strategies that LG and female aid workers take on to signal their membership within their organizations and avoid the internal security risks that they perceive.[123] The humanitarian space continues to be male-dominant and hetero-normal, particularly at the managerial and leadership-levels of organizational hierarchies. This could mean that aid agencies' employee security policies may continue to overlook the complexity of identity-based risks faced by LG and female professionals both externally within crisis communities and internally within their employing agencies. In addition, a lack of LG and female personnel in leadership positions may also discourage humanitarian professionals from expressing their identity-based security concerns and report incidences of targeted discrimination and violence.[124]

Although existing literature have extensively examined and reported violence against women and LGBTQ+ individuals at the global scale, ones that shed light into the unique plights of humanitarian professionals of those identity profiles are few.[125] The dangerous long-term consequence of female and LG professionals' self-censoring practices, however, is that they will only result in the continued normalization of the low visibility of LG and female professionals in the humanitarian aid. The absence of open discussions concerning the protection of LG and female professionals in the aid workspace means that aid agencies will remain a non-inclusive workplace for them. How LG and female humanitarian professional self-censor in their workplaces, particularly within crisis contexts, demonstrates a significant clash between humanitarianism in value and practice, where discourses of the protection of LG and female individuals from identity-based discrimination are, in fact, much harder to operationalize – even within humanitarian aid agencies themselves.

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[123] *See also* Mazurana and Donnelly, 2019

[124] Tatum, Formica and Brown, 2016; See also Korff, Balbo, Millss, Heyse and Wittek, 2015.

[125] Stoddard, Harmer and Haver, 2006. *See also* Rengers, Heysse, Otten and Wittek, 2019.

Section Three
Emotional and Physical Overworking
in the Humanitarian Profession

Aid workers made the voluntary choice of joining a profession that is characterized by conflict, disaster and the witnessing of human suffering in general, knowing that they would need to sacrifice time with family, jeopardize private relationships and face immense personal security risks to relocate to crisis environments for their work. A nine-to-five work schedule is rarely applicable in the humanitarian sector, as the escalation of external crisis environments is rarely foreseeable, and that humanitarian professionals need to be always prepared to respond to emergencies and shocks. This could mean that workdays are often long, and that the line between personal and private lives of the professionals are significantly blurred.[126]

It is necessary to examine humanitarian professionals separately as both *humanitarians* and *professionals*. While they work to fulfill their humanitarian value of relieving vast communities in crises, they also hope to find stable career prospects and continued professional engagement in the humanitarian sector, which is contingent on their employing agencies' assessment of their ability to perform. Leiter and Maslach suggest that a number of conditions within a work environment can pressure professionals to overwork emotionally and physically to a point of burnout, including work overload, lack of control over work, lack of emotional and professional recognition, unsupportive workplace communities, lack of fairness in compensation, promotions or workload, as well as practical demands that contradict one's personal values.[127] Building on Leiter and Maslach's characterizations, this section seeks to demonstrate that the work environments of humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts possess the conditions that are particularly inducive for them to overwork to a point of burnout.

The body of this section is divided into four parts. The first presents how the moral dilemmas experienced by humanitarian professionals in crisis environments can negatively affect their mental

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[126] Visser, Mills, Heyse, Wittek, and Bollettino, 2016
[127] Leiter and Maslach, 2005

wellbeing; the second suggests how aid agencies provide insufficient emotional support for the professionals that they employ. The third examines how humanitarian professionals have to mitigate with demanding workloads and insufficient protection, while the last section details how they do not receive sufficient professional recognition for their work.

A significant volume of assessment has been facilitated by existing literature focusing on the working conditions of humanitarian professionals working in crisis contexts, portraying the often-challenging conditions and situations that they have to mitigate with in order to upkeep their professional responsibilities. Building upon relevant literature, this section will also take into account that they are not only individuals with altruistic motifs in helping those in need, but also that they join the humanitarian sector in hope for a foreseeable, long-term career prospect that will allow them to continuously engage with the humanitarian cause. Through the presentation of anecdotal accounts of interviewed professionals and existing research, this section will emphasize that humanitarian professionals overwork both emotionally and physically as they struggle to find balance between humanitarian values and practices.

