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Emotions and Belonging: Constructing Individual Experience and Organizational Functioning in the Context of an Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Program

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Abstract The analytical approach of this article is inspired by C. Wright Mills' (1959) notion of "the sociological imagination." Individual experience is viewed through the lens of the wider social context, particularly that of the organization. The socio-organizational context is then viewed through the lens of individual experience. The aim of this bi-directional gaze is to explore the relationship between individual experience and wider society. And in doing so, to identify and reveal the shared motifs—the significant, recurrent themes and patterns—that link and construct personal experience and social world.

The aims, findings, and research processes of the original study are rooted in the instrumental epistemology of program evaluation. Specifically, a mixed-method implementation-evaluation of a local non-governmental organization's Orphans and Vulnerable Children program. The aim of *this* article is to take the analyses and findings of that evaluation beyond its epistemic roots. Qualitative data were disentangled from the confines of thematic analysis and freed into their original narrative form. This allowed for a deeply reflexive "second reading," which brings whole narratives into a dialogue with original findings, contextual factors, and sociological discourse.

Key conceptual anchors are located in Vanessa May's ideas on the self and belonging, and in Margaret Wetherell's writings on affect and emotion. These are important aspects of working with children, particularly orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa, where many fall through the cracks of government's social services. A second, deeper, qualitative reading of the narratives of children, their parents/caregivers, and the organization's staff, explores three key pathways of individual and group experience that are inextricably linked to emotions and belonging, and which co-construct the social functioning of the organization itself.

Keywords Emotions; Belonging; Identity; Organizational Functioning; Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC); Sociological Imagination; Social Constructivism

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South African Children and Their Familial Caregivers

South Africa is unique in the regional and global contexts regarding the extent to which biological parents are absent from children's daily lives (Jamieson, Berry, and Lake 2017:101). As is the case with most social inequalities in the country, this circumstance is highly racialized (Stats SA 2017). Of the estimated 18.6 million children¹ in the country, Black-African children are by far in the majority,² and less than one quarter of them live with a biological parent (Wilcox and DeRose 2017:26). Instead, most stay with family, friends, and even neighbors—a way of life that is largely accepted and which originates in factors such as labor migration, poverty, the (un)availability of housing, and educational opportunities. “Many children experience a sequence of different caregivers, are raised without fathers, or live in different households from their biological siblings. Parental absence does not necessarily mean parental abandonment. Many parents continue to support and see their children regularly even if they have to live elsewhere” (Jamieson et al. 2017:101). For some children there is no prospect of being reunited with their parents: 17% of South Africa's children are orphaned (Stats SA 2017), most often due to HIV/AIDS.

Orphanhood, or living in a household without at least one biological parent, are conditions that *may*, but do not *necessarily* lead to child vulnerability—

¹ Children are defined as those under the age of 18.

² Approx. 75% of all children in South Africa are non-White (Stats SA 2017).

which is a much more complex, intersectional issue. Poverty and unemployment are key contributors to vulnerability. Locally, in the Free State, approximately one third of all children live in households without an employed adult (Jamieson et al. 2017:107). And 14.5% live in households where there is reported child hunger (Stats SA 2017). Income poverty constrains children's access to basic human rights such as healthcare and education; it also compels children and their caregivers to live in physical environments that are unsafe (Jamieson et al. 2017:105). On the issue of personal safety, South Africa has alarming levels of violence against children, including sexual abuse (Burton et al. 2016). These are some of the main factors implied in the definition of a vulnerable child as, “a child whose survival, care, protection, or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation, or circumstance that prevents fulfillment of his or her rights” (DSD 2005:5).

The Organization as Caregiver

Many vulnerable children fall through the cracks of government-based programming, social services, and social welfare. As in other areas of South African life, civil society—particularly in the form of non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—steps in to bridge the gaps. A longitudinal evaluation of South African community-based organizational support found that community-based NGOs have a positive effect on vulnerable children, particularly HIV-affected children, by improving their behaviors, their mental health, and reducing their exposure to violence and abuse (Sherr et al. 2016).

One such community-based organization is the local Free State Province NGO featured in this paper. It reaches approximately 650 orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) via a program with four main components: OVC support groups; home visits; child rights and protection interventions; and household economic strengthening activities.

