



DO NO HARM
Western Volunteers and Self-Perception
Among School Children in Post-War Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

Volunteering in Third World countries is a modern trend. People, from all over the world, and of all ages, are devoting their time helping others to escape poverty. This help however, is often the source of additional problems, creating more challenges to overcome. This paper is meant to tell every person with the will to help others to “do no harm”. The idea of all the NGOs sending volunteers to remote parts of the world is to improve the lives of people who have less possibilities than we do, living in the western world. However, each volunteer comes with their own ideas of the world around them, their own ideas of what is their role in helping people living in totally different culture. Volunteers often disregard the differences between themselves and their new surrounding. Then consciously or subconsciously these westerners are imposing on the local communities certain behaviours or way of thinking. Most oftenly harming people by making them dependent on the western aid and western ideas of “good” life. This paper is meant to show how a group of kids at small school in Freetown (Sierra Leone) are being influenced by those western ideologies.

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Figure 1. Volunteers and Rhema students

Table 1. Background of Rhema School Volunteers

Table 2. Background of Rhema students

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

The expression “Do no harm” was first used by Mary Anderson (1999) to describe the effect of international aid influence on violent conflicts. She studied different conflict situations and arrived at the conclusion that international aid flow is one of the main reasons for prolonging violent conflicts. Yet, in many other situations, foreign assistance motivates people to find solutions to relational problems, and live in harmony with one another.

While Mary Anderson (1999) focused mainly on the influences of material aid, my particular focus is on the social psychological dimension. This study is therefore about the influence of western volunteers on the self-perception of school children in post-war Sierra Leone. It is about how volunteers at Rhema School in eastern Freetown influence the identity and sense of self (self-esteem, self-confidence, etc.) of the school children. People develop certain attitudes through the observation of the behaviours of other social actors. Self-perception here is considered as an aspect of the processes whereby people come to terms with who they are, as well as adopt certain values that give meaning to life and underlie their capacity to relate to the world around them.

We live in an interconnected world, where people and their lives are easily influenced by impulses from near and afar (Held, 2000). Typically with the interconnected world, the number of NGOs and international volunteers is constantly growing. The media are raising awareness about the diverse challenges in poorer regions of the world, informing about how to help the poor and advertising new ways of spending a "gap year" among the youth in the relatively richer

sections of the world (Heron, 2007). As a result, thousands of people, particularly young people, travel each year to remote parts of the world with the will to “make a difference”. However, the cultural baggage that is carried over the borders by the volunteers are hardly considered or problematized. This is because the volunteers are not mere good Samaritans helping deprived local communities, but also cultural, racial and national representatives or ambassadors. They (volunteers) come from specific cultures. Volunteers are not neutral, their way of life can equally affect life ways of the local communities. They can initiate behavioural and attitudinal changes through their own behaviours and attitudes. Foreign volunteers are agents of attitudinal change in the beneficiaries communities. A serious consideration of the diverse effects of this “cultural baggage” is necessary for effective international voluntary work.

2. Research Problem

This study seeks to highlight the attitudinal influences of international volunteers on Rhema School children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The Rhema volunteer program started in 2007 and enables western volunteers to work with primary school children (6-14years). Volunteers through their self-representations are influencing behaviours of Rhema students. The purpose of the study is to explain how these behaviours are affected by western ideologies and whether they can have negative or positive consequences.

The thesis is strictly connected to one particular volunteer program at Rhema School but it is additionally supplemented by few individual cases from different parts of the country and Freetown.

3. Research questions

1. What is the voluntary program in Rhema School?
2. When did the program start and how many volunteers have been there since?
3. Who are the volunteers and where do they come from?

4. Who are the children attending Rhema?
5. How do volunteers think about their role at Rhema School?
6. What do the kids think about the volunteers?
7. What do the teachers think about the volunteers?
8. What specifically are the responsibilities of the volunteers in Rhema school?
9. How long do the volunteers work in Rhema School?
10. What are parents' opinion about the volunteer program at school?
11. Which behaviours among the school children do the volunteers affect?
12. How do the volunteers influence the children's gender roles?
13. What is volunteer's influence on people's attitudes and aspirations?
14. What is the understanding of education, development and so called "better life"?

4. Thesis Organization

The paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter focuses on the introduction and methodological issues. The methodology section is on the studied area, modes of data collection, and field reflection. The second chapter is about Rhema school and its voluntary program. The conceptual approach is basis of chapter three. Especially, the issues of identity and social identity; social cognitive learning; knowledge production and situated knowledge; self-efficacy; as well as development and imagining development or planning development. The chapter four captures the collected data and their discussion with the study's defining concepts. The final chapter provides a summary of the study and its concluding remarks.

5. Methodology

5.1. Introduction

This section focuses on the methodological part of the study. This includes data collection techniques and reflections about my role as a fieldworker. These self-reflections will focus on race, gender, age, and status, as well as ethical considerations.

5.2. Study area

The research was conducted in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. It was more precisely in Thunder Hill Community in the eastern part of the city. This part is considered to be the most populous and the poorest part of Freetown (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freetown>, 2012). This suburb was the main ground of rebel actions during the January 2000 attacks on the capital. The buildings were completely or partially destroyed, people were forced to run and hide (source: interview with Francis Kamara, 2009). Thunder Hill as one of the poorest suburbs, was deeply affected by the war still, 9 years after ending the conflict, is facing multiple development and social challenges. Presently there are 3 private primary schools in the area. This includes Rhema Preparatory School, which has had an international volunteer program since 2007 to fill the gaps in teaching and other material resources.

The fieldwork was in two phases. One was conducted during a 3 month of volunteer work at Rhema Preparatory School in 2009. The second was done for 2 weeks in July 2010. Taken together, the two field visits have provided a basis for reflecting upon observations of the pupils and general developments at Rhema School. Precisely because the current research problem is the influence of western volunteers on self-perception among school children in post-war Sierra Leone, based on the example of pupils at Rhema Preparatory School. Self-perception or 'sense of self' is understood in the context of values, capacity to organize, self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ability to imagine and aspire to a better future.

5.3. Data collection techniques

The main techniques for acquiring information during the first time period were participant observations (including community studies and life histories), interviews, and documentary sources. The second part was mainly focused on interviews and reanalysis of previously obtained information and experiences.

5.3.1. Choosing participants

Choosing participants for the interview was based on previous background interview with the school board members who were very familiar with the history and background of each student. I chose children from grades 4 to 6th as the main group for my interviews and observations because this group was old enough to remember all the volunteers since the program started and were considered to be the most influenced by the westerners. I selected 10 school children. Also some of the children were selected based on the relations I have previously created with the pupils while working at the school. Part of the selected group were also children who were friends with previous volunteers.

The reason for selecting only 10 pupils had to do with the time at my disposal for the interviews, and the need to get to know the children more to make them feel comfortable in my presence. Good report is usually possible with a small number of informants, who in turn talk more openly. Also, a total of 10 informants was enough in order to avoid “data saturation”. That is the point when data collection have become repetitive and there were no new ideas or themes (Gray, 2009). Many family cases were the same and life histories very similar. Additionally there is few more cases of youth and adults that are presented in order to supplement the analysis about the influences that children were exposed to.

5.3.2. Participant observation

Participant observation is a major qualitative research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals (such as a religious, occupational, or distinct group) and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. “The central intent of this method is to generate data through observing and listening to people in their natural setting, and to discover their social meanings and interpretations of their own activities. Part of this process is the reporting of the researcher’s own experiences, feelings, fears, anxieties and social meanings when engaged with people in the field.” (Gray, 2009: 399-400). This method allows the researcher to become part of the group being studied and helps understand their situation by experiencing it. This method was connected with observations of the informants’ behavior and have been a part of my personal voluntary work at Rhema Preparatory School. It was based on teaching and organizing events that included everyday contact and participatory activities with pupils during school hours, as well as multiple sport activities in my spare time. “By living and participating in the community, the researcher can achieve a kind of understanding that other methods cannot provide. First-hand observation of events and unstructured interviews give powerful ways of perceiving social processes and discovering the symbolic meanings that people use in their everyday lives (...) The researcher takes on an active role within social setting that is being studied. As well as watching, this facilitates listening, conversation, questioning and interviewing, so getting ‘closer to life’. Blending in by adopting a role” (Payne and Payne, 2004). My personal experiences in the field has shown that using this technique was especially influenced by self-representations connected to my “social attributes”, as various activities and relations were based on my characteristic looks and social background. This method was used to get acceptance from the community in order to gain “insiders” view. The understanding of the change that volunteers had on the youngest members of society would not be possible without people treating the researcher as a member of their group. At first contact, children and adults did not behave as they were in

regular, day to day situations. It took a couple months for the informants to get used to my presence and act, and talk the way they normally do between each other.

As part of the participant observations I have also used the community studies and “life histories”. Community studies is a technique meant to investigate local social networks, relations between people, shared sense of common identity (Payne and Payne, 2004: 49). This method was chosen in order to grasp the relations between different age groups, patterns of authority, and the idea of role models.

“Life histories” is a method meant to explore what happened with the people in the past and also to discover individual experiences, interpretations, understanding, expectations and the way children define the world around them. Furthermore life experiences show the way self-esteem and confidence has been built. Obtaining people’s life histories require certain assimilation into the society and trust-building (Payne and Payne, 2004). That is often very long process based on the ability of constructing deeper, intercultural relations. It took few months and required involvement in daily activities and participation in everyday social life.

The main challenges was the issue of ethical consideration. This means the extent to which I am allowed to use the information from day-to-day situations and interviews, acquired from friendly relationships with children and other local people? This has been discussed below, in the paragraph about ethics in the fieldwork.

5.3.3. Interviews

The main interviewing method used, were semi-structured interviews. It is an approach, whereby “the interviewer has a list of issues and questions to be covered, but may not deal with all of them in each interview. The order of questions may also change depending on what direction the interview takes. Indeed, additional questions may be asked, including some which were not anticipated at the start of the interview, as new issues arise. (...) The semi structured interview allows for probing of views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers.” (Gray, 2009: 373). Significant challenges, in this part of interviewing

process, were establishing relations with the community. That was crucial for acquiring truthful answers. Additional interviews conducted with other western volunteers made an interesting impact on my perspectives on local society and personal role in it.

The reason for choosing this method of interviewing was that while interacting with the local community I have noticed more differences that have raised my curiosity with diverse aspects of people's life and their past. This furthermore raised more questions. In order to understand the social processes that had an impact on the children it was important to be flexible, allowing the pupils to freely express themselves.

5.3.4. Documentary sources

“Documents are standardized artifacts, in so far as they typically occur in particular formats: as notes, case reports, contracts, drafts, death certificates, remarks, diaries, statistics, annual reports, certificates, judgments, letters or expert opinions.” (Wolff 2004: 284). I have used the documents in my study as a complementary information to interviews and observations. Documentations supplement the research with additional statistic and historical information about the war and post-war era. Using background information was crucial for following and understanding people's life histories and experiences that have influenced their lives. The statistics have also shown the level of destructions during the war, particularly regarding schools. This shows how the conflict has affected present educational system as well as different aspects of people's lives.

5.4. Field reflections

Elizabeth Levy Paluck in “Surviving Fieldwork Research” mentions the importance of selecting researcher with appropriate identity to enable the collection of high quality data. This clearly is very dependent on the studied problem. Because, “research participants use researcher's physical appearance, accent, mannerisms and multilingual abilities to identify them

with certain ethnic, regional and even political groups” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 45). This identification furthermore can lead interviewees to certain conclusions and thereby limit their participation. In my fieldwork, in Sierra Leonian community, there was no issue of potential violence towards me. However, my physical appearance created certain mistrust and put me in the “outsider” role, which did affect many interactions and interviews. My social attributes created boundaries between me and the locals. This is why the process of gaining people’s trust and creating friendships took longer. I have pointed out four main variables I believed were influential on the approach of participants towards me as well as on my own perception of the locals.

5.4.1. Being white

Two main characteristics that were noticeable with the first glance and caused immediate reactions was my white skin color and being a female. These personal attributes affected my experiences with the informants to a large extent. The matter of race and the feeling of alienation was a part of everyday interactions. Thunder Hill Community was rather separated from major contacts with white westerners. Still, the image of white foreigners was quite strongly embedded in the locals’ perception. In my opinion this has been the effect of the flow of western aid after the post-conflict era. It has created visualization of a white person as a rich aid worker bringing relief to devastated areas and marginalized communities. This is also the kind of picture that humanitarian workers has created by themselves and furthermore have been spreading this stereotype among Sierra Leonians. One of the main arguments of Mary Anderson (1999) in the book “Do no harm: how aid can support peace – or war” was that in fact NGOs have very often created more problems, rather than actually bringing relief.

At the time of my fieldwork in Thunder Hill Community, I was the only white person in the area. That certainly made me very noticeable and predisposed to frequent interactions and conversations with various individuals. Therefore, while facing the challenge of trust-building, I also encountered additional problem of the need of reshaping the stereotypical model. The

approach towards my person, from the very beginning, was based on the assumption of acquiring immediate material help. This influenced the content of my field conversations that were purposely exaggerated or modified. The issue of stereotyping became one of the main obstacles that had to be overcome in order to gain reliable information. Stereotype of me as a white person being rich was based on the perception of westerners by the locals. However, this shows only one side of the problem. On the other hand, my personal stereotypical ideas about volunteer, humanitarian work, as well as the image of African post-conflict society, also impacted my self-perception and my role in the community.