Lack of Control over Work and Consequent Emotional Hardship

Ilana Feldman duly suggests that humanitarian aid is aimed to "saving lives and moving on."[128] Indeed, *saving lives* is a challenging task for humanitarian professionals working in extreme conditions and complex emergencies resulting from atrocious conflicts and disasters, as they need to make do with limited financial and human resources in face of overwhelming numbers of people in destitution.[129] The harsh reality of humanitarian aid in conflict is that saving lives rarely equates to saving *every life*. Barnett has also emphasized that contemporary liberal humanitarianism, characterized by its increasing institutionalization and professionalization, have incorporated significantly consequentialist ethics in its aid delivery endeavors. However, he also emphasizes that the danger of consequentialism in aid for humanitarian professionals, as it "can generate a detachment from the object of their actions" and "relies

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[128] Feldman, 2019
[129] Didier Fassin, 2011

on welfare principles, can lead to abstracting and sacrificing the particular and the individual to the universal and the collective."[130] The humanitarian organizational process of decision-making averts risk by relegating it into decentralized sets of smaller, technical objectives or activities. The process of humanitarian aid delivery would hence resemble the completion of smaller tasks in an extensive checklist – a logistical framework – leaving individual field workers to focus on how to achieve their delegated tasks instead of reflecting on the viability of the program as a whole.[131]

More specifically, a prevalent product of consequentialist ethics in humanitarian aid is the logic of effective altruism. Based on the concepts developed by Peter Singer and William McCaskill, effective altruism advocates for a decision-making process for resource distribution that maximizes the number of beneficiaries yielded and promotes the best consequent aid outcome.[132] Although the specific term has only been popularized in early 2010s, the consequentialism at its core has long existed in humanitarian aid, requiring professionals to prioritize certain lives over others in the delivery of care. Indeed, there is respectable merit within the core principles of effective altruism but, as Stoddard reasonably articulates, "the elegant abstractions of effective altruism are a poor guide to addressing the messy totality of human suffering."[133] It is not realistic to expect humanitarian professionals to be completely detached from the broader crises that they work to relieve (particularly for local professionals who live within such communities) – and that they often retain significant emotional trauma from having to mitigate with the reality where they do not possess the resource to save everyone.

Derrick recounted the consequentialist decision-making process that he had to take on during his assignment as a medic dispatched by the Canadian Armed Forces for Operation Passage in response to the immediate aftermaths of the Rwandan Genocide. His reconnaissance team was tasked to establish a field hospital and assist refugees with passing from Rwanda to the then Zaire. Derrick's team, like many

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[130] Barnett and Weiss, 2008
[131] Obrecht, A. and S. Bourne, 2018. See also Barnett, 2005
[132] MacAskill, 2015
[133] Stoddard, 2020

other humanitarian actors present at the time, faced significant resource constraints which required him to strategically prioritize certain patients to treat over others to maximize the impact of the care he could deliver. He details how making the decision on who to care for first and how much care they receive based on resource efficiency in humanitarian crisis environments was particularly taxing for his emotional wellbeing:

> *I was prepared to be a medic. I was prepared to (..) you know, treat patients, and relieve pain, and make sure to care for whoever came to me. But I don't think I was prepared to be a humanitarian – to make the choice between morality and efficiency… you know, to give up some lives so that I can save more. You feel quite helpless at one point, because you were not aiming to provide the best care, but a flawed care – and you start blaming yourself for people's deaths.*[134]

Indeed, one needs to recognize the necessity of operational perspectives in high-risk environments such as armed conflicts, where "the real horrors happening in front of your eyes… are encountered with routine frequency, the temperance required by professional detachment is noteworthy as a departure from the empathy that would otherwise be forthcoming."[135] On the other hand, how can one morally justify the measurement of victims' suffering, as well as the alleviation of it, through logistical and operational estimations? Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant remind us that "moral calculations are not math.[136] Consequentialist decision-making in humanitarian aid distribution could induce the development of a sense of helplessness for humanitarian professionals who have to work with the limited resources at hand that they clearly understand are insufficient to help everyone.

Pines and Keinan reasonably argues that one of the main factors behind burnout "lies in the people's needs to believe that their lives are meaningful, that the things they do are useful and important."[137] Humanitarian professionals, through working to assist communities in crises, hope to derive the exact sense of existential significance and feel that they are making a difference in improving

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[134] Derrick Nearing, from interview with author, January 2021
[135] McKenzie, 2009
[136] Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001
[137] Pines and Keinan, 2005, p. 626

the lives of others. When they are confronted with practical demands that require them to reduce the action of saving lives on the sole basis of resource efficiency, they would feel that they have failed to realize the ideal that encouraged them to join the humanitarian profession. The frustration that emerges from the misalignment of value and practice, in turn, can be a particularly deciding factor driving professionals to experience burnout.[138]

It is hence important to understand that in addition to risks of physical security, there is also a significant emotional cost that humanitarian professionals working in particularly difficult environments cannot and should not pay themselves. As they risk both their physical and mental livelihood to aid others suffering from crises, humanitarian professionals should expect not only comprehensive protection from their employing agencies not only throughout the duration of their working contract, but also after their completion of an emotionally taxing and physically insecure assignment.