The organization has nine childcare workers operating at ground level. Each childcare worker is assigned to one of nine geographical clusters/areas, usually the cluster closest to her home. I use “her” deliberately: the childcare workers are women.³ Top and middle managers are also all women.

Theoretical Lenses

Ontologically this “second reading” of data and initial findings is rooted in phenomenology. Participants’ direct experiences of the world—of phenomena and events, even those in the less concrete realm of perceptions and emotions—are taken as “real” and are understood as having real consequences for participants in relation to self, other, and lifeworld. Importantly, perhaps unusually, my second reading regards “the organization” as a *living entity* made by people, for people, with an identity, and *capable of experiencing*, as well as interpreting and adapting via interactions with people and the wider social domain (Senge et al. 1994; Wheatley 1999). Regarding epistemology, phenomenology focuses on the relevance of understanding and interpretation in everyday life (Phillips 1990).

³ At the time of the research the OVC program had only one man at ground level; he was not available for data collection and left the organization soon after.

This second reading also draws on critical-constructivist ontology: on the view that (social) reality is constructed via language, and manifested in rules and norms. Epistemologically the focus is on understanding how the social construction of society links to the construction of the self (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Rau, Elliker, and Coetzee 2018). This involves excavating and exposing commonly held assumptions concealing the dynamics and structures of power in written, spoken, and visual texts (Foucault 1988). Researcher’s reflexion is key to this process, not only because we wield a lot of power over our research and must be mindful of the assumptions we bring to it, but less obviously, because the thinking processes and pathways of reflexion *itself* are socially constructed and therefore not value free. As Foucault (1988:38) asks: “How is the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth linked?”

Belonging and emotion were submerged in the original evaluation in as far as their influence on program implementation and the organization itself was not measured, nor closely scrutinized. At the level of substantive theory, insights on belonging and emotion from the work of two academics help to shape my second reading.

Briefly, this article draws on Vanessa May’s (2011) notion of belonging as related to identity and reflected in the sociology of the everyday. Everyday life is characterized by intersubjectivity and involves, for instance, roles, status, and attachments to institutions, groups, cultures.

Margaret Wetherell’s (2012) writings provide conceptual anchors for analyzing affect and emotion.

Schools of thought in the sociology of emotion include evolutionary, symbolic interactionist, psychoanalytic, psychobiological, interaction ritual, stratification, and exchange theories (Turner 2009). Wetherell deftly sidesteps their many jostling, and often rigid, classifications to offer a pragmatic, holistic “way in” to studying emotion. She starts by defining it as a “relational pattern involving interaction, intersubjectivity, and ‘ongoingness’ which are embedded in *situated practice*” (Wetherell 2012:3). She elaborates:

Practice draws attention to both a transpersonal “ready-made” we confront and slip into, as well as to active and creative figuring. Routines do in some sense “land on” people and “subject” them. And “forms of encounter” or social relationships arrive with the affective slots for actors already sketched...It is an organic complex in which all the parts relationally constitute each other. [Wetherell 2012:125]

Wetherell’s (2012:4) formulation encompasses pattern and order, form and function, process and consequence. It posits that affect and emotion can be understood as *embodied meaning-making*. It is hospitable to complexities and allows for analyses that are not “boxed in” by rigid theoretical borders but open to the exercise of sociological imagination.

Analytical Processes

The analytical approach of this article derives from C. Wright Mills’ (1959) injunction to exercise “sociological imagination.” Analyses seek out significant motifs—shared recurrent themes and patterns—that link individual experience to the wider social

context, particularly the organization as social context. The aim is to reveal how the individual and the social context interact, and to explore if and how they co-construct one another.