Jan Naderveen Pieterse has analyzed in depth the stereotype images of white on blacks and also self-image of black people. He has written that “stereotypes are based on simplification and generalization” and further he amplifies that “though they may have no basis in reality, stereotypes are real in their social consequences, notably with regard to the allocation of roles. The targets of stereotyping are maneuvered into certain roles, so that a vicious circle develops, in which social reality seems to endorse the stereotype. Social representation echoes social realities which are in turn modeled upon social representation. A kind of societal typecasting is set up, from which it is difficult to escape” (Pieterse, 1992: 11). The post-war development aid helped creating a stereotype of a rich, white, westerners, whose role is to bring people money and other benefits. Quite disturbing is the observation that this type of stereotyping is embedded in the perception of all age groups, children in particular. This implies that the youngest generation is continuing to carry on their parents’ ideas which in the outcome undermine future change in perceiving other races.

To clarify how did stereotyping, associated to the color of my skin, influenced my interactions especially with the youngest I will give an illustrated example. In my encounters with the locals, on many occasions, I faced cases of adults describing their life stories with expectations of certain assistance in their endeavors towards improving their life conditions. At the same time, I made personal observations that in many cases children were used to “negotiate” assistance conditions as it was considered that children made greater emotional influence. This therefore created additional boundary in developing relations with the kids that would be based

on ordinary friendship without high expectations and issues of superiority. Moreover the stereotyping among children ranged widely over the issue of a white person being more educated and therefore more authoritative. However, with the relation to community elders pupils have always considered their authority to be superior over western volunteers of any age. Racial diversification and western representation of “the other” has been influential on everyday interactions with people of all age groups and educational backgrounds. This affected the attention and willingness to converse. On the other hand “when the participant understands the researcher has no authority, no coercive power to chastise or capability to insist on their cooperation then there is voluntary participation.” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 30). Along this way of thinking we can also conclude that when there is no demands, no expectations, the debates become more open and straightforward, which ultimately will give positive results.

5.4.2. Being a female

The increasing value of gender dimension of issues in social sciences has a relatively short history. Gender has never played such an enormous role in society’s relations and in the field of research as much as it does today. It is still in the phase of development, especially in certain less liberal and developed nations (Payne and Payne, 2004: 89).

While conducting my research, I encountered many gender issues related to security, education, skills, status power in relations with men, women, youth, boys and girls. The gendered experiences were connected to being assigned certain roles by the locals, as well as my own interpretations of reality and sometimes emotional connections with the people and their problems.

The problem of security was related to ensuring the personal safety of a female white researcher in a post-conflict African setting. Therefore, in the beginning of the fieldwork, I very often had some male companions during field visits. These men showed me around the city, introduced me to people and introduced people to me. This resulted in a form of “gatekeeping” by my companions through expressions such as “don’t talk to anyone who is not my friend”.

Potential contacts with random community members, who I believed could have been good information sources, were limited by these man companions or. I have observed this has resulted in very positive effects, enabling me to easily communicate with any strangers who would not be scared of my male “bodyguards”.

In the matter of gender and education, I observed certain connections with the willingness of people, especially men, in talking to me about their lives and developmental aspirations. I was also often ignored and not treated seriously. However, I also consider not necessarily being a female was at the basis of that attitude. This general attitude has to do with the focus on education of women in Sierra Leone. Women are expected to have only one role in the future and that is taking care of the households. The capital city, Freetown, unlike countryside, is becoming more liberal in that matter. However, the mentality is far away from any kind of equality, especially in the field of academics. Yet, while peculiar groups were resistant to communication, others like school teachers, some women and my closest surrounding seemed to be quite open, disregarding gender differences.

With the connection to education and gender also comes the issue of authority and being positioned in the society. Like I mentioned with certain groups, especially male elders, I experienced very insignificant influence, as other groups has valued my opinions. The outcome of the interviews was very often guided by local perception of me as a female academic.

5.4.3. Being young and student or volunteer

Being a young fieldworker made it easier to build trust with and gain an “insiders” access to the informant school children. Courtney Radsch writes that part of the trust-building approach is to make the participants comfortable in your presence. In order to realize this trustful relationship, the researcher’s identity could be particularly useful. “By invoking particular personal characteristics at various times I attempted to shift from outsider to insider, enabling me to build trust with my informants and gain different perspectives.” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 97). Following this path, using attributes as young age, being a working, self-financing student,

female volunteer, and teaching skills, gave me the opportunity to make friends with different age groups. That resulted in honest opinions and comments. For example, introducing myself as a working student, arouse curiosity. In Sierra Leone it is very rare for the youth to work and pay for their own education. If you do not have a sponsor, educational opportunities are limited. Facing in some way similar challenges has brought out mutual interest in each other's life histories. On the other hand in some individual cases age has played the opposite role. Few elders, whom encountered, were indifferent to my presence, they had no interest in talking with me. This was however quite rare as people always seemed to have time for conversation. Additionally the identity of a volunteer teacher at Rhema School enabled many contacts with group working with children and gained me the access to parents for purposeful conversations or interviews.

5.4.4. Being Polish

Nationality is another element that is invisible during first encounter, but affect social interactions in many ways. During the initial contact with the local community, I was assumed to be either American (from USA) or British, and rich. The locals assigned me with a familiar nationality. It seemed like positioning me according to peoples' knowledge made them feel more confident and safe. I noticed that trying to explain my real national identity only created confusion. My explanation was mostly ignored and expectations remained unchanged. Britain and USA are the two main countries that sent aid to Sierra Leone after the conflict. There is also many nationals of these countries in the western part of Freetown, where all the luxury apartments are situated. Considering the limited access to education and to media due to lack of electricity, television and internet connectivity, the knowledge is produced mostly through peoples' own experiences and interactions with other individuals. The fact about my Polish nationality has not affected my interviews directly. However me not being USA American or British created confusion, partially affecting trust-building efforts, because people were not sure who am I and where am I really from.

5.5. Additional Challenges

5.5.1. Reflexivity – “conceptual blinkers”

Research is not only an intellectual exercise but the inseparable and essential part of our personality and social skills (Grills, 2009: 193). Reflexivity means being self-aware of researchers’ own beliefs, values, attitudes, and how these factors are affecting studied communities, also how they interact, making certain changes in participants environment. This is one of very important issues, namely “the fact that behavior and attitudes are often not stable across contexts and that the researcher may play an important part in shaping the context” (Holliday, 2007: 138). Reflexivity also means being conscious and self-critical about the used methods and the whole process of conducting research, which is enhancing the final evaluation, creating better understanding. This attitude shows the reader that researcher is not trying to escape subjectivity, that he is conscious that in every social research objectivity is desired but impossible to achieve, because the whole process of data analysis is permeated by “conceptual blinkers”.

Taking under consideration the subject of my thesis, which is the influence of western volunteers on the youngest Sierra Leonian generation, my personal role in changing behaviors, attitudes and actions was one of the main reasons for selecting the subject in the first place. Initial idea for a thesis has been modified due to the realization of certain changes that occurred during my voluntary work. Taking notes and being able to record certain situations with my camera gave me many opportunities for reanalyzing events, especially some time after returning back home.

During the first stage of voluntary and research period I have used various methods, disregarding the matter of self-awareness. My main, initial goal was to get to know and understand my new living surrounding. It was an environment which I have been studying about for couple years before but not till the actual interaction I was able to understand. In my opinion, the fact I was not paying much attention to the influence of my personal beliefs, values and attitudes, brought positive outcome in creating relations with encountered people. Putting these

certain elements of my personality aside in order to get to know someone else's way of thinking has enabled me to avoid unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings. For example, disregarding my personal religious affiliations, I have participated in all traditional religious ceremonies willing to experience new cultures. This attitude in fact helped me make friends and gain the "insiders" position, however it was not necessarily honest, which partially could also be an ethical problem.

Considering the change in my own behavior, indicated my self-awareness, which I was not fully conscious of at the time. This attitude of an ignorant newcomer thriving to explore the unknown allowed me to experience Sierra Leonian post-war culture from a different perspective. In further research, especially in the second fieldwork conducted in July 2010, I was essentially better prepared, more conscious and aware of the role that my person as a researcher has affected the participants. This caused extra caution with my actions and interviews, which in my opinion in fact has raised more boundaries. Boundaries, that I have created myself. I have given myself the identity of a researcher which changed my attitude towards people, as they were treated strictly as informants. Reanalyzing the phases of both of my fieldworks made me realize the incompetence of the first research period and its' negative effects on my informants, however positive effects on the data. On the other hand second fieldwork was undertaken properly and consciously, nevertheless giving unsatisfactory outcome.

Another absorbing aspect of reflexivity in my particular research was a slightly different behavior and personal sense of identity while I was the only volunteer at the time and while living and working with other western volunteers. Adjusting to a society where the researcher is the only representative of his culture (or even race) seems much easier and effective than while cohabiting with the same "others". As the only ambassador of the European society in the area I felt much more obliged to be obedient to my hosts. However, during the last two weeks of my voluntary period there was another volunteer who has just started her work at Rhema School. The presence of a person having similar background, way of thinking, and the way of looking at the surrounding reality, has enhanced the sense of my personal identity in myself, leading to more self-confident behavior exposing my actual values and beliefs.

5.5.2. Trust-building - Managing the “insider” and “outsider” roles

In various researches trust is being built in the form of cognitive trust. That is by giving the participants full overview of research objectives, making sure there is either written or oral consent that is being secured, and ensuring all collected data is confidential and anonymous (Sriram, et al., 2009). However, as Julie Norman mentions, this formal approach is often ineffective in many societies, especially in post-conflict zones, where peoples’ previous trust towards the government and the leaders was frequently violated. Presently in these communities trust is built through the emotional bond. This is built and fostered by spending time in the community, participating in various activities with the locals, and talking to the informants in formal and informal way. Basically, making friends is the best and most effective way of gaining trust which leads to the most interesting outcomes in an interview. When the informants became more comfortable with me, I noticed that over some period of time, I began to have more open conversations, where people gradually revealed their personal opinions and experiences.

Undoubtedly, my voluntary work was one of the main positive factors helping build this emotional trust with the kids as well as the school board, parents and adults in the community. Being seen as a person who is sharing her time and effort to help or support others partially gave me a better position to start with. However, considering that initially not everyone was familiar with my role in the community, my presence did raise certain awareness in peoples’ attitude towards my person. Just like pupils and people affiliated with school had a very positive approach, many other under-informed locals were slightly cautious in the beginning. Curious, but cautious, answering only basic questions and maintaining distant relations. This however changed over some period of time. A good example is my relations with people who lived further up the hill in Thunder Hill Community. These were people who did not seem to have had any direct contact with anyone from the western world. In most cases, their children were not attending school but instead working with their parents to support their households. In the first days of my presence in Thunder Hill I have asked neighborhood kids to take me for a tour to upper part of the hills. This request already, surprisingly, has arisen certain admiration (after all,

in their previous opinion “white man can’t walk too much; white man is not used to these harsh African conditions with steep, stony hills and hot weather; white man is only used to riding cars”). Showing the children a different side of a “white man”, they assume they know, has given me a certain additional pass to their world, where I was more considered to be one of them, which means another level of “insiders” position. Moreover, our trip around surrounding mountains had further interesting emotional trust building issues, with my tour guides as well as with other encountered individuals. As a traveler, newcomer to an exotic, new environment I wanted to take pictures if I received a permission. The fact was that my presence in the first place was considered strange and additionally taking pictures seemed like it escalated peoples’ awareness. They were talking to me, however on a very basic, cautious level. I have spent few minutes there and while leaving I promised to come back later on with the pictures for them. Few weeks later when I managed to develop some photos I came back to the same place to talk to the same people, giving them the pictures. This outwardly simple gesture had completely changed the angle of the approach towards me. First of all keeping the word and appearing with the pictures again made me trustworthy and reliable which allowed for an open, nice and casual conversation. As Julie Norman explains “relationships grow over time based on observed actions” and furthermore “trust is not established automatically, but rather develops sequentially over a ‘trust period’ in which the participants can observe each other’s behaviors.” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 73). That is why for effective research it is necessary to gather data over a longer period of time, putting focus not only on research itself but mainly on creating relationships through various activities in the studied community.

5.5.3. Ethics in fieldwork

The main ethical challenge, in my particular case, is that I have been using some data based on experiences I gained while not conducting research on this particular subject. As written in “Surviving Field Research” all research staff as much as the participants should be well informed about all the aspects of the research. Appropriate respect and confidentiality

should be given. Also participation should be completely voluntary with specific consideration of any physical or psychological damage to the participants (Sriram, et al., 2009).

Considering these issues, my research on judging war crimes and the work of Special Court for Sierra Leone conducted on behalf of Adam Mickiewicz University, was carried on properly. However, experiences from that period of voluntary work and fieldwork, has given me the fundamental input for this particular thesis. This information, life histories, peoples' experiences, my personal feelings about their behavior and attitudes are being used as the main source of data, yet, it was collected without anyone's knowledge. Which violates the main ethical rule regarding informing all the participants about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, before conducting the interviews. However, during the second part of my fieldwork, people were informed about the study and its purpose, and the fact that my previous experiences in the area are going to become the basis for my analysis.

During my volunteering period I had taken notes on everyday bases, describing my experiences, encountered people, interesting conversations, people's behavior and its' impact on my personal opinions. In order to practice reading and writing with local kids, I had encouraged them to write essays and read books every day. This has also become a source of data for my current thesis.

Consequently, there appears the aspect of managing my identity. I have been using my "insider's" position to extract information, which violates the emotional trust between the researcher and community members. I have used the facts obtained from the participants who were actually my friends, meaning there were relations exceeding strictly professional field. This has seriously affected employing many personal opinions into the analysis of my research.

However, the area of study in this Sierra Leonian community regarded particularly uncontrolled behavior and reactions, opinions about various subjects. If the purpose of this study was completely explained and well understood by the locals, then the outcome most likely would be unrealistic. All acquired data is confidential and is not revealing any personal information that would lead to any harm from either the locals or officials, as the character of the study itself is not harmful to any party. In addition, also children who were the main aim of the study has not

been put at risk leading to any physical or psychological damage. Conducted interviews, and essay writing tasks were formulated as a game, and the only certain problematic issue was the influence of my person on the change of perception of their own environment and the world outside of it.