Insufficient Emotional Care

Derrick also recalls how the trauma he experienced while responding to the Rwandan Genocide was left largely uncared for after the completion of his mission. Nearing was amongst a myriad of other humanitarian professionals who found their work experience particularly traumatic but have received little psychosocial counseling and emotional validation from their employing agencies:

> *There were piles of bodies everywhere… half burning and half rotten. We would wake up every day in the field hospital with that smell. It even lingered when I returned to Canada. I thought it was my imagination, but I realized that it was PTSD[139] years later. I discovered it so late because no one really talked about it. No one seemed interested, I think, because they were living in this civilized, peaceful normalcy all along. I also think that as a military medic, I was expected to be used to it – but I really had a hard time.*

Lisa Reilly, the Executive Director of the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF), also recounted feeling she had "no right to be depressed" after working in multiple humanitarian aid programmes in Southeast Asia and East Africa, and that she felt that she was expected by her employing

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[138] Schaufeli, Bakker and van Rhenen, 2009
[139] Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

agency to well-manage her own emotional experiences as an aid worker.[140] Reilly's mindset reflects a continuously normalized expectations for humanitarian professionals to detach their own emotions from and acclimate to the broader crises that they serve to relieve, which can be particularly unrealistic for those working in the sector.[141]

Unfortunately, the importance of psychological care for humanitarian professionals remains largely unaddressed by many international aid agencies. Abby Stoddard, who have closely observed the 2016 Terrain Hotel raid in Juba, South Sudan to develop the 2016 edition of the *Aid Worker Security Report*, that has provided significant empirical data in violence against professionals working in international humanitarian sector, emphasized that NGOs on the ground were significantly underprepared in reacting to the aftermaths of the event where female humanitarian professionals were subjected to violent sexual assault by South Sudanese militias. In her account, humanitarian professionals who fell victim to the incident were insufficiently cared for by their organizations, as many of them were immediately sent home, put on leave without clear guidance in obtaining emotional support from their peers and professional counselling:[142]

> *… most NGOs did not well-respond to the incident. It was obvious that many organizational leaderships did not know how to care for victims of sexual assault, as many of the expatriate female aid workers who were raped were sent home on the next available flight with an indefinite leave. It was almost like they were saying, "it is unfortunate that this has happened, but this is the risk of the job. You get to go home right away, but we are not going to talk about it. Hope you get better."*

The negative impact of humanitarian professionals' trauma remains under-recognized in practice by employing aid agencies. When they do try to speak up to or seek help from their supervisors or managers, particularly those permanently situated within headquarters in Western developed states, they

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[140] Lisa Reilly, from interview with the author, February 2021

[141] See Rizkalla and Sengal, 2019 and Young, Pakenham and Norwood, 2018; Di Razza, 2020 also examines on the mental health challenges of UN peacekeepers, also emphasizes that working in difficult environments and having to bear witness to the mass human suffering are particularly taxing for those who work in the broader conflict intervention and relief sectors.

[142] Abby Stoddard, from interview with the author, November 2020. See more on her examination on the Terrain Hotel incident in Juba, South Sudan in *Necessary Risks Chapter 4* https://link-springer-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/book/10.1007%2F978-3-030-26411-6

can face responses of indifference or even vilification.[143] Through an interview, a director of an international aid agency elaborated on his expectation for his staff:

> *All humanitarian aid staff should have expected the conditions they will be in, so they should be professional and manage their own mental wellbeing in the field. Especially that they are paid by their organizations. Why would agencies hire someone who cannot deal with the conflict? Also, they chose this line of work after all. They are not there to be comfortable, and take vacations, they are there to respond to the problem.*

The reality where few organizations consider the emotional wellness of their staff to play a role in the safety, security and effectiveness of aid operationalization discursively normalizes the idea that it is the sole responsibility of humanitarian professionals to manage their own emotional experience in face of traumatic events.[144] In turn, many humanitarian professionals fear openly discussing their own emotional trauma gained from playing the unique role of the neutral aid provider who bear witness to humanitarian atrocities, as any sign of wavering determinism and emotional detachment may be seen as a sign of professional ineptitude.[145] In the end, it is important to keep in mind that no one should be *used* to conflict and disaster environments, neither the beneficiaries of aid nor aid providers themselves. It is extremely challenging to make decisions on aid resource distribution solely based on maximizing consequent impact, particularly for humanitarian professionals who join the sector of work based on the altruistic drive of helping those in need. Within the broader international humanitarian aid sector, there is an increasingly normative misunderstanding that the aid workers are naturally resilient towards trauma, and any signs of emotional compromise directly equate to a lack of humanitarian professionality.

It is reasonable to assume that humanitarian professionals are aware of the realities in which they have to work when they choose to join the sector. "I did sign up for it, didn't I?" is a common catchphrase shared amongst humanitarian professionals during assignment.[146] However, this does not mean that they

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[143] McCormack and Joseph, 2013 indicate that many aid workers, upon return, face secondary shock as their employing agencies do not provide opportunities for them to reflect on their traumatic working experiences.

