This dissertation addresses the concept of common humanity in humanitarian communication. Whereas NGOs in humanitarianism and development cooperation have relied on the construction of a 'human identity', the current 'post-humanitarian' condition is characterized by increased critique and cultural disintegration. NGOs struggle with the colonial legacy of their work and the (audio-visual) language that they use, whilst being confronted with both conservative and progressive critiques. Parallel to this, the rise of digital media complicates their aim to construct a consistent narrative about international solidarity. In this dissertation it is argued that an important strategy for NGOs in reinventing themselves is to set-up platform-like structures. Four such platforms are scrutinized here: (1) a platform that aims to combat fragmentation, (2) a platform that reflects on critiques, (3) a platform that tells (new) utopian stories, and (4) a platform to disseminate a range of different approaches to international solidarity. However, these platforms do not always succeed or allow for sufficient room to contemplate structural revisions in the discourse of international development. Particularly, the lack of attention for historical and political roots of (global) inequality impedes a fundamental reorientation of humanitarian communication.

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What Brings Us Together?

Wouter Oomen

WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER?

Common humanity and the challenges of post-humanitarian communication in a platformed society

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Common humanity and the challenges of post-humanitarian communication in a platformed society

Wat verbindt ons?

Gedeelde menselijkheid en de uitdagingen van post-humanitaire communicatie in een platformsamenleving

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER?

Intertitles asking “What brings us together?” are shown at the start and end of all videos of ‘The Family Meal’; a campaign launched by the World Food Program (WFP) and the European Union (EU).[1] The campaign aims to provide a daily family meal for ‘the poorest and most vulnerable’ and with respect to this, the question “What brings us together?” plays out on two distinct levels. The first is situated on a local level in reference to the habit of a family sharing an evening meal. Pointing to the moment when different family members return home and settle to share an evening meal. This daily habit of having dinner signifies togetherness on a local level. The second level is the global one, where the family meal is presented as a universal custom that naturally belongs to the human way of life, across national borders and cultural boundaries. In one of the campaign’s videos Barbara Noseworthy, assistant director of the WFP, indeed states that “it is important to convey that others, even in dire circumstances, want to have those natural, normal activities which are part of raising a family”. In saying this, Noseworthy stresses both the role of the family unit and its universality in deeming the family meal as a “natural, normal” custom – a custom that cannot even be challenged by the direst of circumstances. Throughout the campaign, the notion of a family meal pertains to both an idea of material well-being in the form of a bare minimum of nutrition, as well as to immaterial values in the form of family life. In this campaign, therefore, the concept of a family meal amounts to the notion of humanity and to what are perceived to be its essentials. In doing so, ‘The Family Meal’ campaign relies on the imagination of a common humanity and a universal understanding of the human experience. With respect to this, the campaign is no anomaly since humanitarian communication centralises the notion of human vulnerability and by doing so taps into “the language of common humanity” (Chouliaraki 2013, 30). As such, humanitarian communication involves itself in an ongoing endeavour of channelling contested and ambivalent notions of ‘the human identity’ while at the same time, it conveys what is deemed an essentialized and therefore coherent and clear account of said ‘human identity’. The construction of a common humanity in and through humanitarian communication is a focal point in this dissertation. More particularly, the question posed is how the notion of common humanity is produced through new platforms in humanitarian communication.

If we interpret the notion of common humanity as the construction of a particular form of identity, two important features can be distinguished: an embodied aspect and the discursively produced one. First there is the embodied aspect; where common humanity is established by connecting vulnerability with solidarity as well as by providing a mediated

[1] Together with Emiel Martens and Anna Piccoli, I published an article on the Family Meal in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2020). Though the argument in the article takes the case of The Family Meal’ into a different direction (it is mainly occupied with the construction of European citizenship through showcasing altruism) some overlap may occur.