Furthermore, considering the fact I was teaching at the school, participating in sport games after school hours and actually being friends with the children, I have decided obtaining consent from the parents or teachers to talk to the pupils seemed absolutely unnecessary. The actual approval by Institutional Review Board or any other ethics committees would not apply in this particular case, as this is more anthropological and psychological research, meaning the consent is obtained by being accepted to the community, becoming friends with the locals and being allowed to share their living space together.

“Academics have a community duty to inquire freely in the pursuit of the truth.” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 25) but is it despite the risk of ethical violation? To provide the answer to this dilemma it is crucial to specify the meaning of ethics in the first place and be able to objectively, properly evaluate potentially unethical situations. In highly underdeveloped, post-war nation western ethic code has no meaning whatsoever. Therefore the proper judgment is the matter of individual moral values. What counts is the community’s acceptance and scholars’ personal drive towards uncovering the reality as it is, showing people the problem and joining efforts to overcome it. However, as Dieter Birnbacher mentioned that the selection of appropriate practice rules must take into account of all morally relevant consequences. Meaning that all aspects of the research, such as trust-building, participant observations, interviewing, information given to the participants, and the sharing analysis outcome must be very carefully undertaken in order not to create a bigger damage. As Julie Norman has put it “the researcher needs to find a balance between developing relations, emotional trust, which contributes to access, with the cognitive and behavioral trust, to avoid creating unrealistic expectations” (Sriram, at al., 2009: 82). The main problematic ethical issue however was that “unrealistic expectations” were created just by my presence itself, as well as the locals’ perception of who I was and what was my purpose in being there in the first place. My presence itself created certain changes in the society

influencing actions and behaviors of the pupils and other groups which regarded me as a person being capable of bringing relief to all their life problems. Therefore any of my actions were potentially unethical, but still required, from the scholars' point of view and for the final research conclusion.

5.6. Conclusion

Considering the research background, the compilation of two different projects and two separate fieldworks has turned out to be a major contribution to the understanding of discussed thesis problem. It has also allowed using a various data collection techniques which involved diverse groups of people having direct or indirect influence on the studied group of children.

Furthermore, the “social attributes” that are crucial in every research and are affecting being positioned as an “insider” or “outsider”, significantly influenced the process of data collection and interpretation. Research conducted in completely diverse environment, from the scholars' point of view, is an additional challenge of learning actual behavior in everyday situations and managing basic human interactions. For example, just like one and the same comment “you gained some weight” could estrange and create discomfort in the relation with other person in my home country, in Sierra Leone could make you friends. In my particular research topic it was more valuable to gain the insider status and make as many friends as possible, especially with the pupils. However in various cases it seemed also necessary to remain a neutral outsider. Some of my social attributes I was inseparable from, like being white and a women, others like age, social status, nationality was easier to hide and manipulate. Learning and understanding the skills of maneuvering researcher's identity opens possibilities for acquiring diverse perspectives and enhancing the results. One of the main contributions were the differences, as it was written: “interviews are often more open when the participant feels ‘different’ in some way from the researcher (whether according to gender, ethnicity, class, etc.). Some hypotheses about why this might be so are that the interviewer is treated more like an outsider who must be educated, or because there is less suspicion or self-comparison than there is

between two ‘insiders’” (Sriram, et al., 2009: 47). Also as Jonathan Rutherford wrote “Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer” (Rutherford, 1990: 11). My self-representation as “the other” has created curiosity, especially among children, whose opinions were the most valid for my research. However the elders’ perception of “the other” was rather negative, therefore it was more crucial to build trust and gain the “insiders’” position for the positive outcome of the fieldwork. Social attributes along with cultural background and situated knowledge are inseparable part of every research conducted on a foreign ground and in unfamiliar society. These are affecting research in its’ every aspect. This relates to David Hume’s idea of knowledge coming from the experience. What local community knew or thought they knew about me was created by their previous experiences, contacts and acquaintances they have encountered in their life time, especially in the period of post-conflict aid flow. What I knew or thought I knew about the locals was mainly created by the media and articles from my previous researches. As I concluded neither local perception of my person as well as my perception of an average Sierra Leonian was the perfect image of our imagination. The actual direct interactions had verified all assumptions on both sides.

Finally, the very complex dilemma of ethical correctness cannot be overcome simply by using standard solutions. As in any other research assignment or implementation program there are certain necessary outlines to follow. Consequently, sticking strictly to created rules can set limitations which will greatly affect the final results. That is because rigid rules do not take into consideration unique circumstances and individual variances in the field.

The reason for a particular focus on the methodology part of my thesis is that it has made the biggest contribution to defining a significant problem that is being analyzed in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

RHEMA SCHOOL AND KIDS WORLDWIDE VOLUNTARY PROGRAM

1. Country's profile - conflict and its' effects

Numbers of countries, lying in the Sub-Saharan region, for over 40 years have been struggling with a combination of various problems restraining them from reaching adequate development level. When the wave of independence came through the area, people had positive attitude towards the possibilities for a bright future of their new country. Independence lead to creating a democratic system based on the ideas of countries' previous colonial power. The government was meant to create one nation out of variety of tribal groups, a set of legitimate policies regarding security, and reinforce the economic strategies for building a stable, prosperous and integrated state. The initial idea was a perfect incentive for independence movement. However, in most of the cases, it did not reach its intended aim. The majority of new African states have fallen into various conflicts based on ethnical division, or the urge for reaching power fallowed by deepening the crisis of poverty. A setback of one department of nation building was crossed by another, mutually reinforcing one another (Kapuscinski, 2001).

This was the case with Sierra Leone, a small country in West Africa. Sierra Leone has undergone 11 year long conflict between 1991 and 2002. The population of the state after the war raised to around 4.9 million people (<http://www.statistics.sl/>, 2006), with over 40% of population living in urban agglomerations (Sesay, Karama, Ngobeh, 2006). The density is based on the areas rich in diamonds and around concentrations of crops grown for export.

The determinants leading to breakout of the war in Sierra Leone were a mixture of various elements. Sierra Leone had a promising perspective for development, considering rich diamond deposits. However, weak and inefficient governance has not only diminished existing opportunities but also lead to corruption. This has significantly undermined progress of all political, economic and social institutions. It left people without strong policies guarding their

security, and furthermore protecting their businesses and opportunities for sustainable income. Years of society's dissatisfaction over bad governance and scarcity of basic resources eventually lead to launching an uprising. This unfortunately ended with a brutal conflict. In the outcome of the war, state capacity has only aggravated, leaving traumatized population insecure (source: interview with Tommy Garnett, 2009).

Another reason leading to war and in its' effect deepening the crisis was economical struggle. Just before the conflict in 1989/1990 it was estimated that 82% of the population lived below the poverty level (which is one US dollar per day) (Cheru, 2002). This data put Sierra Leone on the last place on a list of the GDP per person income. The decrease of revenue was quite significant; GDP per person fell from 330 USD in 1983 to 140 USD in 1993 ("Encyklopedia geograficzna, Afryka", 2002). 90% of states' income was generated by extraction of diamonds (Cheru, 2002). Paul Collier indicated that already 25% of income generated by natural resources significantly increases probability of conflict, especially in politically unstable country. Till the mid-eighties the country was gradually falling into a bankruptcy. Foreign debt was rising, inflation was high, and there was a serious budget deficit, additionally corruption and decrease of export lead to serious shortage of food, oil and energy. For long years Sierra Leone was becoming even more vulnerable to any illegal actions and possibilities of a coup.

After a decade of destructive war the life conditions of majority of the population has worsen even more. The government was facing a hard task of reconstructing and rehabilitating the economy, reintegrating millions of refugees, strengthening democracy and renewing public trust towards official institutions. The conflict has destroyed the infrastructure, including the road system, school buildings, and hospital centers. Business sector and most of all the basic social structure of the society were devastated. By the end of the war the average citizen was living for 38 cents (USD) per day (World Bank, 2007).

Since the peace agreement was reached in 2002, the economy in Sierra Leone has been gradually improving. The mining and agriculture are the fastest growing sectors. In the effect of plundering of the diamond areas throughout the war, in the beginning of 2002, the export of these minerals reinforced the GDP only by 0.1%. However, taking the control over the region of diamond mines by the new government should gradually increase the production; leading to higher employment and increase of GDP. Additionally agriculture is the second, main area of

focus thanks to its potential for decreasing the level of poverty in the country (interview John Kamara, Ministry of Agriculture, 2009).

Present challenges, that have been previously undertaken by DDR process, are now being carried on by multiple local and international organizations. These are helping the rebuilding processes that are meant to secure the peace and prevent future outbreaks. Rhema Preparatory School is a small local school that is contributing to educating the community which is meant to support future development.

2. School – a brief profile

Rhema Preparatory School is a nursery and a primary school for the children who are just starting their education. The school is based in Thunder Hill Community in Eastern part of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The area is considered to be the poorest part of the city with majority of population struggling to afford their children's education. Thunder Hill Community is highly populated with only 3 private schools for the whole area.

The eleven year of civil war cracked the educational system of Sierra Leone, increasing already existing national problem of high illiteracy rate, especially among women. Shortly after the main military interventions has ended, still before the official signing of peace agreement, in the year 2000 Rhema Preparatory School was established. The school is affiliated with previously established by Rev. Francis Kamara, Rhema Evangelistic Ministry. In year 2000, together with his wife Mariatu Kamara, who has been running other preparatory school since 1989 till 2000, they have started a school with only 100 pupils and 6 teachers. Currently the school is still divided into two departments, that is Nursery and Primary. Total enrollment is approximately 250 pupils and 13 staff members including the helping staff. The number of children attending is often varying, depending on the financial possibilities of paying the fees by their families.

The location of the school is in a one story building, which was previously burned down during the last January 6th 1999 invasion in Freetown. The ground floor has four rooms which are presently occupied by the Nursery department, while the upper floor had to be rebuilt as it was completely burned down. Currently there is one big area for Primary classes, which is divided into 5 parts by thin cardboard. The setting of the school building itself is on a rough hill

side area. These conditions of the school are challenges itself, for the children to get to school, as well as for the teachers to maintain order while teaching.

The Sierra Leonian educational system is divided into three levels. The first level begins with the elementary school (that includes nursery, and classes first to sixth). Further there is three year Junior Secondary School, and Senior Secondary School also for the period of three years.

There are three terms a year in the Sierra Leonian school system. The first term runs from the second week of September and ends in the second week of December, the second terms runs from the second week of January and ends in the last week of March, while the third term runs from the third week of April and ends in the second week of July.

Most schools in Sierra Leone are running on a private bases, which means there are school fees that have to be paid in amount of about 25 dollars per term. There is a very limited number of government supported schools, even for the basic level, as there are insufficient financial resources. That means schools are operating thanks to the fees that are paid by the pupils' families. Due to lack of external funds many schools have problems with buildings and usually use rented spaces. Rhema Preparatory School is one of those institutions that is on a rented building but have recently bought a plot of land and the schools' board is working on raising funds to put up a building of their own.

3. Aims & objectives

The idea to start a nursery and a primary school was implemented to provide basic education facilities for children up into conscious, reliable citizens, and simultaneously prevent future outbreaks of violence.

The schools' initiators meant to reconstruct the spirituality and the literacy in the local community after the disastrous war. Rhema Preparatory and Primary School is trying to fight down illiteracy by helping to educate more and more children that cannot afford to attend expensive preparatory schools.

The main aim of the school is to provide basic educational facilities to the children of the Upper Thunder Hill, Lookin Town (neighborhood community) and Lower Thunder Hill Communities. This intents to help develop destitute children, as well as build up relevant

attitudes, skills and values in children that will teach the individuals to be an effective and responsible citizens in the future.

4. Voluntary program

Five years ago, in 2007, the school has started a program inviting volunteers from all over the world to come as teachers. Rhema Preparatory School Voluntary projects was initiated with the help of a New Zealand organization called Kids Worldwide.

“Kids Worldwide helps to organize placements for approximately 500 international volunteers every year, who get involved in over forty children’s projects located in 17 developing countries around the world. These projects are managed by organizations registered in the country in which they work. Kids Worldwide is different from the majority of other volunteer organizations in that we are run by volunteers FOR volunteers. We do not have to recoup staff and salary costs for administration. This means that volunteers only pay for their food and accommodation to the project directors themselves, when they arrive - thus directly benefiting the project they are going to help. There is no middle man and the cost is thus very reasonable to volunteers.” (<http://www.kidsworldwide.org/index.html>, 2012). More in-detailed specifications of the process of choosing a project and stages towards project’s self-sustainability can be found on KIDS Worldwide website.

Voluntary program at Rhema Preparatory School in Freetown, Sierra Leone is meant to help overcome post-war educational crisis by providing good, basic level education through creating self-sustainable, fee-free school and more attractive education program increasing the percentage of attendance. The project mainly requires qualified teachers and nursery specialist but generally volunteers from all fields of study are welcome. „Enthusiastic, self-motivated, and patient people who have completed high school and love kids. Anyone who is broadminded and ready to live a simple lifestyle in simple surroundings. Couples as well as small groups are welcome, likewise either gender. Both long and short-term volunteers are welcomed. Teachers who will like to organize in-service training for local staff. Volunteers with medical background to work in the school clinic.” (<http://africa.kidsworldwide.org/sierrarhema.htm>, 2012). All volunteers are always encouraged to start their own programs.