[144] Pigni, 2014

[145] Paton, 1992

[146] In fact, all humanitarian professionals interviewed for this research have included different forms of this remark at some point of their responses.

are always able to calmly face the humanitarian atrocities that they are tasked to respond and are at risk to, as the process of aid delivery can be particularly costing for the emotional wellbeing of humanitarian professionals. They have to not only mitigate with challenging environments, but also make difficult ethical choices in distributing limited resources to those in need, although they often don't receive enough emotional support and validation from their peers and employing aid agencies.[147] Aid agencies should consider the humanitarian ethics of care for communities in need – encouraging a sense of being, control and meaningfulness, facilitating social support, and respecting human dignity – to be unarguably necessary for humanitarian professionals. They need to feel heard, validated and recognized – otherwise they may "remain isolated in shameful self-blame, unable to adaptively integrate new and purposeful meaning into their lives that gives hope for their future."[148]

Work Overload and Lack of Workplace Protection

On June 29th, 2012, Steven Dennis, an employee of the NRC, was injured and kidnapped in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Three of his colleagues were also kidnapped and their driver, a Kenyan national, was killed. After four days of captivity, Dennis and his colleagues were rescued by an armed operation mandated by Kenyan authorities and local militia. Three years later, Dennis filed a lawsuit against the NRC through the Norwegian Court – a process which Dennis had to crowdfund in order to complete – which ultimately resulted in the Court's decision that the NRC acted with gross negligence in ensuring the protection and providing sufficient aftercare for its staff in the specific incidence.[149] The *Dennis v. NRC* case was significant because it was the first time where a humanitarian professional has sought legal action against his employing agency on the basis of negligence in employee protection and care. The case brought focus on aid agencies' moral and legal duties of care for the professionals that they employ, an issue that has largely remained under the radar within the international aid sector before.[150]

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[147] Pigni, 2014
[148] McCromack and Joseph, 2013
[149] Hoppe and Williamson, 2016
[150] Kemp and Merkelbach, 2016

The ruling of the Norwegian Court – indicating that the NRC has acted with gross negligence in ensuring the safety of Dennis and his colleague for their camp visit. Two external investigations uncovered that although the risk of kidnapping was high in the Dadaab area, the NRC did not delegate armed escorts – a decision contrary to the recommendations made my NRC's local security managers and regular protocols.[151] The NRC did have a security policy that clearly outlined relevant measures to be taken for activities in high-risk environments, and that the court decision of gross neglect was based on the NRC's non-compliance with its own policies. This demonstrates that the security incident is a result of the active decision-making within the agency that underestimated operational risks – and that the existence of policies alone do not necessarily preclude the safety of humanitarian professionals.

The effects of local-expatriate staff categorizations also become particularly acute in the discussion on the agencies' duty of care for their staff. While expatriate humanitarian professionals are often seen residing in walled compounds and following strict security procedures in crises environments, local professionals do not necessarily receive equal amounts of protection, all the while as they "experience increased attack rates and fatality rates per capital relative to international staff, reflecting increased localisation of aid in high-risk areas."[152] For example, Sally Mohsen, a local professional who had worked for Save the Children in Egypt during the Arab Spring, recounted how the agency's local staff members were exposed to significant security threats due to the fact that they were not able to travel with the NGO-owned vehicles and asked to take public transportation instead. The logistics policy at the time was justified on the basis of funds limitations, but Mohsen detailed that when "one of the international staff would travel they (the organization) would definitely assign a car."[153]In fact, a majority of aid agency security policies are developed to address risks faced by expatriate professionals, as it is often assumed

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[151] *Ibid.*
[152] Stoddard, Harvey, Czwarno, and Breckenridge, 2019. For security measures for expatriate professionals, see also Smirl, 2015 and Autesserre, 2014
[153] Sally Mohen, interviewed by Pauletto, 2018

that local professionals are able to manage their own security.[154] This overbearing expectation for local professionals, who themselves can be direct and indirect victims of the crisis environment, results in their disproportionally high security risk exposure.

Local humanitarian professionals, while taking on a significant bulk of operational and implementational tasks of aid programmes, are also marginally less compensated compared to their international counterparts.[155] In addition, they also receive less training, livelihood benefits, security provisions and psychosocial support compared to their expatriate colleagues.[156] Iman, a senior program officer for OCHA Syria, disclosed to me that as a local staff, she is not provided with the opportunity to take advantage of the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) plan offered to her expatriate colleagues that allotted special vacation dates and subsidized air travel costs. In addition, besides being delegated noticeably similar (and often times higher) amounts of tasks than her expatriate colleagues, her salary is half of what expatriate staff with similar work experiences receive.[157] For Iman, this material reality evidences the non-equivalence of status between expatriate (in her case, an all-white leadership team) and local humanitarian workers:[158]

> *What many expatriate managements cannot fully comprehend is the fact that like all other local staff, I live the Syrian conflict twice: once as a humanitarian worker, and another as a Syrian national. Because of the instability, almost nowhere is safe, and yet everything is expensive. My family depend on me; if the conflict escalates, the expats get to go home to somewhere safe, but I have no other choice but to live through it.*