Importantly, the analyses in this article go beyond those of the original research project, which generated the primary data and initial findings. The aim of the original research, its analyses, and findings served a very pragmatic goal—to evaluate the implementation of an OVC program and to generate recommendations for improving it. The aim of *this* article is distinctly different: to extend and deepen the original analyses by bringing them into a dialogue with sociology as discipline and discourse. As such, the insights presented here percolated slowly through layers of critical reflexion on the research as a whole—on its primary data, on findings, and field notes, on clues in the data and signals in the context. The second reading also derives from my personal experience and professional re-appraisal of the entire project and its processes. New interpretations emerge from my shift in gaze from pragmatic evaluator to reflexive sociologist. And this calls attention to the mutually transformative relationship between researchers, their subject matter, and their participants (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Of note for a special edition featuring narrative methodology: qualitative data were originally analyzed thematically. I reversed this approach in the analyses for this article, returning to the whole narratives, to the full stories as participants told them. Thematic analysis can have the effect of dislocating data from their immediate textual context, from their position in the natural flow from one

statement to another, from one paragraph to the next—from the often untidy sequencing and intrusions of thought and speech to the neat categories of themes. There is a severance of meaning, or at least a disturbance of it, that can happen with thematic analysis. Narrative analysis allowed me to hear the voices again, to pay attention to the cadences, the sequences and timings, the slow hesitations and quick exclamations. Therein lay many clues to help re-member the texts and discover new meanings and connections.

Research Design

Primary data were gathered via a realist, mixed-method, assessment-oriented implementation evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Chen 2005) of a local OVC program (Rau et al. 2014).

Ethics: Formal ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education (Clearance no.: UFS-EDU-2013-043, dd. July 30, 2013). Researchers were very mindful of the comfort and rights of participants and great care was taken to do no harm. To this end a project psychologist was appointed to facilitate group-work with the children, childcare workers, and the children's parents/caregivers. She also supported the research team members.

Participant sampling/selection and data collection: Data were gathered by teams of two: one researcher and the psychologist. Throughout the process team members recorded their reflections, insights, and questions. These texts were useful in shaping and

sharpening our focus during the evaluation; they also contributed to the initial findings, and their secondary analyses for this article.

- *Children (OVC):* Random sampling avoided risk of selection bias. The total population of 608 OVC was stratified by sex, cluster, and age. Random processes identified 32 OVC to approach, and a list of replacements should any decline to participate. Children were reached in contact sessions lasting three hours per day for three consecutive days—so we opted for a more in-depth approach. Sessions were held in a mix of Sesotho-Tswana, the children's home languages. Methods were participatory and used drawings, decoupage, writing, and storytelling.
- *OVC parents/caregivers:* Caregivers of each of the randomly sampled 32 OVC were invited to participate. They were reached in focus group discussions that generally lasted 1 hour, were led by guidelines, audio-recorded, and also conducted in Sesotho-Tswana.
- *NGO staff:* All childcare workers (9) and all program managers/leaders (3) participated in informal talks, meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one audio-recorded interviews held in English.

Data processing: In preparation for analysis, audio-recordings, OVC writings, and field notes were transcribed, translated if necessary, and names were replaced with pseudonyms. The data were then exported to NVivo (qualitative data management software).

Insights and Findings

This second reading traces cycles in the social construction of individual and organizational experience and functioning in the context of serving in, and being served by, a local OVC program. Clues to detecting the cycles lay in the emotive content of participants' narratives. And how *inter-subjectively constituted* (Coetzee and Rau 2009) dimensions of emotion interface with belonging—that sense of connectedness between self, other, and society as manifested and experienced in everyday life (May 2011).

Circulating Conflict—Interrupting Fear

Narratives of children indicate that they most often express caring via discourses of “sisterhood” and “brotherhood.” One interchange between two boys during a child-contact session illustrates this. Both were pushing boundaries during the session—one through rebellious behavior and the other through non-participatory behavior. Clearly these two were friends, but what characterized their exchanges is that the boy with a “rebellious” attitude was over-protective of his “self-isolating” friend and would come quite fiercely to his aid whenever he felt that his friend was threatened or uncomfortable. It was like a brotherly bond of protecting the weak: he shielded his friend from being laughed at, from being mocked for his inability to express himself, or write, or even draw. But, in a strange turn of loyalty, *he* would then tease his friend—in essence, it was not fine for others to tease his friend, but it is fine for him to do so. Our project psychologist pointed out that the interchange was an interesting representa-

tion of the children's home and wider social environments—protecting and needing protection—yet (unconsciously) taking advantage of these roles, and the situation, to re-enact patterns of interaction that maintain a status quo. These patterns, and their well-worn emotional slots, are what Wetherell and Potter (1988 as cited in Wetherell 2012:12) refer to as “interpretative repertoires...threads of sense-making that work through familiar tropes, metaphors, and formulations.” The repertoires of these two boys function to maintain identities that are divergent and contradictory, yet each is indispensable to the existence of the other, like poles of a magnet (strong one-weak one; bully-bullied; feeling brave-feeling fearful). Importantly, these repertoires (Wetherell and Potter 1988 as cited in Wetherell 2012:12) work to maintain configurations of power, and to maintain roles of belonging (May 2011) that both boys tacitly accept and which, therefore, become repeated and reinforced.