The work of every volunteer is based on teaching at the school, grades one to six, in coordination with the local teachers. The subjects taught are mainly math, science, language, reading, tutorial programs, literature, history, geography, French, handwriting, computer skills. Volunteers are encouraged to give their own input and try or share their own teaching techniques. It usually takes the kids some time to get adjusted but they definitely enjoy a certain diversity in their school time. Each volunteer is additionally contributing to school by providing the children with free materials: books, pens, and medical resources in particular.

Volunteers are accommodated at their own rooms, in the house together with schools' principal (the Project Manager), her husband and their family. The house is located within the walking distance from school compound. There is no running water in the area. However, there are running taps where clean water can be fetched. The electricity also is a certain challenge, as energy supplied by the government is rather unreliable, the main source of electricity are small petrol generators. Each arriving volunteer is expected to contribute US \$400 towards his accommodation and food costs for the first month and US \$200 for subsequent months.

Up till May 2011 there have been 11 volunteers from different countries: United States, Canada, Australia, England, Poland and Hong Kong; who have been working with Rhema Preparatory in different times and for a various amount of time. Each have shared different experiences and knowledge, assisting with few other projects in the community, for example regarding the water tap connection, computer and internet facilities, and other.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

This chapter focuses on the study's conceptual approach. It specifically discusses the concept of identity, cognitive learning, knowledge production, situated knowledge, self-efficacy, and development.

1. Personal and social identity concept

The concept of identity is understood in several, slightly various ways. Generally, in psychology this term “refers to a person’s continual sense of self, based on consciousness and the personal attributes and external relations” (Rohmann, 1999: 192). Hegel has connected human identity with social activity, explaining that our consciousness of self comes from interactions with others. Here also comes the diversification for “same” and “others”, relating to self-identification through the process of contrasting own attributes with those who are perceived as different, for instance, in the matter of race or culture (Rohmann, 1999). “Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others” (Rutherford, 1998: 88)

Erik Erikson’s idea of personal identity is defined as “the integration of all the self-images and identifications we have held” (Rohman, 1999: 192). This certain integration of self-images has created a debate among theorists, saying that the self is basically a collection of identities, each having a different role to play (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Psychologists argue that identity and social identity, though often related one another, are not the same. However, in order to fully understand the concept of “self” these two ideas should be combined together. With the relation to my topic, both concepts are crucial in understanding

the processes where Sierra Leonian children are likely to look at themselves, other people and the world around them. Identity theory emphasizes group process and inter-group relations rather than role behaviour. Identity theory notes that the self is the collection of various roles each individual occupies (e.g. mother, friend, employee). Social identity theory relates to the group to which people belong (e.g. political affiliation, nationality, race), and this can provide their members a definition who they are (Desrochers, 2002).

Identity is a very broad concept and could be related to various issues in the field of personal attitudes and social relations. That is why I have limited my scope of interest to the identity that is related to the idea of self-perception, aspirations, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, I have related these to the ability to imagine development and aspire to a better future.

Self-perception, as a “sense of self”, was explained by Daryl Bem (1972). He wrote that when the “individuals come to ‘know’ their own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own behavior and/or circumstances in which this behavior occurs. Thus, to the extent that internal cues are weak, ambiguous, or uninterpretable, the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer, an observer who must necessarily rely upon those same external cues to infer the individual’s inner states” (Bem, 1972: 2). Every child in the beginning of his development is surrounded by other members of the family, or community, who are the ones identifying and labeling either objects, persons, behaviors, and actions. That is meant to teach the child to distinguish between the items and events that are a part of their everyday life.

The same procedure occurs when children at a certain age understand themselves, who they are, and the structural relationships in the society. This process, as explained by Erikson (in Allen and Marotz, 2003), is a fourth stage of psychosocial development. That is psychosocial competence crisis between industry and inferiority. It is a stage at the progression of children aged 7-13, which are elementary school years. This phase is critical for the development of self-confidence leading further to making successful changes in the future. Children at this age become more aware of themselves as individuals (Allen and Marotz, 2003), that also means being aware of their role in the society. Erikson believed that if any of the identity crisis stages are not being ended successfully then it disturbs the next stages and interrupts the proper growth. That can affect people’s personality, social skills, social integration and a social and economic

status. Erikson mentioned that one of the main problems emerging from the failure of identity formation could create so called “refusers”. “Refusers typically develop a series of defense with which to ‘refuse’ entry into adulthood” (Cote and Levine, 2002: 3). This behaviour leads to some kind of dependency on someone or something else. It is said that this attitude was the effect of giving little structure and encouragement regarding engagement with social environments during childhood period. With the regard to Thunder Hill, there are many community members in the age 15-30 that are unemployed and unable to find a livelihood form. They are one of the main groups relying on the sponsorship of western volunteers. Their behaviours set example to the youngest members of the community.

The way people understand themselves and perceive themselves is strictly dependent on the context, on the particular place or time we are at, or people we are relating to. Whether it is a social or personal identity, “the content we generate depends on some comparative reference, and this can result in different self-descriptors coming to mind, depending on the context.” (Baron, et al. 2006: 173). The comparison could be intragroup (where judgments are result of comparison between individuals who are members of the same group) or intergroup (where judgments are result from comparison between our group and another group). This reflects in identification regarding for example race or gender, which were one of the most influential identity factors in my study. “Features of the context can make one aspect of the self highly distinctive, with that aspect of identity forming the basis of self-perception.” (Baron, et al. 2006: 177). Being the only white person in the region has certainly made me more distinctive.

Self-perception also comes from the way we are treated by others. This can influence people’s self-esteem, which is the individual’s overall attitude towards the self (Baron, et al. 2006). The self-evaluations of some kids were affected by the classical conditioning procedures (which is a basic form of learning, further explained in social learning) used during social learning under the influence of volunteers.

Knowing the “self” can also come from social comparison, because all human judgment is relative to some comparison standard. How we think about and feel about ourselves depends on the standard of comparison we use (Baron, et al. 2006). Furthermore, this comparison can be downward and upward. Downward social comparison relates to other who does less well than the self, as upward is a comparison to other who does better than the self. These concepts help

explaining how did the children and locals perceive themselves in the relation to white westerners.

Identity is embedded in local cultures. This is to say that “it is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty.” (Appadurai, 2004: 59). The formulation of aspirations is partially based on cultural background. It is also a matter of social situated learning and most of all the economic and educational level of the community, being responsible for possibilities, knowledge about the possibilities and the will to take some actions. In the case of Sierra Leone additional factor is the war that affected cultural changes in the society. Additionally, it destroyed country’s economics, limited the access to education, and made communities dependent on foreign aid. That furthermore has significantly affected the capacity to aspire.

2. Social cognitive learning

George Herbert Mead, who was the precursor of modern socialization theory, first noticed that human self, arises in the process of social interaction, especially through symbolic interaction, such as linguistic communication. “As humans, we have unique capacity to create shared meanings, and to bring those meanings to life in social relationship. Mead placed a heavy emphasis on childhood socialization as the source of adult personality” (Fraser, et al., 2001: 28). The outcomes of socialization processes also depend on the frequency of interactions. In Rhema school there constantly were some volunteers for the last 5 years, every day assisting children with their day to day activities.

Social learning means that people learn from one another through observation of other behaviors, attitudes and their outcomes. This leads to imitating and modeling those behaviors. Bandura (1977) says that from observing others an individual forms an idea of how to behave in order to reach various goals. He specifically writes that “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new

behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1977: 22).

The effective modeling can be achieved under four conditions, and they are: attention to certain characteristics, distinctiveness, affective valence, functional value; retention, that is remembering certain images, behaviors; reproduction, which is being able to reproduce previously acknowledged behavior, image; motivation, which is finding a good reason to imitate.

Bandura's theory describes how children and adults operate cognitively on their social experiences and how these cognitive operations influence their behavior and development (Grusec, 1992). A person's behavior is not only the response to a certain incident but it is also the attempt to understand and adapt to very complex social relations (Rohmann, 1999). My aim thus is to use Bandura's model to explain the learning process of an average Rhema School student, who comes from a war torn country and has a potential to bring a positive development to his/her community and country in the future. The social experience involves being raised in a post-conflict nation by war-torn society. The new growing generation, as well as people raised and changed by war, both were undermined by foreign aid. That is, the tendencies to become dependent on "white westerner's" effort in assisting a war-torn country and its citizens in the development process.

According to Bandura's theory individuals are abstracting and integrating information encountered through various social experiences. For example being exposed to models, verbal discussions, or discipline encounters. These abstractions and integrations help people give mental representation of their environments and themselves in terms of certain important classes of cognitions. This include response-outcome expectancies, perceptions of self-efficacy, and standards for evaluative self-reactions. It is believed these conditions are affecting how people respond to environmental stimuli and also the kind of environments people seek out for themselves (Grusec, 1992). The way children are responding to new volunteers is the effect of previously acquired experiences with other westerners who were taking part in the Rhema voluntary program.

Bandura describes social cognitive theory in the context of reciprocal determinism, meaning the acknowledgement of interrelation between the individual, the environment, and behavior. Bandura explains all these three factors are constantly interacting, affecting one another (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Through the experiences people gain competencies, self-efficacy

beliefs, and self-regulatory capacities, which in turn determines the future experience of the same individual. For a young Sierra Leonian generation who is just gaining new experiences and start following certain role models, the interaction with the environment is just the next step in shaping their identities and life choices.

The model of social cognitive learning involves some more important factors. This includes: “vicarious reinforcement (modeling, imitation, identification), symbolic activities (language and gestures), forethought activity (cognitive anticipation of consequences), self-regulatory capabilities (self-evaluation), self-efficacy (confidence), and self-reinforcement” (Bandura, as in Malone, 2002: 10). These factors will help explain the processes of personality building.

Social learning is a process shaping or changing our attitudes, which are our evaluations of various aspects of the social world. The way we learn and develop our attitudes towards our surrounding is not only based on observational learning but also on classical and subliminal conditioning, instrumental conditioning and through social comparison (Baron, et al., 2006). Classical conditioning appears when one stimulus, which is initially neutral, gains the capacity to evoke reactions through repeated pairing with another stimulus. That means, one stimulus becomes a signal for the occurrence of the other. This stimulus may be noticed or it could also appear in the absence of conscious awareness, then we are talking about subliminal conditioning. The way people in Thunder Hill were approaching volunteers gave the children stimulus to shape their attitude towards the westerners. In additional instrumental conditioning states that children easily learn which views are seen as “correct” among the people who they identify with. “Behaviours that are followed by positive outcomes are strengthened and tend to be repeated, whereas behaviours that are fallowed by negative outcomes are weakened or decrease in their likelihood.” (Baron, et al., 2006: 130). And also social comparison, as mentioned before, regards learning, building attitudes based on social information, and in connection with the desire to be similar to people we like or identify with. These forms of social learning help explaining the process of learning that children of Rhema school went through.

2.1. Situated knowledge through social learning

Knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something. It applies to facts or ideas acquired through study, observation, investigation, or experience. Since Donna Haraway's theory of "situated knowledge", the idea of knowledge being embedded in culture and social life is very significant, particularly in the area of cultural and social research and analysis. Previously studied experiences have made clear that "production of knowledge is a part of, and not separate from, the prevailing social relations and ideologies in research communities and society in general" (Engelstad and Gerrard, 2005: 2).

Situated knowledge takes under consideration dialogues, conversations, relation circumstances between different communities, assuming that these interactions are not only possible but most of all they are productive, stimulating and inspiring, in the effect leading to better knowledge production. Haraway's fundamental conclusion was that "the production of scientific knowledge is not separate from the social and cultural contexts in which that knowledge is produced." (Engelstad, Gerrard, 2005: 2)

Healey supplements Haraway's concept with his communicative approach to knowledge production writing, "that knowledge is not merely a preformulated store of systematized understanding but is specifically created anew in our communications through exchanging perceptions and understandings and through drawing on the stock of life experience and previously consolidated cultural and moral knowledge." (Healey, 1993: 241, as in Young, 2008). Communicating groups may operate within different "systems of meaning", which means that "we see things differently because words, phrases, expressions, objects, are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference." Diverse frames of references between volunteers and children has made it often interesting as well as challenging while communicating on daily bases. Healey's concept will enrich the understanding of how children's knowledge about the external - foreign world has been influenced, changed by the westerners.

In my study, the matter of situated knowledge is significant at every level. My personal background has affected the people in the study area, influencing the change of their behavior. It affected our relationship and communication process.

The community and volunteers were involved in knowledge production, which had capacity to shape the school children's identities, and their diverse social relationships. In this

regard, Arjun Appadurai (2004) writes that the individual has no self, outside a social setting or situated knowledge system. Individuals in their everyday activities may express aspirations but they are neither owned or produced individually. They come from the broad cultural system and, in the mold of situated knowledge, they are linked to the context of social action.

2.2. The use of proxy agency

Bandura through his concept of self-efficacy explained how people come to self-realization while in the process of fulfilling their goals. He presented self-efficacy as a part of the three modes of agency distinguished by social cognitive theory, and these are: direct personal agency; proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes; and collective agency exercised through group action. In personal agency exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear directly on themselves and their environment in managing their lives (Bandura, social cognitive theory in cultural context). Bandura further explains that sometimes personal agency is not enough and that is when people look for proxy agency, someone who has bigger possibilities and power. Sometimes also the effort is socially interdependent, the goal can be achieved only through a cooperative action of the whole community. Successful functioning requires blend of these different modes of agency. However, relative contribution of individual, proxy, and collective modes may vary cross-culturally. But all of these agentic modes need to be enlisted to make it through the day, regardless of the culture (Bandura, 1995).

The concept of agency appears while discussing how the children were under the effect of social learning through the elders in the community. In the outcome children have learned the use of proxy agency. It was through observation of elders' behaviours who realized the potentiality of benefits from the volunteers.