Especially in an environment where waves of emergencies are seemingly endless, working overtime is common. In this context, unforeseen demands related to conflict and crisis response requiring immediate attention are easier to meet for those without daily family responsibilities. This would

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[154] Stoddard, Harmer and DiDomenico, 2009.
[155] Stoddard, Harmer and Haver. 2006
[156] Carr, McWha, MacLahlan and Furnham, 2010; see also Jackson and Zyck, 2017
[157] Indeed, it can be argued that cost of living may be lower in, for example, Syria compared to another conventionally more developed country, such as Canada. However, this perspective neglects to account for the *purchasing powers* of different communities. While Damascus may be an affordable city to live in for an expatriate professional arriving from Toronto, it may remain unaffordable for many local professionals who have marginally lower purchasing powers as they receive local market standard compensation.
[158] Iman (acronym), from interview with the author, November 2020.

frequently mean that expatriate management and leaderships who choose to work during "after hours" may expect similar working ethics as local staff, who are less compensated, less protected while having to shoulder their daily family responsibilities and navigate through everyday crisis challenges.[159]

The historical origins of humanitarianism are embodied by Judeo/Christian ideals of selfless giving emerged during the European Enlightenment, and this discourse of selfless giving still persists as a significant part of its fundamental moral value.[160] Yet at the same time, expatriate professionals, often arriving from a more developed part of the world (mostly North America or Europe), stand in a mobile, contingent contrast to the predictable, constant local professionals. They possess a notably privileged type of voluntary mobility; the migratory experiences of expatriate professionals for their respective aid works are rarely characterized by economic or political hardship. In turn, the much-celebrated, transcendent humanitarian worldview is more difficult for local professionals to take on, as they are both financially and socially disadvantaged to do so.

Consequently, local aid professionals experience more challenges in dedicating to the transcendent humanitarian selflessness than their expatriate counterparts, who are much better compensated and more extensively protected. For expatriate professionals, "the field" can be as specific as one community in crisis, or as ambiguous as any parts of the developing world, and that working in "the field" is an experience that can often be beneficial for the advancement of their career. For local professionals, on the other hand, "the field" is where they are born and raised, where their family reside, and where they live through the exact crises that they work to respond. As they struggle to conform to this humanitarian ideal, mitigating with the structural barriers within their profession and the social ties of their communities in crises, they may appear to be less-so committed, and hence less-so professional, than their expatriate

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[159] See Acker, 2006. In her examination on the gender, racial and class inequalities in organizations, Joan Acker emphasizes that modern technology has enabled employees to work beyond formal hours. Lower-ranking employees in organizational hierarchies may have to work overtime with their managers, although demands for such overtime work are easier to fulfill for those without daily family responsibilities.

[160] Barnett, 2005

counterparts. This in turn will affect their mobility within the organizational hierarchies within the professional aid sector.

Career and Livelihood Insecurity

What is equally important in the Dennis v. NRC case is that it also opened an important discussion amongst humanitarian professionals on the often-overbearing working arrangements and lack of protection that they receive from their employing aid agencies in challenging crisis contexts. Many contributors of Dennis' crowdfunding campaign were also humanitarian professionals themselves – in the comment section of the crowdfunding page, they sympathized with Dennis' experience by sharing similar sentiments regarding having to work in high-risk environments while feeling under-protected and undervalued by the agencies that employ them.[161]

Part of the reason why Dennis' crowdfunding campaign gained significant attention was that each contributor could participate in the comment section of the webpage, which was a rare platform for humanitarian professionals to share their concerns regarding the aid sector with fellow peers with reasonable anonymity. The comments left by humanitarian professionals on Dennis' online crowdfunding campaign page discursively portray the reality where within the aid sector where humanitarian professionals are largely discouraged to voice their own security and livelihood concerns. "When you formally speak up about workplace inequalities and question whether if they are providing you with enough care, it is you against this entire organization… an entire established structure, so naturally there is significant risk, not only for career security but also coming off as… uncompassionate." Aiko, who had been working for a UN refugee programme[162], details how she will not initiate the conversation on

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[161] Dennis, 2015. For example, Cristine, a campaign contributor, commented that "staff will always take and accept the risk inherent in working in challenging and insecure contexts, but the organization must take responsibility to mitigate that risk – and accept consequences if they fail to do so. Security and duty of care does not receive enough attention because it's considered so disloyal to speak up."

[162] United Nations Development Programme

employee care in her organization unless being asked by leaderships, which she considers to be unlikely.[163]

There are currently few international professional humanitarian associations that can serve as a platform for individuals to voice concerns regarding inequalities, abuses and exploitation faced by employees within aid agencies.[164] Walker and Russ indicate that "Professional associations serve as the ultimate authorities on the personal, social, economic, cultural, and political affairs relating to their domains" and are "expected to influence public policy and inform the public within their areas of expertise."[165] It is hence reasonable to understand that humanitarian professionals see little opportunity to collectively mobilize and hold aid agencies accountable for fair standards of compensation and protection in the sector. This could mean that the needs and rights of humanitarian professionals, particularly revolving issues of staff care, protection and compensation can be in significant need for advocacy, while individual humanitarian professionals are reluctant to initiate any relevant discussion with their employing agencies.