What is intriguing in this interchange is the synchronous co-presence of two very different expressions of power: defending and violating. And this is not an isolated occurrence, the interaction pattern circulates more widely amongst children in the program. In a poignant narrative, delivered like a little soldier standing bolt upright, with eyes fixed straight ahead, one girl, aged nine, confessed her perplexity in the face of a significant moral dilemma:

I don't like it when other people are fighting, I don't like it when people are being laugh at, when we tease one another and make fun of other children. When they laugh and tease me and push me down on the ground, I told the teacher here. Then she told them,

“No” and why. But...but...me, I am also teasing. I know it’s wrong, but it just comes. I am heartbroken and I...I try to make right. I want stop hurting. I am not a thug.

Her narrative suggests that teasing does not only present as a dilemma, it involves complex and sometimes conflicting emotions, which in turn are situated in conflicting practices (bullying and then trying to “make right” with her victim). It is clear from other children’s narratives that these emotions and practices reach well into schools and other wider community-level contexts. The space of the organization’s support groups offers some succor, as another child observes:

I like [this place]. It protects us when it’s raining, it makes sure the thugs are not beating us up.

Again the word *thug*—it comes up repeatedly in the narratives. This is because crime and its perpetrators are part of everyday life in the communities where participants live and work. Crime and violence reach children in schools (Zuze et al. 2016), on the streets, and in their homes. The child support and prevention component of this organization’s OVC program is designed to mitigate the negative effects of different forms of violence on the children. Some advantages of attending the after-school support-group sessions are that children are kept off the streets, occupied, under the eye of childcare workers, and being taught about child rights and life skills such as knowing their own worth, how to say “No!,” and how to get help. Two children comment:

I learned that when you are abused at home, you should write a letter and put it in the box there. If you cannot tell the lady who teaches at the support group, you write a letter and put it in there, but if you can tell her, then you can call her to the side and tell her.

There are a lot of things I learned from [this organization]—like one has to have a bright future and not be attracted by gangsters. Because once you end up being a gangster, your name will be ruined; then when you’re older and want to find work, you’ll find difficulty because you have a lot of things that have made you lose sense of yourself, making it hard for you to get a job.

Childcare workers do not only teach children, they actively come to their assistance. One child attests:

If something has happened to anyone from us on the street, Sister [childcare worker] will say they should tell what has happened so that she can go call the police or go to the social workers.

Sometimes attacks on children on the street result from their belonging to the organization’s OVC program. Their parents/caregivers also speak about being stigmatized and discriminated against in their communities because they belong to a program that others associate with being poor and HIV-infected. Program staff do good and sensible work to interrupt this by making children aware that bullying undermines a person’s sense of acceptance and belonging in their support groups:

They have to be taught that bullying is wrong, bullying is the same as discriminating, and they are

discriminating one another. The children must be taught right here [in this organization] that they have to learn how to treat one another. Facilitators have to go and see how the children sit in each and every group and ask: “How are they coping towards one another?”

So, childcare workers do well to interrupt aggression among children in support groups. Nonetheless, there is a gap in the organization’s understanding: program staff do not connect bullying in the OVC program itself with societal-level violence. The program’s support group meetings are intended as a safe space for the children, physically and emotionally. Bullying violates this. Like a seed of aggression, bullying grows, and it matures into the myriad other forms of fully-fledged violence that have reached alarming levels in South African society (Burton et al. 2016). From the narrow context of the support group, to the wider communities in which the children live and in which the organization operates, this “ongoingness” (Wetherell 2012:3) of violence and aggression propagates emotions of fear and deep anxiety. In turn, these emotions structure patterns of interaction that have negative consequences for children (Carthy et al. 2010) and for the adult societies that they will come to shape.