environment where commonalities among human beings can play out, can be acknowledged and facilitated. This notion is generally embraced in academic writing with Immanuel Kant's enquiry into 'cosmopolitan existence' as a cornerstone (1790). With regard to (humanitarian) communication, Kant's approach stresses the need for dialogue not so much about but with (potentially vulnerable) far away others by "cultivating our mental powers by exposing ourselves beforehand to what we can call humaniora (...) and the ability to engage universally in very intimate communication" (Kant 1790, 356). More recently taken up in the writings of Ulrich Beck (2002), Seyla Benhabib (2002), Judith Butler (2004) and Edward Said (2004), this notion of common humanity is taken to be a prerequisite for solidarity where disregarding its value is deemed "foolish, if not dangerous" (Butler 2004, 31). In this sense, 'The Family Meal' is a case in point, as the campaign initiates a platform for the exchange of experiences, stories, cultures and habits that underscore mutual human interests. Precisely this is what the campaign tries to do: by sharing recipes from the dishes that, because of the help offered, could be cooked by 'unfortunate others' (these are 'typical' dishes from Ecuador, Chad, Niger, Jordan, and Myanmar) the campaign strives to make the practice of cooking more inclusive. Alongside this, the campaign asks its audience to participate in an online photo competition that allows for the exchange of different family meal traditions. By linking the universal and the particular, this approach tries to create a platform on which common humanity can play out. In this regard, food is a fruitful entrance point as it appeals to both a material condition as a basic need for nutrition and in that it ties in with abundant cultural practices of cooking and eating.

Yet, as Lupton states: "[c]ooking is a moral process, transferring raw matter from 'nature' to the state of 'culture', and thereby taming and domesticating it … Food is therefore 'civilised' by cooking, not simply at the level of practice, but at the level of the imagination" (1996, 2). Precisely here it becomes clear that 'common humanity', albeit bound up with alleged universal truths, is part of discourse and laden with notions of civilisation that ultimately imply differentiation, power and hierarchy. Indeed, as Butler acknowledges, the discourse of 'common humanity' "cannot be properly thought of outside a differentiated field of power and, specifically, the differential operation of norms of recognition" (Butler 2004, 46).[2] Such differentiation suggests the division of common humanity into factions. This fragmentation happens, for instance, along lines of cultural identity, judiciary rights, nationality and citizenship, or socio-economic positions, or aligns with the intersectionality argument as a combination of those (Crenshaw 1991). Thus, while common humanity emphasises the oneness of humanity, it also magnifies the fault lines within it, either intentionally and explicitly, or (more commonly), as Butler describes, as a by-product of the "norms of recognition". To put it more strongly: the norms of recognition are shaped by our understanding of common humanity itself. By emphasising what (common) humanity can or should look like, it also constructs a normative ideal to

[2] Elsewhere, she also notes that "no universal is freed from its contamination by the particular contexts from which it emerges" (Butler 2000, 40).

which some individuals or communities are more proximate. The food stamps provided by the WFP, for instance, 'enable' people to have a family meal: they permit certain families to become part of what is supposed to be a 'common' human practice and to lay claim to humanity. Either in the form of representation and stereotypes or in particular claims about 'reality', certain people are mapped further away from what is commonly understood as 'humanity' and its standards.

It is precisely this that leads to the second feature of common humanity, which is closely related to the embodied aspect, but is analytically distinguishable. It is situated in the linguistic or discursive domain; where common humanity is *discursively* constructed through the use of particular tropes that are recurrently ascribed to represent the human experience as a whole – such as a 'family meal'. In his critique on the photo exhibition *The Great Family of Man*, Roland Barthes assesses this "myth of the human 'condition'", stating that it "rests on a very old mystification, which always consists in placing Nature at the bottom of History" (1972, 101). Literally, stressing the idea that a family meal is natural and normal (as Noseworthy does) is a case in point. Here, the seamless, apparently unproblematic association between 'natural' and 'normal' – the former drawn from alleged facts of life, the latter from normative frameworks – is telling. In particular, this becomes interesting when the campaign states that "it is important to convey that others, even in dire circumstances, want to have those natural, normal activities which are part of raising a family". In this sense, Barthes notes that while universal, natural facts might exist, they become meaningless and 'purely tautological' when history (or ideology and power) are removed from the equation. "For these natural facts to gain access to a true language, they must be inserted into a category of knowledge which means postulating that one can transform them, and precisely subject their naturalness to our human criticism" (1972, 101). It is precisely the basic need for nutrition being aligned with the notion of family that underscores this point. [3] As Pauline Adema puts it, "[n]ostalgia for the idealized kitchen and family meal gathering have reinforced the symbolic power of food" (2000, 118). As a result, nutrition is embedded in a wide range of discourses. Thus, humanity as an identity is implicated in discourse, despite its apparent roots in what is considered a natural human experience. Therefore, the essentialised notion of humanity cannot be taken as an a priori truth; rather, it emerges from a variety of preconceptions, such as those that are presented in humanitarian communication. In short, "[t]he debate over the humanitarian identity reflects a search to recapture the unity and purity that is tied to its presumed universality" (Barnett and Weiss 2008, 5).