Humanitarian aid as a professional sector is significantly under-regularized.[166] Most existing sector-wide operational standards, such as those in the *Sphere Handbook*, are designed to emphasize humanitarian accountability towards aid recipients, all the while focusing concerningly less attention on the importance of aid agencies' legal and moral duties of care for the professionals that they employ. Indeed, Cruess and Cruess are reasonable to emphasize that professionals are expected to prioritize ethical values and performance before reward, and it is undoubtedly prevalent for those working in the humanitarian sector.[167] There has long been a pronounced tension between the values of voluntarism and the importance of professionality in humanitarian aid.[168] However, the result of this ambiguous tension

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[163] Aiko (Acronym), from interview with the author, October 2020.
[164] James, 2015
[165] Walker and Russ, 2010
[166] Weiss, 2013
[167] Cruess and Crues, 2006
[168] Slim, 2015

is a continuously normalized view that while humanitarian professionals are to possess significant expertise and duly follow the extensive standards of aid operationalization, discussions revolving workload fairness, compensation and emotional care – all of which aid agencies have the duty to ensure for the staff that they employ – can be perceived to be in misalignment with the humanitarian value that agencies seek to embody. This is further exemplified by Tasi, who works for a UNHCR mission:[169]

> *I don't remember the last time I actually took a break from working – the two times where I "took leave" were because I was so overworked that I had burnout episodes and had to go to the hospital. Every time I tried to ask for my vacation – which technically is included in my contract – I am being asked to defer to a later time because the demands of the crisis was too big for the agency to not have full staff. It really is sort of a manipulative reason, in a way, because insisting that I take my breaks would make it seem like I don't care about those we are trying to help, who I do know are much more unfortunate than me.*

The contemporary humanitarian value discursively perpetuates a common notion of volunteerism in the sector, which is becoming increasingly contradictory to a humanitarian practice that has significantly institutionalized and professionalized. Employment opportunities within the aid sector continue require applicants to demonstrate significant past working experience, well-versed in navigating crisis environments and possess expertise certified through a recognized institution that often takes form in holding a graduate degree.[170] Most of those who join the aid sector aspire for stable, long-term career trajectories. Existing humanitarian professionals contractually recruited by aid agencies, although recognizing the altruistic aspects of what they do, ultimately see their work as a career for which they have committed time and resource to accumulate necessary expertise.[171] However, Dickman et. al. find that most professionals working in the aid sector don't see a clear career path, neither within their employing organization nor internationally. Walter, who had been working in the aid sector for more than a decade, detailed how his extensive career is characterized by a series of short, temporary assignments and frequent periods of uncertainty:[172]

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[169] Tasi (Acronym), from interview with the author, October 2020.
[170] Walker, Hein, Russ, Bertleff and Caspersz, 2010
[171] Stoddard, 2020
[172] Walter James, from interview with the author, January 2021.

At this point, I think humanitarian aid as a stable career almost never exists – you are like an "aid freelancer", having to find your own future every few months to few years. You would think that after studying on and working in such difficult conditions, you will be appreciated and recognized – but I never felt that way. Instead, it was almost as if I was disposable, left to fend for myself after the conclusion of my professional contract, and wondering what I am exactly doing for my life.

Park, in his examination of the plight for professional recognition of volunteer health workers in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, details how trained nurses volunteered to work in Ebola treatment units operated by programmes led by international aid agencies and the national government in hope to demonstrate their expertise and obtain permanent employment in the national health system. Instead, many were abruptly disengaged at the end of the epidemic without any emotional nor professional recognition. Similarly, Coleman also stresses that many UN Volunteers, while often highly qualified individuals who perform "the same or similar types of functions as regular (international) staff" and "see their assignment as a possible path to a future United Nations staff career", continue to receive formal warnings advising against such considerations.[173]

The conflation of both fragmented human resource needs in face of unpredictable emergencies and inconsistent (and increasingly limited) funding available from donors, work contracts for both expatriate and local professionals are almost always short term (approximately three to eighteen months) with indeterminant likelihood for renewal.[174] Humanitarian professionals, after dedicating significant resources and time to accumulate relevant certification and experience, nonetheless have to frequently apply for new assignments, be prepared for periods of unemployment and uncertainty in future prospects.[175] The increasingly pronounced career insecurity within the aid sector pressure humanitarian professionals to conform to increasingly demanding work conditions without fair reciprocation from their employing agencies in the forms of protection, recognition and compensation.