3. Development and imagining development – planning development

The idea of development is at the core of this thesis. Development is meant to be the final goal for the youngest Sierra Leonian generation. But what does development mean for any of the actors taking part in the reconstruction process of war-torn Sierra Leone? In the contemporary

globalized world, for most European-American aid workers, development simply means “catching up” with the West, and it is the West that is “being appropriated here as a symbolic boundary marker or a cultural identity, which offers a standard for evaluating other non-Western societies.” (Cohen, 1993 in Oware, 2005: 108). “Catching up” with the Western world is for example a goal for less developed nations, such as Poland in Eastern Europe. Poland is driven by the will to escape from the post-communist economic and social backwardness. Similarly African countries are driven by the desire to abandon their extreme poverty and dependency, and live according to western standards. However, African nations seem to be facing bigger cultural gaps. That is while interacting, as Eade (2002) wrote: “this palpably harmless ‘catching up’ process implicitly enjoins the developing societies to purge themselves of their traditional practices, ideas, heritage, values, meaning and identity; as they could fetter the development process – ‘progress’ and ‘modernization’ (Sardar, 2002, in Oware, 2005: 108). Thunder Hill, having limited access to globalization tools in the form of media are mainly influenced by a small number of white aid workers. Therefore, they have their culture much stronger embedded in their everyday life, and in bigger opposition to western image of development.

Development has many faces and it is hard to find one particular theory regarding it. It has been divided according to a field of study and approach. The development I am interested in is economic and social development leading to sustainable development of Thunder Hill Community with the regard of the future prosperity of this community as well as the whole nation. Economic development is understood as the increase of living standard of nation’s population, meaning the improvement of their quality of life with the regard to economic, political and social well-being, (<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~alandear/glossary/e.html#EconomicDevelopment>, 2012). Social change in this context is in reciprocal interaction with economic development, and it refers to a change in nature, social behaviours and social relations of the society. The idea of development initiates a change in societies’ aspirations and behaviours, as well as this social change reinforces economic growth. Jonathan Crush, who studied the concept and practicality of development, wrote that, “those defined in development discourse as the subjects of development are also active agents who contest, resist and divert the will of the developer in greater or lesser ways.” (Crush, 2003: 22) Barbara Heron also quotes Young who “has pointed out that the concept of development

does not confine itself to economic change, but focuses as well on social transformation, so that potentially ‘the whole fabric of social life is subject to control’.” (Heron, 2007: 12)

The concept of development itself does not really bring anything positive if it is not properly understood, adequately integrated with the culture and its’ aspirations, and persistent actions are undertaken. What seems to be at the core of every positive change is imagination and action. As Jonathan Crush has mentioned development gives this power – the power to imagine a new “better” world. However, it is in culture and social relations then to transform this power of imagination into the actual positive reaction. Because “Culture, as part of the tool-kit of development, puts the spotlight on people’s aspirations, innovations and adaptations in a given space and time.” (Oware, 2005: 104).

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents two main actors taking part in my study. That is the volunteers, who are the individuals taking part in an aid program, and the Rhema school children, who are the receivers of western help. The interactions between these two groups form the basis of the discussion of the changes in behaviours, influences in the way of thinking, and perceiving the world around.

For the purpose of the present analysis I have prepared a visual representation of the theoretical concepts vis-a-vis the particular data sets. Each concept itself can already create a separate theme for discussion. However, I have been trying to connect few relevant concepts in order to present how these concepts together are affecting the idea of possible future development in the eastern part of Freetown. I have been particularly focusing on the relations of western volunteers and average Sierra Leonian children at one of the local schools. These relations are directed and dependent on few main factors, such as identity. However, identity seems to be influenced by external factors in the form of social interaction with “outsiders” (foreigners, Africans / white westerners). Social learning that has been in progress at Rhema school, especially since the beginning of the volunteer program. Furthermore, knowledge acquired through life experiences reflects in self-efficacy. That is, self-realization to what extent and in what field do we have influence on our everyday life. Then the final step is development that has been a goal for voluntary program, which started at Rhema school in 2007. The interaction of the two completely different worldview is believed to affect one another to the extent that it has been creating greater misunderstandings.

I believe that the process of self-realization is very individualized in western societies. Individualities, who focus only on themselves and are depended only on themselves, realize more easily what is their own role in deciding what direction their life is heading towards. On the other hand in Sierra Leonian society I have noticed rather a collectivity, where the individuals

attain their self-realization through the communications with other members of their own community. These cultural differences were also similarly described by Barbara Heron (2007) in her book about Third World development. Both these, individuals or collective communities undergo very different processes of constructing societies and in the effect produce diverse personalities. Some effects of the clash of these differences I would like to describe below.

In the figure underneath I have put the complexity of the sociological processes affecting psychological identity “production” and re-shapement with the relation to future desired development. I will be using this graphical presentation for my analysis in order to bring clearer visualization.

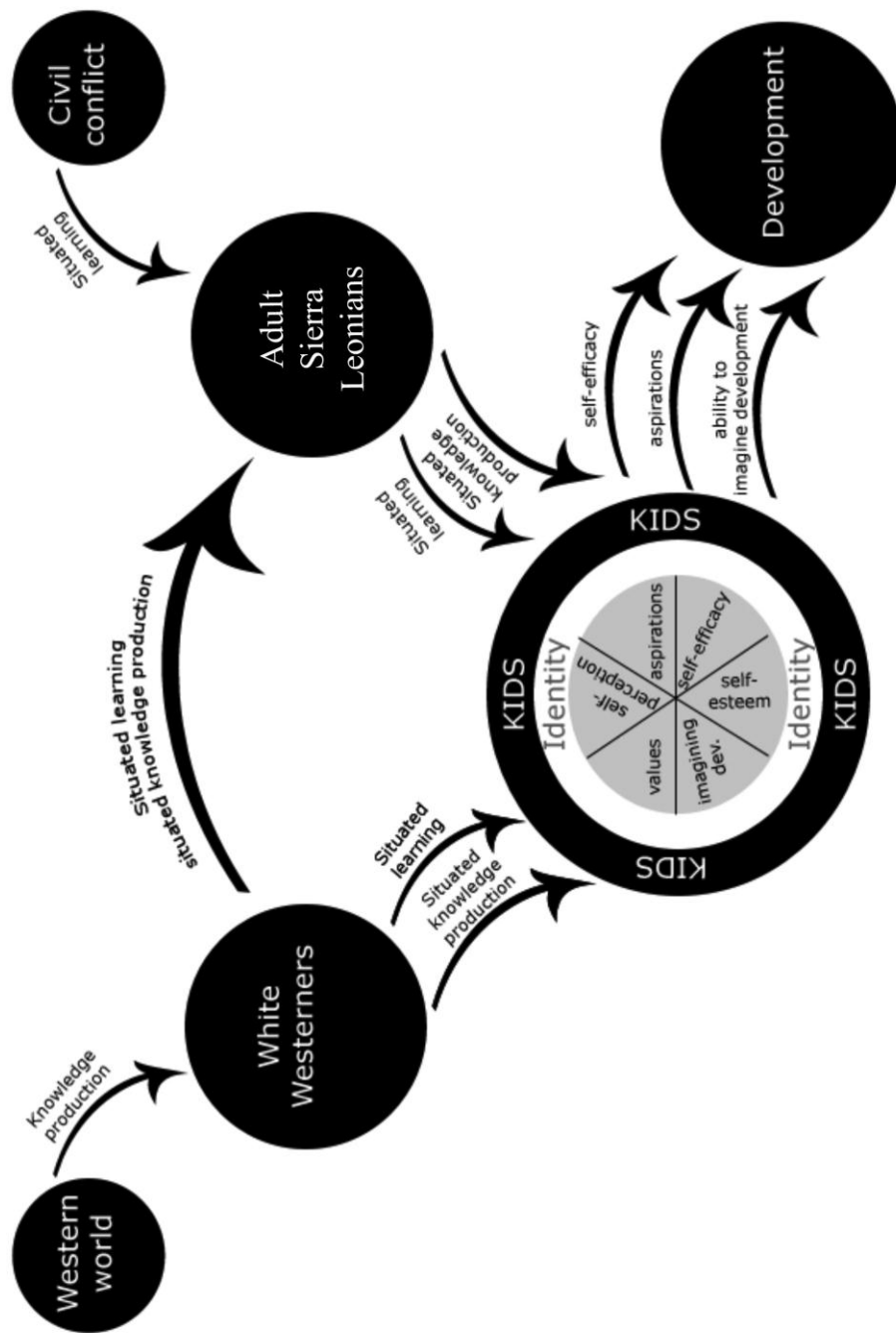


Figure 1. Volunteers and Rhema students

1. Who am I? Volunteer versus Rhema students

In my study identity is the collection of self-perception, values, aspirations, self-esteem (self-confidence), self-efficacy. Since I am focused on these qualities affecting development, I also consider the ability to imagine development as part of aspirations belonging to child's identity. Identity as a whole is described in this part of the chapter. Further parts focus on each quality separately.

The study analyzes the mutual influences volunteers and Rhema students have on each other. Therefore, I will start from profiling volunteers that took part in this particular program undertaken at Thunder Hill community. Till the time of my research there has been 11 volunteers.

Table 1. Background of Rhema School Volunteers

Volunteers*	Country	Background
James	USA	Student
Nick	USA	Student
Damien	Canada	Teacher
Michael	Australia	Student
Elizabeth	England	retired, NGO worker
Beata	Poland	Student
Caroline	Canada	Student
Jake	USA	Student
Emily	USA	Student
Charles	Hongkong	Lawyer
Jonathan	England	artist - theater

Source: Fieldwork, 2010

* Changed names to make it relatively impossible to identify the informants

All the volunteers are coming from quite developed countries, where there is a bigger sense of individuality. Despite the age, all the characters are independent and self-sustainable. The youngest volunteers were Emily and Michael, both 20 years old, both students willing to travel to remote parts of the world to gain personal experience. Caroline, 25 at the time of volunteering is also a student in peace and conflict studies, working for her own support. Damien is a teacher supporting various development programs worldwide, each year spending few months with projects in various parts of the world. Elizabeth, currently retired, has also extensive experience working with private NGO supporting school in Ghana. The last volunteer I have met, while conducting second research, was Jonathan, who is working at a theatre in London, however, took a break to devote his time for Thunder Hill community development through art.

I have personally experienced that self-perception of the volunteers has been changing depending on the context of relating with others. For volunteers sense of identity was more individual when there was only one volunteer at the time (which also meant, there was only one white person in the area). However, as soon as there was two westerners at the same time, the self-perception was more collective. During the time of my stay at Rhema, I have worked with Elizabeth in the beginning, and with Caroline right before I left. I have also spent two months working by myself. From my observations, as well as from interviews with Elizabeth and Caroline, I have noticed that sense of identity was stronger when there was another person sharing similar worldview. While working by myself, I have put much effort to adjusting to the society, in order not to disregard any local rules or customs. Any kind of behaviour that was an aberration from local's mindset was regarded as an offense. The possibilities of acting more freely with our personal values and ideas was very limited. Which we have noticed regarding, for example, being active at the church. Not attending Sunday mass was very often questioned, and expressing opinions about different points of views on religion was literally mocked. However, the sense of personal opinions was much stronger when living with another person with similar ideas or greater tolerance.

On the opposite side of this particular social experience are Rhema students.

Tabel 2. Background of Rhema students

Name*	Age	Family members	Parents background
Estella	11	only child	parents killed during war; raised by pastor's family
Suzi	9	only child	mother lives in the country; sent to Freetown to get education
Bethany	10	2 siblings	parents unemployed; stays with pastor and his family
Zainab	11	only child	mother trades; father is dead; living with their cousins
Fatmata	11	3 siblings	father is university teacher; mother is a housewife
Jonah	10	only child	mother is a nurse; father a pastor living in Belgium
Ishmael	11	7 siblings	father is a carpenter; mother housewife; 4 kids are in school
Mariatu	11	4 siblings	4 cousins raised by grandma who is a petty trader
Suzanna	8	3 siblings	father trades; mother sells food products
Hassan	11	2 siblings	mother trades; father is a policeman

Source: Fieldwork, 2010

* Changed names to make it relatively impossible to identify the informants

Who is an average Rhema student then? All the kids come from different families. There are kids who are the only child in the family, they are kids coming from large families, kids with no parents, and kids who even though they have parents they were sent to Freetown to extended families, so they could get a proper education. Most of the parents are working in some kinds of trade, as trade is the most common source of income in this particular part of Freetown. All the parents are concerned with their children's education and are putting extra effort to make sure

their kids attend school on regular basis. Kids are the representation of their parents. Most of them wants to be like their parents when they grow up. They want to work in the same profession that their parents do, such is the case for example with Hassan, who also wants to be a policeman. Kids of the parents that are more educated and more knowledgeable about the world have much greater aspirations and are doing much better at school. This is particularly the case with Jonah, whose father lives in Belgium, and Fatmata, whose father is an university teacher. Both those kids have greater imagination of the world outside Thunder Hill and even outside Sierra Leone. They have greater knowledge about what realistic they can actually do in life. This refers not only to the professional but also possibility of traveling, exploring different parts of the world, and getting to know people from different cultures. All the kids are very curious about all the volunteers, their behaviours, their looks and way of being. However, some kids have a slightly different approach, depending on whether their families are very poor, or whether they are less or more educated, or knowledgeable about the volunteer program at Rhema.

Asking an average primary school Sierra Leonian any questions related to their identity was like asking who is a black person. Identity is always affiliated with race and a larger community they are coming from. The main reason for that answering pattern was that the questions were directed by a white person. Kids' judgments about the self-perception were based on intergroup comparison, that is comparison between "us" black and "them" white.