Critically, this universality and the discourse of common humanity have sparked increased scepticism over the last two decades. Although its claims have not so much been questioned in an explicit sense, Lilie Chouliaraki witnesses "a generalized reluctance

[3] For now, I will go without problematizing the notion of 'basic human needs' and acknowledge it as a particularly strong field of signification where the notion of common humanity can play out. The basic needs approach has, however, been critically assessed and particularly attacked for the fact that it "rests upon a naturalistic conception of the social" (Rist 2008, 168).

to accept 'common humanity'" (2013, 2). A fractured and dispersed cultural landscape has affected the notion of common humanity as the anchor point in humanitarian communication under what Chouliaraki calls 'post-humanitarianism'. This means that the multiplication of media outlets and channels, the multitude of new stories and sources, but also the retreat of ideological certainties and institutional mainstays have called into question common humanity and its claim to universality. On an abstract level, this is most apparent in the demise of grand narratives under postmodernity, which arguably undermines the grand truth-claims that underlie the idea of common humanity (Rorty 1989b).[4] This disintegration pointed to here will be explored in the next chapter as one particular aspect of Chouliaraki's argument on the 'post-humanitarian' condition (2013) that is used as the historical context that shapes this study. As common humanity is considered a cornerstone of humanitarianism (Linklater 2007b), its active reorganisation and reestablishment is part of an attempt to safeguard humanitarian discourse and action generally and in the context of post-humanitarianism. With this in mind, the first question raised here is how 'common humanity' is sustained in the face of several disintegrative forces under post-humanitarianism.

The question of "what brings us together" can be read as a direct response to these tendencies of fragmentation and will remain central throughout this dissertation. This means that common humanity is not just studied to address the discourse of a universal human identity, but also to more generally point to Daniel DeChaine's observation that, through global humanitarianism, "contemporary social life is marked by redoubled efforts to find, or maintain, or regain a sense of community" (2005, 15). Indeed, DeChaine observes a 'crisis of community' roughly runs parallel to the fragmentation discussed here, and he also seeks to examine "the new rhetoric of 'global community'" (*ibid*, 37) used by humanitarian NGOs. For this, he traces back the history of humanitarian NGOs (and in particular *Médecins Sans Frontières*) and situates it amid the geopolitical struggles that are part of the ascendance of a 'global rhetorical culture'. DeChaine's historical investigation of the role of NGOs in political discourse serves as a crucial predicate for the present study, namely that the rhetoric of shared humanity correlates to discourses of unity more generally. While sometimes claims to common humanity are very explicitly used to outline the ideal of a universal human identity (Agier 2010), its rhetoric can hardly be disentangled from notions of community and togetherness. It can be difficult to distinguish between grand claims about what unites us as humans and more contextual (and playful) clues at what unites us in a more concrete sense in many of the case studies examined here. To put it another way, common humanity is employed in this study as a

[4] Richard Rorty tellingly associates the notion of common humanity with "metaphysical or theological attempts to unite a striving for perfection"; attempts that he rejects (Rorty 1989, *xiii*).

way to explore the conflict between disintegration and unity in humanitarian communication.[5]