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[173] Coleman, 2017
[174] Korff, Balbo, Mills, Heyse, and Wittek, 2015.
[175] Dickman, Parry, Emmens and Williamson, 2010

Concluding Reflections

The common theme that emerged through the interviews facilitated for the purpose of this study is the self-consciousness of respondents when discussing their own emotional and livelihood needs as humanitarian professionals. All respondents have requested to remain anonymous or be given an acronym before disclosing that although they wish to be better protected, compensated and emotionally cared for, openly initiating such conversations with their employing agencies could mean sabotaging their career. One respondent, who currently serves as a Country Director for a humanitarian aid agency, even admitted that due to the temporariness of his short-term contracts, he is unable to apply for a mortgage to purchase a home for his family, as he cannot prove that he can generate consistent income. At the same time, he feels that by speaking up about this issue, he may be perceived by his organization as disconnected from the larger crisis that he is working to relieve.[176] In many ways, a humanitarian professional's critique against their employing aid agency can often be misunderstood as a critique towards the broader humanitarian value that the aid agency aspires to embody, which significantly discourages any internal dialogue regarding aid agencies' duties of care for their staff.

In turn, it is fair to understand that there are two kinds of perceived risks that drive humanitarian professionals to overwork. First, their fear of being perceived as non-compassionate by their peers pushes them to overwork emotionally and downplay their own trauma from confronting ethical dilemmas in aid distribution while witnessing mass suffering. Second, their fear of career insecurity and being perceived as professionally inept drives them to overwork physically in order to appear functional and seasoned in responding to crises that they do not have control of. Such practices of overworking normalize the already-prevalent discourse within the aid sector considering any requests for emotional care and professional recognition may taint the ideological purity of the altruistic humanitarian value and shift the focus away from the broader crisis.

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[176] Anonymous, from interview with the author, November 2020.

The growing professionalization of humanitarianism highlights the need to acknowledge that aid work has and will continue to evolve as a practice that requires training and expertise in order to be performed, and that it is no longer only just a temporary volunteer endeavor, but also a career that many are willing to commit their life to if they can be fairly compensated, protected and supported, both emotionally and physically. However, while humanitarian professionals face increasing expectations for performance, expertise and emotional resilience, many aid agencies have been able to largely justify their inability to provide them with sufficient psychosocial support and professional recognition on the basis of the demanding nature of the crisis contexts and the selfless discourses of humanitarian value. This, in turn, has created an unsustainable system where professionals are almost morally coerced to work in compromising conditions without contestation towards aid agencies' neglect of their emotional wellbeing and livelihood needs.

Humanitarian professionals understand that aiding communities during and after a natural disaster or conflict is no easy task. However, the complexity of crisis environments does not exempt aid agencies from their legal and moral duties of care for the professionals that they employ. The long absent discussions concerning aid agencies' accountability to the emotional and professional security of their staff have normalized the unfair assumption that humanitarian professionals should be able to effectively function without comprehensive organizational support and protection from their employing agencies. The interplay of unrealistic emotional and performance expectations, the contradiction between humanitarian values and professional cost, aggravated by the unregularized nature of the aid employment market, ultimately condition aid workers to both emotionally and physically overwork. In this case, humanitarian professionals overwork both to upkeep a humanitarian identity value in an environment where they lack control of, and to demonstrate sufficient expertise for a more stable future career.

Conclusion
Piecing the Puzzle

To what extent does the varying identities of humanitarian professionals influence their everyday practices within the aid workspace? In this study, I have suggested that identities of humanitarian professionals affect ways which they perceive professional and security risks within their employing aid agencies under crisis contexts that, in turn, significantly influence their everyday practices. In particular, I focus on three types of practices to which I typologize as 1) inward socializing, 2) overworking and 3) self-censoring. Each of these practices are taken on by humanitarian professionals of particular identity profiles in response to their unique perceptions of operational, physical and professional risks within their workspace.

In Section One, I aimed to argue that humanitarian professionals assess others' expertise through a racialized lens, and that the professional categorizations of "expatriate" and "local" positions are not race-neutral. The practices of inward socializing by white, expatriate professionals, exemplified by the phenomenon of the "expat bubble", demonstrate that whiteness is continuously and subconsciously perceived by many humanitarian professionals as an equivalent of expertise and professional competency. Expatriate, white professionals can garner significant recognition in aid decision making, while BIPOC local professionals remain in the implementation, information collection and reporting roles as they are not trusted to have the thematic expertise to make active policy decisions based on the information they possess. BIPOC expatriate professionals, situated within the small nexus between BIPOC locals and white humanitarian professionals of Western backgrounds, receive an embedded double scrutiny, whose expertise are under-recognized by both racial groups.