Here also appears the first sign of situated knowledge. Meaning the researcher is affecting the research process itself by ether their looks, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and previous knowledge production. During various parts of my participatory observations and interviews I noticed a different way of giving answers. This was connected to different behaviours, differently used language and expressions, with the relation to me as a researcher or in contacts with another member of local community. This was particularly noticed while interviewing the parents. It was very dependent on the level of education, previous interactions with white westerners, as well as capability of speaking English. Well educated parents (father teaching at the university, mother finished secondary school and currently is a housewife) of Fatmata, who is attending to grade 6th, had very friendly attitude, and were glad to have a conversation with me. They admitted the importance of education and considered Rhema school the best in the area, and the voluntary program open minding for the kids. Mariatu's grandma, who is taking care of her and 4 of her other cousins, is very skeptic about white volunteers in the area. From her

experience there has been much foreign aid promised but there are no real outcomes for herself or her family. She seemed very bitter about lack of improvement that has been talked about since the end of the conflict. The father of Ishmael, who is a hard working carpenter and has 8 kids all together, does not speak English. Despite having no education he has been working hard all his life to provide his kids with the opportunities that he never had. He realizes the importance of education for the future of his kids and his country. He has not shown much interest with the fact the school has volunteering program as he did not expect any profits from it whatsoever.

Who is Sierra Leonian participant of Rhema school then, considering their personality is changing depending on the context? Here comes Hegel's idea of human identity being associated with social activity and self-realization through interaction with significant "other". This "othering" is obviously based on racial and cultural differences. Every child, as well as every person in the community, expressed their understanding of the differences between us, which was based mainly on the color of the skin. I will not deny, I personally have noticed the same differences, which is also based on my background. I was born and raised in racially and culturally homogeneous society. Therefore, taking under consideration racial, external appearances we have both come to self-realization of our race through interactions.

The differences started appearing while discussing the perception of behaviors and traits and skills affiliated with our races. Bethany, who was 10 years old at the time of the interviews (which was rather a random conversation, more than strictly formulated interview), while talking about the comparison of education system in Africa and "my world" (my country), with great confidence she has expressed her opinion about the reason why she (and all black Sierra Leonians, Africans) have limited will to spend more time on studying. She said: "you are white, we are black, you are smart and you learn fast, we learn very slowly." What Bethany was implying all along was a simplified conclusion "you white are smart, we black are stupid". Isn't that self-justification for all setbacks in the first place? I carried on the conversation by saying "what about Obama, is he stupid as well? He is also black. How could he become a president of the most powerful country in the world if he was stupid?" At this time Bethany showed no reaction and I have noticed a sign of shame and confusion. I have carried on my statement, saying that he was working hard, studying as much as possible, just as every white person have in order to achieve success. Bethany's idea of associating certain skills with the race was not the only example I have encountered. Similar attitude was shown while talking to older generations,

for example Jack (25 year old IT graduate), has always emphasized that no white person is as strong as any black in Sierra Leone. The reason for that is because they were raised in harsh conditions, they were forced to bring their own water to drink and wash, they had to wash the clothes with their hands, etc.. While white kids do not have to do anything, which makes them much weaker. Bethany's attitude is a good example of upward comparison. She derives her self-perception by comparing the white being smarter with her - black girl being less educated. On the other hand Jack shows an example of downward comparison, where blacks are stronger and whites are physically unable to work hard. This generalization is a sign of differentiating based only on racial identification, disregarding any cultural, historical, personal background. Therefore, with the relation to a white person – researcher – volunteer, an average Sierra Leonian child considers himself/herself very physically strong but most often educationally, even mentally limited. I believe these limitations are not connected to lack of access to education or even less developed educational system but it is mainly dependent on personal attitudes.

The case of Bethany and Jack show not only what do average Sierra Leonians think about themselves but also what their idea of the westerners is. Both of them are representing most of the members of their society. Other kids at school have similar idea about the white westerners being more educated. This idea partially might have been imposed on them also by the teachers, who to some extent consider the volunteers an authority regarding some aspects of development, such as organization of the school activities, or possibilities for school's development. Who the kids think they are and who the kids think the volunteers are, are strictly related to every day interactions kids are having with volunteers. The self-realization comes from the comparison that kids are making with the volunteers and their way of behaving.

Changing scope of the approach and observing children's behaviors and attitudes in interactions with members of their own community gives completely different results. Clearly there are differences in behaviors dependent on gender. Girls are considered incapable of playing sports, boys are considered incapable of cooking (in many cases, not all of them), etc. The idea of identities is changing. There is no more black or white, there are girls or boys, there are Mende and Temne, members of Thunder Hill Community or members of Lookin Town Community; members of Rhema School or members of other local schools. Self-identification has changed because the context has changed. This confirms Erik Erikson's idea of personal identity being the actual integration of various self-images, collection of identities, each having

different role to play depending on social activity, people they interact with and personal goals. Girls were hardly ever allowed to play any sports and if they have, they were usually mocked by boys. Also the interest of the girls with playing any sports was not really that big in the first place. It seemed as it was assumed it is not for girls. This has slightly changed when I personally have challenged some girls to participate in sport activities with me, also playing against boys. I have often played football with the boys on the playing field during school breaks which in the beginning was a bit of a surprise for both girls and boys. This has changed over time. However, it is one of the biggest example how boys and girls are having certain roles attached.

Girls on the other hand are destined to become housewives, therefore they are prepared to work more around the households. From interviews with the locals at Thunder Hill and during the trip to Koidu district I have been told that only Freetown is quite liberal enough to allow large percentage of girls acquire proper education. In other parts of the country girls are meant to be married in very early age. This is the reason many kids (girls in particular) are sent to their relatives in Freetown in order to provide them good education. This is the case with Suzi, age 9, and Bethany, age 10, who have been raised by pastor and his wife for the last few years. I intend to show that in Sierra Leonian setting girls and boys have certain roles assigned. However, especially in regions where there are greater number of westerners the change of these roles is being influenced. Girls are shown they can get better education that they can participate in any activities that boys do. Boys on the other hand are shown that girls can be as good in all the activities as boys are.

Daryl Bem has explained “self-perception” being affected or shaped by the surrounding individuals, and the whole communities. In the case of Rhema students a major role in shaping this self-perception had western, white volunteers. Especially, regarding the fact that volunteers have been teaching at the school kids age 7-13, which according to Erikson is the age for kids to undergo fourth stage of personal development. This is the stage when children are becoming self-aware and come to realization about their role in the society, and their role in affecting change in the future. Kids during that time are very receptive. Observing the relations of volunteers with adults and the benefits that come from it makes them realize how easy it is to rely on someone else. This reduces aspirations. Suzi, Bethany and Estella were told by their guardians that as long as they have good grades and they will work hard, they will be sponsored to take part in a school field trip. However, later on when they have noticed we became friends

with the girls, the guardians have induced the girls to ask me for sponsoring their trip. Their aspiration turned from working hard and studying to working hard to convince a volunteer to help them achieve their goal. This is a good example of how the presence of volunteers has affected kids' behaviours and aspirations.

War and post-war idea of development has created many so called "refusers", as Erikson called them. "Refusers" are youth or young adults who emerge from certain failure of identity formation stage. Their defense system stops them from entering adult life. There is a large number of people aged 20-35 in Thunder Hill who showed little effort for taking responsibilities for themselves. I believe with some individuals this is one of the effects of foreign aid and the way parents have limited the encouragement to engage in a post-war development. Good example for that is Hassan, 33 years old, who still lives with his family, and has no work or idea of what he can do for himself. Furthermore, one of the volunteers, who came from Hongkong has started an organization and passed it on to Hassan to manage. However, Hassan had either no experience or idea what the organization should be doing in the first place, but as long as he received money every month for making some efforts, he did not really put much effort in the outcome of his work. His example clearly shows how unrealistic, and unplanned aid or any external help can literally undermine any sense of real effort in the local communities. His example also matters with the relation to local kids from Rhema school because he is a realistic representation of how white westerners can change people's life, whether they have any aspirations or not.

Enormous part of how the children look at themselves is the way they are treated, for example by the teachers, parents, volunteers or members of the community. This is particularly affecting part of identities responsible for self-esteem. Teachers are clearly underlining, in front of the whole class, those students that are the best, as well as those students that are not as good. There is a lack of any motivational approach. The same attitude pertains in the family and community setting. This behaviour helps those kids with good grades maintain their standards, but it also keeps those kids with bad grades at their studying level. However, as I have noticed while I was volunteering few kids have changed their attitude towards learning when they felt they were more acknowledged. This was the case with Estella mainly, who was always told by the teachers, guardians and surrounding that she is a slow learner. After few weeks working with her, I have noticed a great improvement and interest with her reading and writing skills. As soon

as she was challenged and treated as she was as smart as the rest of her classmates, her grades improved.

2. Learning process – how we became who we are?

The figure above illustrates how children's behaviors, actions, values are being modified by the process of social learning. This social learning has taken place with the participation of white volunteers who have been influencing post-conflict generations both indirectly, through adult Sierra Leonians, as well as through direct interactions, because of continuous presence and undertaken aid work in this region. School kids, born after the conflict, have been taught that white color of the skin is to be affiliated with aid. This still is being confirmed by current, direct interactions with aid workers at Rhema school. This particular school and this particular region make a good, interesting study case, because this shift in kids mentality can be noticeably recognized. Thunder Hill Community is based in the East of Freetown, considered to be the poorest area of the capital city. All NGOs are based in the western part of the city, therefore there is very unlikely to see a white person anywhere nearby. During my 3 months of volunteering I have encountered only one white person in that region. Furthermore, Rhema has been accepting volunteers since 2007, which is only 5 years, and most interviewed kids can still remember the first volunteer.

Damien, a second volunteer, has mentioned that he felt a lot pressure from the elders, who expected him to bring significant development to the school. Elizabeth, from England, was a first woman volunteer, who has put more focus on supporting females. She has mentioned that while providing girls with more school materials and paying more attention to them she has gained their interest. Young, girl students has quickly learned they can get a lot of benefits from her. This attitude continued with other female volunteers in the future including myself. Kids were also very often encouraged by adults to make friends with volunteers or literally ask them for help. This was a part of social learning based on classical conditioning, where kids were learning from the elders, who are treating white westerners as people with more power, more money, etc. It was considered kids made greater impression on volunteers, females in particular. And they were meant to convince them to bring more aid in the form of paying school fees, buying school materials, clothes, or even bringing kids to volunteers' home countries.

The length of time the volunteers spent at Rhema varied from few weeks up till the longest that was 9 months. However, whether the volunteering took 3 weeks or 3 months all the kids were able to list previous westerners, remembering the most those that seemed to make the greatest impact on each person. Many children seemed to have their favorites and were often mentioning them long after they were gone.

Each volunteer's main assignment was to teach, English, Social Sciences, or Math. This required daily interactions with the pupils. In addition each volunteer spent additional time after school hours to make connections with the locals by organizing sport events, computer classes, group meetings with local youth, or organizing field trips to the city or the beach. This many, various social activities have created bonds between volunteers and the locals, mainly the children. The volunteers were teaching constantly at Rhema since 2007. That means the frequency of contacts with the kids was quite big. In the effect, the social learning has been even more effective.

On all the levels of social situated learning, that kids go through, there is the attention that is caught through the acknowledgement of "the other". Being white is already the main factor. I have already mentioned the situations when the color of the skin influenced many contacts. This social comparison has not only given the children sense of their racial identity, but it also taught them how to treat people coming from other societies. Additional cultural differences, behaviour, and dressing style are another factors drawing attention. It seems harder for most westerners to get used to the weather conditions which effects in different, lighter, more comfortable for us way of dressing. It varies, especially while teaching. All the teachers are well dressed, often in suits and dress shoes. Women always wear long skirts. Volunteers on the other hand are more casual, wearing shorts, t-shirts and flip-flops. This also might be the reason why often they are not treated seriously by the students. It is very challenging for volunteers to keep the class interested and focused comparing to the local teachers. However, it is hard to conclude whether it is the matter of dress code, maybe the color of the skin, cultural behaviour or different way of teaching. Also for each gender and age group there are different reasons for retention and reproduction. School has only male teachers, the only two females are taking care of the nursery. That is why women volunteers are making additional influence on both girls and boys by playing a role that no other local woman does. These reproductions of acknowledged behaviours depend on the motivation. For each individual this motivation can vary to some extent. It is always

connected to certain benefits. However, social learning is meant to teach people behaviours that will help them in reaching certain goals that they may have. Girl's motivation to copy western women is to escape the social expectations of women being uneducated, unambitious housewives. Boys are driven by curiosity which leads them to viewing woman as a bit more equal.

Social learning at Rhema school setting took place every day with every contact that westerners had with the locals, whether it was intentional or not, this continuous process has been in progress since the first volunteer.

2.1. Cultural and situational influences – Why can't we be like them?

Following the discussion about social learning I would like to supplement it with the issue of situated knowledge production. Donna Harraway put pressure on explaining the influence of knowledge production on researched environment. My figure illustrates these influences on four levels. That is with the knowledge production in volunteer's / researcher's home countries (so called "western world"); adult Sierra Leonians knowledge production through interactions with westerners; and producing knowledge by kids through contact with both elders in their community and visiting volunteers.

This part puts focus on the importance of knowledge production. It shows where do the volunteers come from and who they are. What motivates them to work in a country like Sierra Leone. It also shows who are the kids of Rhema school, how they were raised and how their personalities have been shaped through the experiences of post-war society. Furthermore, this section shows that the presence of volunteers at Rhema affected changes of behaviours and attitudes of community members and kids particularly.