By employing the rhetoric of common humanity to assess social processes of disintegration and unity, space is created to investigate discourses and organisational structures in tandem; to evaluate meanings as part of the networks and institutions that inform them. Shedding light on the collision between meaning and the institutional context in which meaning making takes place is crucial and understudied in the domain of humanitarian communication. The domain of humanitarian communication here encompasses the mediated communicative practices by transnational civil organisations (primarily NGOs) that aim to alleviate the suffering and address the vulnerability of distant others (mainly based in the Global South). In the study of these communicative practices, the 'production side' (reasoning from the classic model in which production and reception can be roughly understood as distinct practices[6]) provides fewer studies than are available on questions concerning audiences, publics and spectators (Orgad 2013, 296). This emphasis on audience research can be explained, at least in part, by pointing to the moral difficulties that audiences may face when witnessing mediated suffering, especially since "it is action above all that is the problem." (Boltanski 1999, 17). In that sense, a direct, personal response to mediated misfortune is virtually impossible. Yet, this does not justify the fact that research on the institutional 'encoding' of humanitarian discourse is scarce. Also, with particular respect to the problem of disintegration and the waning credibility of 'common humanity' and related moral claims, the role of NGOs and the networks in which they operate is key. To put it more strongly, it will be outlined here that the ways in which NGOs reorganise their communicative practices are strongly related to the stories they (are able to) tell.

Taken from the dual focus on discourse and organisation, it will be argued throughout this study that contemporary humanitarian communicative practice should be understood as 'platformed'. Platforms signify the particular ways in which recurrent claims on common humanity are sustained. Much of the research presented here thus boils down to the claim that platforms are widely embraced as an antidote to the fragmented media culture in which humanitarian communication is produced. This

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[5] Although it is somewhat different in approach, it should be mentioned that a somewhat similar tension is used in Nandita Dogra's *Representations of Global Poverty* (Dogra 2013). The book is divided into three parts, of which the first deals with 'difference and distance' and the second with 'oneness', which according to Dogra reflects "a dual logic of 'difference' and 'oneness' characterises INGOs' messages" (*ibid*, 3).

[6] Production here refers to the 'encoding' side of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980), despite increasingly complex dynamics of meaning production. Using this classic model in spite of the celebrations of notions of 'prosuming' (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) and 'produsing' (Bruns 2007) that followed the growth of digital, interactive online media, means to attribute 'relative autonomy' to the practice of producing institutionalized professional content. As the relative autonomy attributed to 'encoding' and 'decoding' by Hall is in itself a response to the rigidity and the linearity of older models of communication (Hall 1980, 128), the notion of discourse will here remain central, whilst branching out to institutionalized moments of encoding; here related to studies in cultural and media production.

approach corresponds to a wide range of recent publications on what is known as the 'platform society' (Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018), which primarily address digital social media platforms and run parallel to their rise. Borrowing from these studies but broadening the notion of the platform at the same time, platforms are here taken to be cultural phenomena that extend beyond (albeit include) the rise of social media platforms. The social media micro-lending platform Kiva is one case study taken up in this dissertation, but the platform analogy is also used to better understand alliances for disaster relief campaigns, NGO confederations, and the Human Rights Film Network - all of which will be assessed as 'platformed'. The different kinds of platforms do have very different functions (they will in turn be highlighted as 'integrative', 'reflexive', 'utopian' and 'heterogeneous') and are moulded to certain purposes that are reflected in their set-up. And, while these examples may appear to be primarily about evaluating organisational structures, it is argued here that these structures are paralleled in rhetoric. From the discourse of unity that is enabled in platforms for disaster relief to the appeal to networked utopia with which Kiva presents itself; it is not just technology, organisation, or rhetoric that is highlighted here as 'platformed', but the combination of all these factors. Put differently: the platforms studied here enable and circulate certain stories and campaign in a style that is indicative of the set-up of the platform itself. This stems from the premise that style and structure in these platforms are *mutually constitutive* and that together they amount to humanitarian communication and its (re)organisation in terms of platforms.

Taken together, this dissertation addresses the question *how different platforms, as cultural phenomena, sustain the discourse of common humanity in humanitarian communication, in the face of post-humanitarian disintegration*. Thus, it runs parallel to the question of "What brings us together", in which the discourse of common humanity, as well as the quest for renewed integration, is caught up. Yet, the question is posed here in a different way. In 'The Family Meal' "What brings us together" is used to celebrate the habit of having a family evening meal, essentialising the ideal of the family and posing the question rhetorically in order to address a specific construction of what it means to be human. Conversely, the aim here is to demystify such discourse; to see how it is constructed, how it is contingent, and how it resembles the networks from which it emerges. Highlighting the contingency of common humanity is at odds with many of its premises, as the universalism of the human experience is often times associated with a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986), stressing an unchangeable core to make up its essence. 'The Family Meal' website exemplifies this by stating that "one universal aspect of eating that forms the basis of our humanity and gives us a clue about our common heritage, is the family meal". Here, universality is presented alongside appeals to a 'basis' in humanity and a 'common heritage', thus referring to the stability and stasis of the human identity.