Circulating Belonging—Interrupting Neglect

Several children’s drawings, and the stories they told about their drawings, pointed to crises of belonging, even when they are cared for by family or extended family. Three children have the following to say:

I am not seen in the house. There are their own children. It hurts one’s feelings.

I do not like my family because they treat me like a dog.

It hurts when there is family members who do not like or love you.

There are also differing degrees of personal neglect. The experience of one childcare worker illustrates what she and her co-workers witness on home visits:

Sometimes you get into the house you will find that there is no table, there is no TV, it’s just an open space. Even the blankets are not looking well. Even the child when comes at the support group is wearing clothes that you will feel sad when you look them. Some their shoes don’t sole, and the socks as well, and the dress don’t have zip. So, you will see by those things. Not to say the parent is careless, but is just that she is getting these things from people who notice that the parent have needs.

The organization receives donations of food, clothing, and blankets and distributes these from time to time. They prioritize those most in need. While understandable, the strategy has a most unfortunate effect: some children and their parents/caregivers feel unnoticed, as if they do not belong. This reinforces and re-circulates feelings of need and neglect. One parent says:

If people get food parcels from [the organization,] it would be only those who are poor-poor. It can’t be like that—other children get hurt.

Emotions tied up with giving and receiving are complex and charity can have unexpected negative outcomes, especially when there is not enough to go round. I recall a refrain repeating itself in my mind whenever I returned from the contact sessions: *Running on empty; Running on empty*. I remember feeling hollow. I understood exactly why childcare workers try to compensate for gaps that simply cannot be filled by available resources. Many overcompensate, for instance, with their energy and time: children and parents' needs or calls for help do not always coincide with working hours. One childcare worker speaks for many when she says:

You will find that you don't get rest. Even on the weekend you have to work.

The lack of boundaries between work-time and personal-time has serious repercussions for childcare workers; they become physically and emotionally burned out. And they cannot access psychological care. The organization cannot afford to pay for counseling, and the welfare system cannot supply it either because it is already overburdened—the ratio of social workers in direct formal welfare service to the general population in the Free State Province is estimated at 1 to 9,000 (Hall, Meintjes, and Sambu 2015). Two childcare workers have the following to say:

After some time, you know, maybe if we had two to three cases that are very painful, you will find yourself depressed and then when we come on Monday's meetings, we talk about issues...We comfort each other as staff.

In a statement broadly representative of childcare workers' attitudes and actions, the following statement shows how socially and emotionally constructed injunctions to duty and compassion override her longer-term mental health needs:

It makes me sad because you would be so heartbroken and see that you are damaging your mind emotionally and feeling like leaving the job. But, tomorrow, when you get to the support group and see the children, you feel you want to help them.

It is quite common to have a "stampede" on resources in severely under-resourced settings. This is precisely what happens to childcare workers in relation to their practical and emotional resources. They are not considered to be officially "at work" if they respond to calls for help after hours and on weekends. But, they are emotionally "hooked in" and more often than not, they do respond. In doing so, they find themselves using their own money for transport. Sometimes children simply arrive on their doorstep, and they cannot turn them away. As clearly demonstrated in the narratives of the children and their drawings of hearts containing the name of the organization, childcare workers are exceptionally kind and caring. But, they sometimes feel overwhelmed, and inevitably, cracks appear in their practical and emotional capacity to "contain"⁴ themselves and the people they serve. This can lead to resentment and frustration, as a statement from one childcare worker suggests:

⁴ "Containment" is a psychological concept. It refers to one person (usually a therapist, social worker, or "helper" of some kind) being able to receive, understand, and appropriately process the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed.

There are those that are lazy; the ones who like to fight—they want everything while just sitting and doing nothing.