Each of the volunteers has come from a different knowledge production, driven by various motivations. I am the only person coming from more homogenous society, with mainly all white Polish, with dominating catholic religion. Caroline, volunteer from Canada, has spent few years of her youth living with her family in developing countries such as Vanuatu or Saint Lucia, since her step-father was working for Doctors Without Borders. She had strong, previous experience living in remote parts of the globe. Her knowledge production was the effect of not only Canadian education system but also social interactions in diverse cultural settings. Her

motivation for volunteering and willing to study the issues of development derived from the environment she was raised at - mother being a nurse, step-father being a doctor, both working towards improving the life of people living in hard conditions. Damien and Elizabeth have been supporting many projects around the world before. Their motivation was to devote their extra time and money for people who need it more. Michael and Emily, both students, have treated it rather as a life time experience, and they were driven by curiosity. Most volunteers come from highly developed nations with sufficient resources. They have found the program at Rhema while browsing the internet. Each had previous knowledge about Sierra Leone from the media.

Rhema pupils on the other hand were growing up in the society characterized by war and post-war experiences, and foreign aid. Not many children have left outside eastern part of Freetown, unless randomly to the city market. While I was volunteering, the first time since the school was opened, the teachers have organized field trip to the beach. There are only random contacts with people outside of eastern communities, therefore kids' social experience outside of Thunder Hill is very limited. Further up the hill there are households where the youngest generation has never had any education and any previous contact with white westerners. Their knowledge is limited only to their closest neighborhoods. The clash of these diverse mindsets of volunteers and the locals is a communicational challenge for both cultures.

This clash is happening through possibility of dialogues, conversations, relation circumstances between different communities. While talking about the clash of these situated knowledge we need to consider most of all its productiveness – possibilities of being the source of inspiration for creating certain change for themselves. The interaction with Rhema kids was productive for my personal knowledge production, which helped me adjusting to the community well enough to influence local kids even more. I have noticed that, while working together with the children around the households, fetching water, as well as doing laundry, cleaning or going to the market, has made me realize the importance of wise use of the resources. At the same time it has change the attitude towards me. I have gained more trust and respect from the children as well as from the elders, which gave me more of “insiders” position. However, the main issue pertains not how this situated knowledge was productive for me but to what extent it was productive and stimulating for an average Rhema student.

The social transformation in Sierra Leone shows that enormous change in way of thinking and living is possible over short period of time. Drastic life experiences such as war has

forced society to modify and rapidly adjust to new existing situation. The material aid that came after, however, without the adequate educational training, has not produced positive, long lasting outcome. It is always easier to rely on external support sources than be responsible for our own prosperity, and this is the case in the western world as well. However, the reverse process of shifting the dependency consciousness will surely be much more complicated and very costly. In the case of Rhema kids white volunteers are enormous part of this shifting phase. Volunteers are part of new knowledge production group in which, through dialogues, consciously they intend to pass on their way of viewing the world. However, unconsciously (through external look, dress code, way of being), they send messages that are being variously interpreted by the youngest members of the society. This is all connected to gender, race, ethnicity, class or location.

Being a girl and being able to play soccer has shown both boys and girls at school that girls can also be good at sports. Example of Obama being able to win a presidency over one of the most powerful countries in the world has shown that being black does not equal being less intelligent, and being black itself does not set boundaries in achieving any kind of success. The example of three (in some way) successful, independent women in different age groups, has shown the possibility of being 50 years old and still be able to travel the world, work hard; possibility of 25 year old girl being strong enough to walk over harsh, rocky hills of Thunder Hill, not scared of exploring the region without supervision, being able to work on her own to be able to travel and pay for her own higher education, etc. The side effects are that kids are only learning things according to their frame of reference and understanding. Volunteers themselves are responsible for showing inappropriate behavior due to their lack of understanding of different culture and system in the society, or by simply disregarding these differences. Drinking beer, especially in front of the kids was considered very inappropriate and was very criticized by the elders. Not attending church was treated as an offense, and volunteers were criticized for showing a bad example to the kids. Not participating in flogging the students and protesting against it made no influence, cause of the locals' attitude that this is the only way to make pupils listen.

To some extent it is hard, partially impossible to predict which form of behaviour, way of thinking, will be accepted, and which will be rejected. Especially that this process is happening unconsciously, with no possibilities of control. However, as white volunteers interfere into

someone else's cultural values and lifestyles they should be aware of all changes they may embark, as well as all its side effects, which we are responsible to limit.

2.2. Agents of change – Who is my agent of change?

This section intends to show the influences of white volunteers and western aid on the aspirations and attitudes of Rhema kids and members of Thunder Hill community.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory is talking about self-realization about the influence people have on their life. Self-efficacy incorporates elements such as self-perception, self-confidence and aspirations. All these aspects of positive change put extreme pressure on the "self" as the main leader towards succeeding in their endeavors. Bandura has concluded that the way we reach our goals is through self-regulation. There are always multiple external influences, negatively or positively changing the course of events in people's life, but it is still dependent on each individual and her/his sense of self that has a decisive voice on the final outcome. Individuals in general are very perceptive and they are modeling the behaviors that seem to be the most effective for them in a given situation. That is how people choose their personal behaviors in the first place.

However, what are those personal behaviours? What are their aspirations? What is their level of self-realization? Sierra Leone has highly collective, community oriented population, where individualism seems to be hidden. This collectivism appears in the capital city as well as in the province. Comparably, it differs from communities in the western world, where I think there is rather individualistic approach to life and personal needs. In Thunder Hill kids, whether at school or around the households, they are raised by the whole community. Responsibility for raising kids lies not only on the teachers and parents but it is also the neighbors, people on the way to school, lady at a market or the owner of the pharmacy nearby. This is why the standards of behaviours seem to be collective standards that become integrated within internal standards simply by modeling.

What about aspirations and self-realization? According to Appadurai, in poor societies there are smaller aspirations because there are limited possibilities for a success. It also applies to uneducated societies, because there is a lack of knowledge about the possibilities (Appadurai, 2004). This was noticeable in some areas of the country, particularly rural region, where there

was very limited access to education. That is one of the main reasons why people living inland often send their kids to their families in Freetown, to provide them education, equal with better possibilities for the future. In Thunder Hill kids as well as youth had some kind of idea about what they could do in the future. They had great aspirations, however very limited level of self-realization about their personal role in achieving those goals. They were aware of their limitations to the extent that they were rather focusing on those limitations, not necessarily how to overcome them. Will, a 20-year old boy, during one of our conversation said: “people realize the potential that is in them, they are ambitious and talented but they know they have little chance for a success.” Estella, girl in grade 6th, whose family was killed during the war and since then she has been raised by pastors’ family, said she wants to be the head of the bank in the future. She wants to fix her country, so there is no more poverty and no problems with education. But since she was a kid she was told by all the members of her foster family and the surrounding that she is a slow learner or even “too stupid to learn anything”. I have personally encountered many situations when she has been told that, and she has been responding to these as she was well aware of that. Therefore all her actions, bad grades, and lack of interest with studying, has always been justified by this assessment. In both cases, Will and Estella, there is the matter of self-limitations, not ever trying to succeed, because there is preexisting assumption of failure. This is socially imposed attitude towards reality.

Great number of western aid workers in the region intensifies the sense of proxy agency, meaning creating dependence on external sources. Currently, the volunteer program in Thunder Hill seems to have effect on sustaining these assumptions. It seems like in Thunder Hill there is a reverse to American system of motivation (literally meaning no motivation). Just as in the USA kids have instilled winning, in Thunder Hill they are told in advance of their failure. This is why Americans, despite their physical or mental limitations, they are always racing to the top, to reach the success, because they believe that is where their place is. In Sierra Leone hardly anyone is even trying, because hardly anyone believes there is any point of trying, that literally it is worthless to try. Even if there are some signs of action in people whenever they are being pushed back down, it seems as they accept it as it was believed that is where their place is. Here is where the issue of agency comes.

From my participatory observations and various interviews I have concluded that, mainly through growing number of aid flow, individual contribution had significantly decreased on

account of proxy agency of westerners. The success is out of individual, and even collective reach, as it seems it is fully dependent on the right connections with much more powerful white people who can provide possibilities, unreachable otherwise (source: interview with Tommy Garnett, 2009).

To what extent or in what way volunteers at Rhema made an impact on the change of the assumptions that proxy agency is the only way out of poverty? Have they made any changes at all? It is hard to evaluate to what extent people at Thunder Hill had the preexisting presumption that every white person is rich and came there to give people money, before the volunteer program has started. However, while walking further up the hills, I have ran into households with kids who have not attended any school, most likely has rarely or even never been to the city, therefore they had no expectations, they were never asking for anything, they were only curious and surprised to see someone with different skin color. Clearly, where there are no interactions with white westerners and their aid, there is no expectations of proxy agency. On the other hand in the area around Rhema school, when I have arrived there was a great pressure on me to provide either financial or other material help to the locals. This was especially noticed from the kids, as well as from some elders. I have heard many stories about previous volunteers and what gifts they have received from them, indicating I should be giving something to people as well. Peoples' assumption that I am rich made them talk to me in the first place. Therefore all initial conversation were related to some kind of benefits. This however has changed by the time I was leaving. As soon as I have proven that I have no power whatsoever to make great changes and take people out of poverty, the relations between us became more casual, and people were more focused on asking my advice what could they improve to make their life better. I have taken part in school board meetings discussing creating computer class, which I helped organize. Furthermore we discussed possibilities of planning school or after school activities for students. The main problem was there was no continuity after I have left. New volunteers came along with more gifts and more money, only with expectations of bringing people relief.

3. What kind of development for whom?

Development is what all the members of Thunder Hill community are talking about. Education and "better life" is what each of them wants for themselves and their kids attending

Rhema school. That is what the kids themselves say that want. However, how does the kids and their parents understand development or the power of education taking a part in it? This section is talking about peoples' and kid's change of behaviours, expectations, the way they are viewing the world around them, and their role in it, which was all created by the westerners.

In the case of Rhema school and its voluntary project there is no actual, professional, effective working plan that would contain full cooperation at the level of actions as well as at planning stage. In volunteer's opinion, as Caroline mentioned, the locals were just waiting and expecting initiatives, actions to be made, as well as all the effects to be brought. Many times I have encountered questions such as "What are you going to do for our school? What are your initiatives to help local youth?" I have organized group meetings with parents in order to discuss the necessity, usefulness of adding extra computer science class for Rhema students. It seemed as parents were not particularly concerned, they were able to support the program as long as it did not require any additional fees. On the other hand school board who had appropriate resources (computers donated by Canadian schools, power generator, room space, qualified teachers) they were expecting volunteers to organize all aspects of the program. People do express they want a change, they want development in the form of higher incomes, free-public education on a good level, possibilities of employment, but all these are expected from foreign aid with limited participation of the locals. Young people are talking about wanting to live abroad, preferably in the USA. However, they have little realization how the lifestyles looks there. Two of the volunteers I have spoken to have mentioned that they encountered situations where befriended families asked if it was possible for the volunteers to take one of their kids to be educated in volunteers home country. I have received many questions from local youth asking me to sponsor them to study in my country, not even realizing where Poland is. The understanding of "our" better life is based on American movies and false conclusions made while getting to know the volunteers. I believe that western volunteers instead giving the real representation of themselves and their country, partially unconsciously, they have instilled the image of the west being a certain kind of "El Dorado", promised land, where everyone are rich and happy. Which is the effect of volunteer's self-representation.

Jonathan Crush mentioned underdevelopment limits the power to imagine new, "better" world. That is another vicious circle where inability of imagining change does not allow the change to happen, as living in poverty limits the access to developing this sphere of imagination.

From my interviews with school children and their parents I have noticed that kids whose parents were educated, traveling often or even living abroad, they had broader ideas about the world and their possibilities. Jonah, was at grade 4 when I was volunteering, his mother is a nurse, father lives in Belgium. Jonah appeared to be one of the smartest students, well above the level of sixth grade students. He appeared to be much more self-aware of his knowledge and abilities than many older pupils. This reflected in his grades and knowledge. When I had returned after a year, I found Jonah, despite his age moved two grades up and carried on education coherent to his level. His knowledge and abilities were both noticed and understood by him and his parents, therefore further actions were undertaken to meet Jonah's full potential. Unfortunately his example is very rare. The majority of parents, whether educated or not, realize the necessity of educating their kids, but in fact those who have not been at school put less pressure on an actual education. They most often see education as the final goal, not as a tool meant to be used for creating more opportunities for themselves. Realizing the importance of education is one thing, learning the use of it is another. Education, as an aspect of development, has to be correctly understood to be effective. In "The Theory and Practice of Learning" (Jarvis, et al., 2003) there is an interesting, similar example of kids learning Calculus at school but receiving really bad grades and showing they do not understand it. However, later on same kids would be out working in the market and had no problem with using math skills. Similarly, there is understanding of the importance of education in Thunder Hill community, and the education provided is sufficient enough. However, people often do not realize how to apply what they learn to reality, how to use acquired knowledge and skills to make some changes for themselves.

Furthermore, culture and social relations are meant to transform formed imagination for development into actual effective reactions. However, Sierra Leonian – Thunder Hill culture and social relations, just as have been modified by war, similarly have been reshaped by the experiences of aid and influence of westerners. Education system was also positively as well as negatively interrupted by volunteers visiting and teaching at the school. I do agree with Percy Oware, who says that identities, values, culture are driving forces of positive change (development). However in the case of devastated eastern part of Freetown this identities, values, cultures have been significantly challenged (and continuously are in the modification process) by the foreign aid and western volunteers.