Yet, as Michael Barnett underscores, it is "impossible to read widely in the history of humanitarianism without being impressed by how context shapes the desirable and the

universal" (2011, 11). Indeed, according to Jim Ife 'the Human' is, therefore, "not a static concept. It is redefined in different contexts and for different purposes, and is continually being reconstructed according to the needs of the moment" (2009, 72). As a result, a strong constructivist approach is used in the current study. There are several valid reasons for this. First, logically and epistemologically, it is the most viable option since only a constructivist approach can account for contingency. Thus, it is a way to counter the pervasive essentialism that usually accompanies the category of the human. Secondly, constructivism allows for an approach that sheds light on the cultural work and processes that sustain the notion of common humanity. It, therefore, highlights how the category is produced and constructed in and through platforms – which is one of the defining features of this research project. Third, and most importantly, constructivism accounts for the politics that become invested in the discourse of common humanity. More precisely, it accounts for the hierarchies and internal factions of what is holistically presented as a category for everyone – and for everyone equally. This is what makes this study ultimately relevant: it is not *just* enough to be content with the insight that common humanity is nowadays promoted in platformed dynamics. Beyond this, it should become apparent how the idea of common humanity is unequally distributed, while the category as a whole depoliticizes representations of vulnerability.

Before going into the outline of the different chapters presented in this study, a short overview of the *hierarchies* in common humanity will be provided. After this, it will be shown that these hierarchies stem from strong modernist roots and have recently resulted in critique, scepticism, and ultimately *reflexivity*. To round up this introduction, the different chapters and case studies are presented, in reference to how each of these relate to the problem of *depolitization*.

Constructivism and common humanity

'The Family Meal' was a multimodal campaign, with a travelling photo exhibition as its backbone. The British photographer Chris Terry, according to the Family Meal website, "travelled around the world visiting families who receive the WFP's assistance", taking him to Ecuador, Chad, Niger, Jordan, and Myanmar "in search of the ingredients of the family meal". In an attempt to foster online dialogue around the exhibition, the Twitter hashtag #sharehumanity was proposed. On being introduced, the hashtag sets up a potential (virtual) meeting place that once again raises the question of what brings us together. It does not only explicitly underscore that 'humanity' is something to be 'shared', it also provides a meeting place just in the act of proposing the hashtag. #Sharehumanity, like all hashtags, proposes a new linguistic element to bring together a variety of people and statements in order to give meaning to specific topics - in this case, solidarity, food, and, indeed, common humanity. As a result, #sharehumanity is an intervention in discourse. The hashtag is a proposal to gather around a certain linguistic invention and an invitation to appropriate a linguistic element that conveys the notion of common humanity. From a constructivist approach, the argument is then that the

concept of common humanity, as an identifiable category about which one can meaningfully think and talk, ultimately derives from linguistic inventions like these. Quite simply, in the words of Stuart Hall, this implies that "things don't *mean*, we *construct* meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs" (Hall 1997, 25). Just as the figure of the human is constructed in humanitarianism, it needs linguistic systems and signs to anchor itself – such as #sharehumanity. Consequently, common humanity is derived not from intrinsic qualities of the human body or spirit (or any other aspect that might characterise the human experience), but from social and linguistic conceptualisations of the human as a category. In line with this, Walter Mignolo's critical assessment of the category of the human posits that the discursive formation of the human comprises linguistic and institutional aspects. "As we have learned from Michel Foucault, and Wynter follows suit, discursive formations go hand in hand with institution-building: 'Cultural conceptions, encoded in language and other signifying systems, shape the development of political structures and are also shaped by them'" (Mignolo 2015, 112; Mignolo here cites Wynter 1996, 65). Thus, the approach to common humanity taken here is similar to social constructivists' approach to 'reality' who: "do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system we are using to represent our concepts" (Hall 1997, 25).