In the face of so much need, the organization itself also struggles to set appropriate boundaries. Instead of limiting its focus to a few specific areas of response, the organization develops “bleeding mandates” and tries to service too many children and too many varying needs. So cracks begin to appear at the organizational level too. The OVC program was initiated specifically to address issues of inequity in relation to the children and their households, but what a second reading reveals is how these very same inequities manifest and operate within the organization itself. In an ominous cycle, crises in belonging and neglect experienced by the program’s children also circulate amongst OVC program staff. Their stories point to experiences of “organizational neglect,” particularly when they compare their conditions to staff who work in the organization’s other programs. Uniforms are very important in the psyche of South African community-level workers: uniforms mark them out as important, as gainfully employed, and worthy of recognition and respect. Staff in the OVC program do not have a uniform and they feel this lack deeply; they interpret it as not being valued by the organization. One notes:

It’s ten years that [this program] has been working, but we don’t have uniform—other sections inside here, and other NGOs, when you look at them, you can see from where are they coming. People respect them.

They also have inferior working conditions compared to their counterparts in the organization’s

HIV testing program and HIV treatment literacy program. Because their work is concentrated on the poorest of the poor, and those hit hardest by the HIV epidemic, OVC staff also experience stigma-by-association, which manifests as being regarded with suspicion by some community members.

What becomes uncovered in the second reading, and its application of sociological theory and sociological imagination, are “affective-discursive loops” between the experiences and responses of the childcare workers and those of the children and their parents/caregivers. Significantly, their shared “rhetoric and narratives of unfairness, loss and infringement create and intensify the emotion[s]. Bile rises and this then reinforces the rhetorical and narrative trajectory. It goes round and round” (Wetherell 2012:7).

Circulating Power—Interrupting Dependency

Power operates via norms, values, and social rules, all of which are underpinned by assumptions. Sometimes we are aware of the assumptions that underlie how we see our world and shape how we live in it. Sometimes our assumptions are like shadows, indistinct and dimly understood. This section explores some of the assumptions underlying how the organization views itself and the children it serves. The emphasis is on how assumptions work to shape relations of power and to position the organization and its beneficiaries in relation to themselves, to one another, and to the wider socio-economic world. The exploration begins with parents/caregivers at the household level, then moves to the children, the childcare workers, and finally to relations of power between the organization and key factors in the

funding environment. In keeping with C. Wright Mills' (1959) "sociological imagination," the analysis tracks links in the social construction of reality from the level of the individuals, through the level of the organization, and into the wider societal level.

At the household level the program delivers training and support to OVC parents/caregivers to establish and run voluntary savings groups, and household economic strengthening activities such as home gardens and bread making businesses. During 2012, 59 voluntary savings groups with over 550 members had been established, and between them they amassed R1,146,974 in that year, which is a significant sum by South African standards, especially in poor communities. Householders are supported with very practical skills-training in establishing governance structures to manage members and their contributions, in banking know-how, and keeping good records. So exceptional work is done by the organization to extend the self-sufficiency of OVC households and caregivers, and this is achieved in ways that foster inter-dependency rather than dependency; this balances relations of power between the householders and the organization. Ultimately, this benefits the organization, which has good hard evidence showing the success of its efforts. And without a doubt the householders are empowered. One speaks for many when she attests:

VSL [Voluntary Savings Groups]—they work very well. We share in December, everybody save what they afford, we do it for ourselves and we were trained before we start our society...Whenever we have a problem, we call one of them [OVC program

staff] to please come and then they explain to us...We are satisfied about it.

Regarding the children themselves, as the previous section clearly shows, some are seriously disempowered by their life circumstances. In a touching testimony to his sense of agency and self-in-the-world, one boy concludes:

I don't know how to talk.

An effect of daily conditioning—of witnessing children, households, and communities locked into hardship—is that childcare workers in the OVC program develop a prevalent view of the orphans and vulnerable children as being needy, passive, and lacking real power. As discussed earlier, childcare workers get so *emotionally* hooked into this view that they help to the extent of overtaxing their own physical and emotional capacities. It is not only childcare workers in constant contact with the children who develop a predominant view of them as being needy and powerless. This view of orphans and vulnerable children circulates so widely throughout the world that it has become a stereotype—a taken-for-granted construct that is so entrenched in collective understanding that we rarely question the assumptions on which it is based. An effect of this for the organization and its OVC program is that childcare workers and managers can miss (at worst) or underestimate (at best) the very real strengths and capabilities of the children.

