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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Elise Jantine van der Mark (1982) is a Dutch born and raised social scientist. Since childhood, she has professed a love and fascination for all things related to Africa. After completing her A levels, she traveled through ten African countries, being only 18 years old. She went on to study Visual Marketing (with a specialization in marketing of social organizations) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences while simultaneously pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. In view of her bachelor thesis for Visual Marketing (conducted in Zimbabwe), she was offered temporary employment in capacity building of social organizations in Zimbabwe. In 2007, she therefore paused her bachelor in Cultural Anthropology and moved to Zimbabwe. She trained local artists in business and project management in order to set up three socially-engaged arts organizations in visual arts, performing arts and photography. She returned to the Netherlands, inspired to help spread the word about the richness of Zimbabwean art and culture. She published a book called *Avocados and Shona* about her experiences in Zimbabwe and set up an art exhibition of critical Zimbabwean art in Haarlem, the Netherlands. At the same time, she continued her bachelor in Cultural Anthropology and chose a specialization in the anthropology of development. She was aiming to work for an international non-governmental development organization one day. However, severe health issues put a hold on Elise's career for several years. Eventually, this made her decide to pursue a Master's degree in International Development Studies to make the most out of her rehabilitation period. She conducted her Master research, again, in Zimbabwe and graduated cum laude in 2012.

After two years of taking up temporary assignments as a self-employed consultant, Elise and her partner Roger decided to quit their jobs and move to Cape Town, South Africa. While searching for employment opportunities, Elise applied for and was granted an Erasmus Mundus scholarship of the European Union to conduct a PhD research in Cape Town. She was hosted as a visiting PhD fellow at the University of the Western Cape in conjunction with the VU University Amsterdam as her home-institution. This research was a perfect combination of the most important professional goals for Elise, namely contributing to social change, making research practically applicable and working in close collaboration with local participants as experiential experts. In 2017, Elise and her partner moved back to the Netherlands. After taking a year off to carry and give birth to twins, Elise finished her doctoral thesis at the VU University Amsterdam; hence this book.



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