All the interviewed volunteers had a slightly different idea of their work and their role in the society, each making their own impact on it. However, perceiving themselves as goodhearted people, willing to make change, inspire and create more educational opportunities to Rhemas students as well as people in the community. Different individuals however, came with diverse life experiences and knowledge. This volunteer group is rather divided into two separate groups. That is students, such as me, with the attitude of learning about new culture, various struggles existing in this part of the world, and with hope of inspiring some changes. However, lack of experience, and sufficient knowledge of the complicity of the problems in the region, have not lead to any substantial input. On the other hand there was Damien and Elizabeth who had extensive experience in work with similar programs who have put more effort into community development. Damien, during his volunteering, has led to building a running water system and improving schools building facilities. Elizabeth has been working on improving the system of running the school facility. Michael came with the initiative to stop the violence between students, which actually did work well while he was volunteering there. I have organized a computer workshop for 6th grade students as well as teachers, and local youth. All the undertaken projects have done well while the volunteers were living at Thunder Hill. However, there was definitely lack of continuity after each person has left. Which is also connected to lack of central organ controlling the progress, and lack of sufficient communication between the volunteers. This is why the water system soon enough has been destroyed. The non-violence program did not work for much longer after Michael left. And the computer class lasted only few more months after my departure.

However, did the volunteers influence any development of aspirations and self-realization in achieving people's own goals or breaking the circle of poverty and violence? Meaning shifting from proxy agency into mainly personal agency, but also collective agency. My main study case was Estella, who I have been working with on every day bases. I have interviewed previous volunteers who have also known Estella and I have been told that she has never shown much interest in education. Even though she was the oldest, she was rather quiet and avoiding contact, especially in the group when she was being pushed back and considered a slow learner. However, I have been working with a group of girls after school, reading books together and writing short stories. Estella ended up being the most motivated out of all the girls, she has been reading every day and spent extra time on studying after school. A year later when I came back

on my second research Estella was just finishing her elementary school, receiving very good grades on her final exam.

I have also organized group works and study competitions for the kids at school, noticing greater interest. Children seemed more motivated to put extra time to study. They were often coming to see me after school hours to ask for help with explaining certain issues or practice more. With the regard to aspirations about what the kids would want to do in the future it differed. Most pupils were rather thinking of working in the same profession as their parents. Girls from bigger families and both parents seemed to be less motivated to study hard as they were expecting to become housewives. Girls in smaller families, especially with only a mother, were encouraged to put more effort into their education. This was the case with Zainab, grade six, whose mother is working hard in trade, making sure she pays all the school fees to provide full education for her daughter. Zainab's mother sets a good example and she motivates her to work hard for herself.

From my observations, people in general realize they are dependent on themselves. However, among people who are talking or interacting with western volunteers on regular basis, receiving certain benefits from them, there are indications of more limited self-realization about to what extent people themselves are responsible for their own profits and development. Meaning "If I can receive something, for nothing, from someone strange, why wouldn't, couldn't I want or have more?" Aspirations in this particular situation shift to thinking of a way to convince westerners of investing in the locals instead relying on yourself. Therefore, in certain cases, where the relations with the volunteers were stronger, based on certain trust and friendship, the volunteers encouraged the children to work harder for their success. While in other cases, people only paid attention to the appearances, ending up relying on external help and making self-justifications for not putting any effort into improving their own lives.

We can also look at the development considering how did kid's and local's behaviour changed through the time spent with white volunteers. Some of the most noticeable differences were for example more rare use of the method of flogging pupils as the main motivation to pay attention. The teachers have been often criticized by the volunteers for using flogging. It has been strongly disapproved. However, most volunteers did realize they are not in their home country and they have little influence on these forms of upbringing. Most teachers however did slightly limit their methods, at least while the volunteers were present. These changes of

behaviours though were only superficial. They were applied only around the presence of volunteers. Other behaviours that were changed regarded the locals often acting like victims around volunteers in order to receive some benefits or extra attention. Also the approach towards westerners as to people superior in some way seemed very noticeable in the beginning. These behaviours though were basically triggered by the presence of volunteers. It took significant amount of time and frequent discussions straightening the mistaken assumptions that has been implanted into the society through the last few years. Certain change in the relations between boys and girls at school also changed. Boys being taught by women volunteers became more open minded to women being teachers. This also regarded playing sports. Previously girls were mocked and not allowed to participate in playing football with boys. The fact that there was a girl showing them their assumptions about all the girls being unable to play sports were incorrect, made them more open to allowing girls in the teams. However, considering the fact that the girls were not used to playing football, they had no actual skills whatsoever. This has only proved the boys that only western women are able to do it. Therefore, the assumption based on cultural education about the boundaries between girls and boys stayed rather unchanged, at least in the relations within the local society.

Especially, after the influential work of white westerners it is hard to define original Sierra Leonian identity, values or culture. People are mainly driven by motivation of survival, disregarding certain values, replacing them with practical experiences. Even the understanding of “development” itself has been changed by white visitors trying to inform the local communities and instill in them their own perspectives. White aid workers are intending to regard local contexts in development programs, just as Damien and Elizabeth, who had great experience, did. Local community in a meantime is changing their ideas about development and their personal role in it. Communities and individuals only partially are accepting foreign perspective, values, habits, ideas, and it is not always reflecting westerners’ way of being and their intentions. As I have written before, the locals are good observers, always willing to learn and take advices, but they are only accepting these aspects which are suitable for them according to their frames of reference.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

What is at stake in my elaboration is the process of development towards positive change. This transformation is a complex conjuncture of diverse elements. Whether there is a change happening in well-developed European country in the sense of adjustment to a cultural-racial diversification, or in a war torn, underdeveloped African nation exposed to “change” being imposed on them by “westerners”, there are still the same set of factors playing crucial role in it. That are: our backgrounds creating our knowledge about the world around us; the society we live in and how it teaches us how to behave, what to believe in and how to treat others; our identity being created and constantly modified by external sources in the form of media, direct but rare interactions and unrealistic stories and images of “the other world”; and our diverse understanding of what “change for the better” means.

I was focusing mainly on the change that occurred with kids being under the influence of western role models. The stages of child’s development, I have mentioned before, also include physical, mental, social and emotional growth. Up till the children reach the age of 10 is the time when it is being determined how their learning pattern develops. Their mind is the most receptive and therefore it has to be properly directed in order to reach its full potential. At this stage of internal development Rhema kids were exposed to contacts with white westerners teaching at school. It is difficult to prove kids’ personality changes that were strictly caused by the volunteers. Based on some interviews with first volunteers some shift in behavior was noticed. Children at the beginning of the program implementation were rather more intrigued and curious about person who had completely different external look and personal behavior. However, with more volunteers coming, children started to understand the possibilities and benefits connected to the volunteers. That was highly encouraged and taught by the older generation who, from the start, seemed to realize the potential profits.

What is the main problem then at this stage of development? Children who are meant to become the educated elite of the country in order to create better opportunities for themselves and their countrymen in the future are in fact being taught they have no possibilities without western supervision and help. To some extent this is taught subconsciously. We (aid workers) do not go to Africa with the intention of spoiling the society and making them dependent. That however is the outcome in most of the cases.

Then what are the intentions of western volunteers? What is the reason for the constant drive of developed countries to be Third World “heroes”?

Individuals coming from a country of economical wealth are being fed with pictures of devastation next to an image of the great impact they can have on bringing positive change. This in effect is stimulating a sense of guilt which is being minimized by providing help to those that grew up in less propitious conditions. However, this help is often understood by intentional or unintended enforcement of “our” way of living and “our” perception of the world. Which in fact is not bringing any positive change but it only feeds our personal ego. It makes “us” feel better that “we” are doing something good for someone else.

However, to what extent are we wrong trying to create certain equality and bring tolerance and peace in the world? Maybe it is a matter of shifting from certain collectivity to individuality and individual world view that is going to create more peaceful society. Maybe that is what westerners in place as Sierra Leone were meant to show to people. Independence means not only being free from political regime, it means being free from external influences, being a fully self-aware individual. We should not intend to show Sierra Leonians that there are no differences between our countries, races and living styles, rather make people realize these differences exist but that does not mean they are something bad and have to be overcome. We would all be better off if these differences were accepted, understood and considered as equal to our differences.

This attitude has to be learned by both, aid workers and people living in Third World countries. Because, so far it seems as our mission is only to save poor nations by imposing our way of living, our way of thinking, our way of understanding what standards of living should they accept. That is because in some way, to some extent, we do feel superior, we do feel we are better educated, we have a better knowledge about the world, about the economic system and cultures. This attitude does not make us “heroes” but rather subconscious oppressors who,

instead bringing relief, are responsible for making people dependent on our support, undermining their potentiality for creating their own independent, ideal world/lifestyle.

As much as I tend to criticize aid work, including my own voluntary work in Sierra Leone I do believe it has its' positive aspects. We were part of making the shift in self-realization. The biggest influence we made was not on Sierra Leonian idea of western world and westerners but the realization of their own identity through the white-westerners' eyes. White westerners are revealing to Sierra Leonians their own image of an average Sierra Leonian, meaning who is a black person in Africa? What is his/hers role and influence on development of their environment in comparison with the role of white westerners? It is not the wrong idea of Africans that we have which stops them from developing but it is the image of themselves that they have that limits their actions towards improving their lifestyles. Our fault is giving Sierra Leonians our image of improvement that they should reach. We do not let them choose what kind of development, and what kind of improvement people want, because we already have imposed on them our western images of a "better" life. If a 10 year old girl says she is "black", therefore "stupid" to change anything in her life, but she wants to become a banker, how is that contradiction going to bring her to any kind of success? It is her image of herself with the relation to western image of the need of being rich. And what is the possible outcome of that rationalization? How can there be successful actions in fulfilling aspirations bringing positive development if there is no self-realization? How can "I" be a winner if right from the start "I" consider myself to be a loser? Despite having great aspirations to win. The ideal model of aid program is a focus on the shift of Third World mentality from dependent to individual responsibility. However, as Polish journalist wrote, in Africa "This is life at a low level. Life where disease leads to death. Sleeping in a hut on the compacted clay. The existence of these conditions is not a matter of choice but lack of other options. Poverty is a closed world. To escape it you need an injection from the outside – the capital, professional strength, organization." (Kapuściński, 2007: 73). It is impossible to abandon Third World countries and expect them to overcome poverty. They need western assistance, because as also Kapuściński wrote "Our prosperous world cannot dissociate, isolate. Today, it is impossible to say 'Let them take care of their own issues'. The world today is the connection of vessels. The situation in the poorer regions sooner or later will bounce back to areas of abundance." (Kapuściński, 2007: 186). The world is interrelated, the consequences of events in one region affects either social or

economic actions in different parts of it. We can notice that looking at the great population movement nowadays. People leaving their home countries in order to find better opportunities for themselves and their families.

But, what is the biggest influence that we-westerns may have and should have on the mentality of underdeveloped population is the ability to imagine a certain kind of change and peoples' personal role in it. However, imagining development in such a community as Thunder Hill in Eastern Freetown is a challenge. The way of thinking is limited only to the things people are familiar with. This way of thinking has clear borders. These borders are knowledge acquired through situated knowledge production. The problem is, that Sierra Leonians let volunteers teach them only things they want to accept and it often seems impossible to break through the scope of thinking within their knowledge. Volunteers are unable to break through that way of thinking, therefore average Sierra Leonian is stuck in his knowledge box where his imagination is limited. That means, there is no way out of their poverty and underdevelopment because imagination has its' serious limitations. And westerners, often cause of their incompetence, are blocked by the locals from making an impact that would break through the boxed area.

I am not claiming that this particular way of thinking is only Thunder Hill or Sierra Leonian, post-conflict phenomenon. I think this applies to many other closed, less developed societies who have limited access to external sources of knowledge or at least diverse worldview. This is also Polish, post-communist way of thinking, where possibilities are limited. People believed that for a young person it was possible to travel only if the parents were rich and could sponsor them. Kids could study abroad only if their parents could afford it. This way of thinking in Poland has been slowly transforming because once in a while there is a person coming up with the solution, trying to prove the society that it is actually possible. This means there is a need for two main factors in order to create positive change – the ideas of change have to be accepted and acted upon but mainly they have to be looked for in the first place.

Awareness seems to be the greatest agent of change. Sierra Leonian new generation lacks this self-awareness. They seem to be confused what is their identity and what is their role in this world. As Percy Oware noticed “An outsider, the international donor community, for example, may succeed in laying the groundwork for social action or development but it does not make the action.” (Oware, 2005: 106). Westerners may have a great influence on the positive development

of regions such as Thunder Hill in Sierra Leone, but in order to achieve any success, volunteers coming there need to produce a high level of self-awareness themselves, to be able to pass it on to the local individuals. I am talking about the awareness regarding personal identity, the role in the society, awareness of good and evil behaviors, awareness of own culture, values, awareness of the differences between various cultures and races, awareness of the possibilities and realization of the fact that they themselves are the agents of their own change. For whatever reasons westerners are supporting aid programs, we need to be fully aware of our subconscious and conscious influences, making sure we are leading people towards sustainable development and not to another form of dependency.

Growing aid flow to poorer regions is not only the effect of worsening economic possibilities but development is also hindered by the growing inefficient, inadequate programs that are literally spoiling the society and their self-determination to act on their own behalf, for their own change. Westerners' ego filled with the need to help people living in worst conditions, in the effect creates a society that constantly needs and wants their help. Both behaviours cause each other forming a vicious circle of ineffective development. The core of every positive change or personal and economical change seems to have its' beginning in the minds of those responsible for it. But with the wrong pattern of thinking, entangled in dependency thinking, there is already a failure at the core, and any financial subsidies are going to be misused.

Identities, responsible for the creation of aspirations, confidence and self-determination to achieve set goals, are all embedded in culture (Appadurai, 2004). But, as noticed in Thunder Hill, the culture has been modified by the experiences of war and poverty, and also by the western, international aid, that arrived on the top of that. Children born in post-conflict Sierra Leone are not really conflict free individuals with a fresh start towards independent development. They still carry a baggage of poor and damaged by war societies, who are being saved by rich, powerful, white individuals. Kids are still being taught that their success depends on white, western sponsors. This is the message that is being imposed on young Rhema students by older generation from local communities as well as by white volunteering westerners who are selfishly attempting to play "heroes".

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