When asked about what they liked and disliked about support group meetings, some of the older children in the program mentioned being bored

with repetitive activities and topics. Some alternatives they suggested are quite creative and could be viable for the children, as well as the organization. For instance, they felt that they could be more involved in fundraising activities and that some support group meetings could be used to brainstorm ideas, learn how to select the best ideas based on their viability, and then learn how to plan and implement them. Even small and simple ideas could provide a platform for the children to improve their self-efficacy and resilience, both of which are key to surviving and thriving in the context of their difficult life circumstances. From the narratives of a group of older children it is clear that they already mobilize group participation to find solutions to problems. One older child states:

A thing I love is that when we are here, we can all sit down and share ideas with each other, and even if the idea you present is not so satisfactory, it can be discussed in the group. And you can be free to express your feelings—it's not where you keep your feelings bottled up. When it's time to go home, you feel that you are satisfied. Even if you have a problem and you feel you can't tell your parents, it's possible to sit down and find a solution in the group.

The organization delivers a range of interventions to children, including psycho-social interventions that teach them about self-worth, assertiveness, and the importance of giving and deserving respect. But, how they apply their learning is not easy to monitor. The organization could take one small leap to incorporate activities that allow self-sufficiency to be *practically* experimented with. Engaging children in designing and running their own programs

transfers power into their hands and opens the door to them becoming more pro-active in solving everyday problems and dilemmas (Feinstein and O'Kane 2005; Save The Children 2005). As Wetherell (2012:125) points out: "Practice draws attention to both a transpersonal 'ready-made' we confront and slip into, as well as to active and creative figuring." A greater sense of personal power is a hospitable space for "active and creative figuring" (Wetherell 2012:125) to occur. It opens up new positions to adopt, new energies to try out, and new feelings to emerge. From the local level to wider communal and societal contexts, shifts such as these can interrupt dominant discourses and stereotypes of orphans and vulnerable children as being passive, helpless, and sad.

At another level of experience, and power, the narratives of some of the organization's childcare workers point to a demoralizing instrumentality in the workplace, and emotions that arise out of this. Rather than feeling like creative human resources, they feel undervalued and resentful because within the OVC program they are implementers only. They have little say in mid- and higher-level planning such as target-setting, in practical aspects of organizational functioning, or in OVC program design. Their practical and emotive "felt" reality arises out of cycles of cause and effect. As discussed earlier, childcare workers do not set appropriate boundaries between their personal-private lives and their communal-work lives. This repeats at the next level: the organization also cannot seem to say no to any call for help. Instead of focusing steadfastly on demarcated areas and quotients of response, the organization develops "bleeding mandates" and tries

to service too many of the various needs of the community it *belongs to and feels for*. In doing so, physical and human resources are spread ever more thinly. Three childcare workers explain:

We started with orphans and HIV-positive children. So, we started with small groups. But, children are children, they tell each other—so we found ourselves going from 30 children [each childcare worker] up and up to 60. And now, even more. But, not all came because of needs: some children are just coming because other children are coming though they don't have major needs in their households. So, we must look more at children's needs.

If we add more children, then we should know that we are not going to do the best job, there will be children that I'm going to visit only once in a year and maybe some not even once in a year because I'm not working with children only, I work on gardens, groups of society, people of IGA [Income Generating Activities], chickens, gardens, bread ovens.

It is difficult because the time that we get it's not enough that is needed for all the jobs and the monthly targets. Sometimes it feels impossible...Our work is too much—we must work during weekends if we want our report to be good. We have to push and pressurize ourselves.

As a result of mounting pressure, and in a troubling mirror image of conditions in the communities it serves, the organization finds itself in a constant state of crisis management. Meetings are not regularly attended by top-level managers, who are hard pressed to meet donor demands, report writing, and

relentless rounds of fundraising. Childcare workers also have very heavy workloads. In all this rush, little space is left for real engagement with challenges, for important strategic work, or for formulating new approaches to programming—in effect, the inputs, and the very voices of program staff are silenced.

Open communication between people *at all levels* within an organization facilitates feedback and the exchange of ideas. This allows for new voices to be heard and for leaders and managers to take up ideas that have their genesis in the needs and experiences of co-workers as they engage on a daily basis with the realities of the workplace. This empowers all concerned to create their organizational realities (Wheatley 1999:37). It challenges outmoded structures and stimulates the innovation so vital to survive and to thrive. As Wheatley (1999:67) comments: “an organization rich with many interpretations develops a wiser sense of what is going on and what needs to be done. Such organizations become more intelligent.” They also become much more resilient in the face of wider social pressures such as donor funding.