In Section Two, I outlined that LG and female humanitarian professionals self-censor their identities and underreport their experiences of discrimination and identity-based violence within the aid agencies that they work for. Specifically, LG professionals may "go back to the closet" and avoid discussing their private lives with their colleagues, while female professionals underplay their experiences

of sexual harassment in the workspace. As most management and leadership personnel within aid agencies are not sufficiently trained in the protection of LG inclusiveness and responding to internal sexual assault incidences, LG and female professionals perceive that they are existing security guidelines in aid agencies do not address their identity-specific needs in risk aversion. Understanding aid agencies as organizations of social spaces, LG and female professionals censor their own identities in order to maintain their membership within their workspace to avert risk of ostracization and physical harm from their peers, particularly when they perceive their employing aid agencies to be male-dominant and hetero-normal. In addition, they refrain from speaking up as they fear that by doing so, they will disrupt the normalcy within the workplace that is contingent for their agency's ability to respond to the broader humanitarian crisis context, which further jeopardizes their social relationship with other professionals working within the same agency.

In Section Three, I suggested that humanitarian professionals at large emotionally and physically overwork in crisis contexts as they do not receive sufficient psychosocial support and professional recognition from their employing aid agencies. There is a common expectation within the aid sector for humanitarian professionals to have the emotional resilience to function efficiently in crisis environments at all times, hence they are reluctant in disclosing the emotional trauma that they have gained from not only witnessing communities suffering from crises. In addition, they also are concerned that requesting time-off, fair workload distribution and professional recognition may aggravate their existing career insecurities, as such actions may make them appear to be both disloyal to their employing agency and disconnected with the volunteerism embodied within the liberal humanitarian value.

Although the research aimed to reach as many interviewees as possible, the size of the respondent pool remained limited. In particular, it could significantly benefit from ethnographic investigations into larger numbers of female and gay professionals, as well as local professionals at large. It is also alarming that we currently do not have reliable empirical data on the incidences of gender-based violence against female aid workers, and that few research concerning aid worker security recognize the existence of LG

professionals in the humanitarian sector. In turn, a potential large-scale survey could be facilitated for female and LG humanitarian professionals to anonymously report incidences of identity-based discrimination and violence that they have experienced within their workspace during their assignment. In addition, the research could further investigate the extent to which local and expatriate staff categorizations could translate to differing workloads and standards of professional performance in crisis contexts.

The previous three sections have attempted to lay a foundation for understanding how the tacit practices of aid workers reflect normative structures of the aid apparatus. Building on the existing findings, the research can also be extended to understand how the everyday practices of humanitarian professionals in crisis contexts perpetuate or alter the normative structures of the humanitarian aid apparatus. Through the perspective of the structuration theory, Anthony Giddens emphasizes the duality of structure within which human agency and societal structures simultaneously inter-influence. While an individual's autonomy in decision-making is enabled or constrained by the societal structures they are situated within, the structures can also be maintained or adapted through the individual exercises of agency.[177] With this understanding, this research can be extended to explore how the identities of individual humanitarian professionals – influencing their everyday practices – ultimately impact the norm inculcation within the broader aid sector not only on issues revolving aid worker security, protection and care, but also on the formulation of expectations for aid effectiveness in complex crisis contexts.

By taking on an identity-based approach to understand the everyday practices of humanitarian professionals, the research has sought to emphasize that their work does not only involve relieving the suffering of different communities in crises, but also navigating the complex organizational structures within the aid agencies that employ them. Adler duly emphasizes that practices are "sustained by a repertoire of ideational and material communal resources," including "routines, words, tools, ways of

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[177] Giddens, 1984

doing things, stories symbols and discourse."[178] The seemingly technical and quotidian practices, narratives and habits of humanitarian professionals can often reflect broader, structural issues within the contemporary aid sector that are deeply political, as they serve as real evidence of how exactly humanitarian values and practices contradict in crises realities that are often complex and unpredictable.

A main purpose of the study has been to challenge the broad-based assumption that the everyday experiences of humanitarian professionals working in conflict contexts are unproblematic, and to emphasize that aid agencies and humanitarian professionals do not necessarily form unified fronts in face of the crises that they aspire to relieve. Such assumptions can normalize many problematic issues when it comes to aid work – the humanitarian values of helping those suffering in crises seemed to have exempted aid agencies from the scrutiny of broader literature on its deficiencies in protecting and caring for the professionals that they employ.

It is reasonable that humanitarian professionals are often assumed to be in a more privileged position compared to the communities that they serve. However, it does not mean that they are not vulnerable and exempt from the effects of the structures that they are situated within. It is necessary to understand that the majority of the aid workforce is composed of local professionals who live in the exact crises that they work to relieve, and that other individual identities, such as gender and race, can also significantly differentiate their own vulnerabilities. We cannot keep assuming the working experiences of humanitarian professionals solely based on their altruistic values – we need to remember that they are more than just humanitarians as we attempt to understand what they practice and why. It is necessary that the needs of aid workers themselves are not overlooked: while the predicaments of communities in crisis environments are always pressing, if there are no humanitarian aid workers, there is no humanitarian aid.

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[178] Adler 2005, pp. 15-17

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