No analysis of NGO's serving vulnerable children, and households made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, can ignore the influence of funding on organizational survival and success. Accordingly, in this final segment of my second reading, I view organizational belonging and identity through a much wider socio-economic lens: its funding environment.

In the first large scale inflows of international HIV/AIDS funding, beginning around 2000, it was a fairly straightforward business for civil society organi-

zations to access donor and bilateral funding directly (Kelly and Birdsall 2010). Then, in 2005, “The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness...called for greater national ownership and control over development assistance and better harmonization of donor activity at country level” (Birdsall and Kelly 2007:1). This meant that the bulk of HIV funding would be channeled to recipients via large scale international and national NGOs and national government sub-granting mechanisms. In the process, funding flows became less easy to navigate and did not reach many small local organizations trying to serve their communities (Birdsall and Kelly 2007:2). Birdsall and Kelly’s fascinating research on the dynamics of civil society and AIDS funding in Southern Africa showed how these changes in funding flows altered the face and functioning of civil society organizations over time. Their research traced three phases of change: from pioneers to partners to providers. Small local organizations developed organic, often innovative, responses to on-the-ground needs (they were Pioneers). Following the Paris Declaration, they partnered with national level NGOs and government departments to harmonize responses and access funding (they became Partners). In time, their independence and their responses, which were deeply rooted in local needs, gave way to a commercial model wherein they were contracted to roll out standardized programs which they did not devise (they became Providers).

On reflection, I came to realize that this is exactly what happened to the organization and its OVC program. What resulted is an organization that moulds its agenda to fit the priorities of funders. The organization staff told of many instances where interven-

tions based in on-the-ground needs had to give way to interventions that better suited national and global agendas. Local funding via corporate responsibility programs were also not sustainable in the longer term. Of note is that not one of the organization’s funders support the costs of key managerial and planning processes such as formal evaluation, and key personnel needs such as counseling for child-care workers. Ultimately, this small organization has little room to move and little space to formulate a unique, solid, and enduring sense of organizational identity. As Wheatley (1999:39) observes:

There is an essential role for organizational intent and identity. Without a clear sense of who they are, and what they are trying to accomplish, organizations [and people] get tossed and turned by shifts in the environment. No person or organization can be an effective co-creator with [this] environment without clarity about who [they] are intending to become.

An effect reaching from the individual through to the organizational level pivots on intersubjectively constituted understandings of the self as “subject,” not agent. The narratives of organizational managers and coordinators speak of their sense of powerlessness in the face of systems that they cannot change. This plays out at all levels in emotions of panic, anger, and frustration. Wetherell (2012:12) observes:

The interrelated patterning of affective practice can be held inter-subjectively across a few or many participants. It can thread across a scene, a site or an institution and is spatialized, too, in complex ways. Intriguingly, an affective practice can be “held” in

a particular place. Further solidification comes into view when we consider the affective practices of entire social categories and historical periods.

The experience of belonging (or not-belonging) arises out of dominant discourses with their underlying assumptions, their overt and covert rules and norms, and attendant affective practices. Individuals have power and can exercise it in many ways. By “individuals” I also mean “the organization”—which in this second reading is regarded as a living entity made by people, for people, with an identity, and capable of experiencing, as well as interpreting and adapting via interactions with people and the wider social domain (Senge et al. 1994; Wheatley 1999). But, as the data and my second reading show, individuals and the small non-governmental organization that they constitute are more often the recipients or “subjects” of power than “vehicles of

power” (Foucault 1988:98) in so far as they are contained in, and constrained by, the whole and intricate architecture of our global-local, or, as it is called nowadays, our *glocal* world.

In Conclusion

Social cycles are complex and spherical. They also intersect. I started by “pulling on threads” (Wetherell 2012:12) in a second reading of individual and organizational narratives. The aim was to see how experiences of belonging, and their accompanying emotions, influence and perhaps even co-construct individual and organizational realities. I found structural knots of top-down and bottom-up power, and looser, more circular relational strings of power, all working together in the construction of individual and organizational identity and functioning.

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