Such an approach paves the way for assessing how any attempt to establish universality is refracted in the face of power and hierarchy. "Once the universality of the Human has been postulated", Mignolo notes, "hierarchies are needed and put into place to establish differences between all who were 'born equal'" (Mignolo 2015, 109). In spite of its inclusive and comprehensive connotation, common humanity will here be studied as holding different hierarchically ordered factions. In this sense, the discourses that shape the humanitarian identity always entail the construction of certain social aggregates, in which "hierarchies of humanity" (Fassin 2010) play out – running parallel to, for instance, Chouliaraki's "global hierarchies of suffering" (2013, 42) and Butler's "hierarchy of grief" (2004, 32). For this, consider the question of "What brings us together" once more. In the videos of The Family Meal campaign, this question is preceded by another question: "What brings *them* together?". By means of a dissolve, 'them' is replaced by 'us', drawing attention to the juxtaposition of both personal pronouns. In this constellation, 'them' refers to the families united by means of an evening meal, and 'us' implies the audience to reflect on one's own habit of eating together as well – it would reflect the process of recognition, where the ways of living of 'others' are means to think about one's own customs. Indeed, by highlighting recognition, the boundaries and differences across which such temporary recognition is established are stressed. This is evident in the video's setting and aesthetics, where impoverished surroundings (Jordan), small shacks and huts in a rural environment (Niger),[7] and large families with many children (Chad) deviate

[7] For more on this, see Nandita Dogra's *Representations of Global Poverty* in which she addresses "the polarity of city and village" (2013, 67). Beyond the realm of humanitarian communication, Raymond Williams'

from Western reference points. This becomes especially noticeable in the stillness of the majority of the shots, where images of the various domestic environments, the long-shots of the natural environment and the direct addresses of the fathers and mothers are static; whereas shots of cooking are dynamic, filmed with hand-held cameras, using close-ups, and filming active agents and environments rather than passive talking heads. Alongside these different shots, the static ones are accompanied by the 'others' talking about hardship and the inability to provide daily meals for their families, while the dynamic ones are dubbed with talk on how the support of the Family Meal campaign has helped them to provide food for their families. Whereas the themes associated with the disparity between fortunate spectator and unfortunate other are accompanied by static and somewhat aloof filming, the filming stresses movement and closeness when these disparities are bridged. This falls in line with the campaign website stating that "in today's rushed world, it is more important than ever to make time to sit down with your loved ones and enjoy a meal together. That is why we are shining the spotlight on the universal custom of the family meal". Where the 'rushed world' might appeal to the experience of the Western public of the campaigns, the locked, static images of families in the countryside, discussing their hardship, couldn't be further away from this. Specifically, what makes a family meal not self-evident is what separates the fortunate spectator from the unfortunate other: either the audiences 'rushed world' or the 'other's' lack of access to nutrition. The gap between the explicitly stated universality of the family meal and the implicitly conveyed cultural and economic difference is stark. It is precisely the bridging of this gap that leads Didier Fassin to conclude that humanitarianism can function as a consensual force. Humanitarianism, according to him, "has this remarkable capacity: it fugaciously and illusorily bridges the contradictions of our world, and makes the intolerableness of its injustices somewhat bearable" (Fassin 2012, *xii*).

In short, this dissertation will address common humanity while also considering its factions. The argument made here is that the outside border of common humanity (how is the human defined and what does it entail?) cannot be envisioned without also constructing, defining, and maintaining its inside borders (who is at the centre and who is on the margins of humanity – and who gets to define this?). These inside borders are contested in a struggle over group formation, just as allegedly 'less inclusive' formations of collective identity are. This is not to say that common humanity cannot forcefully and positively inform solidarity, as its proponents claim, but I maintain that the neutral and undeniable semblance that comes with the connoted comprehensiveness of inclusivity and the materiality of the body (Butler 1993, 1) is a fiction. Instead, common humanity is far from a neutral category: it is contested, hierarchically structured, and frequently reconstructed in humanitarian communication. This implies that here we have to engage

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classic *The Country and the City* more elaborately outlines that "the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. (…) The pull of the idea of the country is towards old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the idea of the city is towards progress, modernization and development" (1975, 297).

in what Vicki Squire refers to as a "struggle over the human", dealing with the fact that "the category of 'the human' is not given, but is *made* as such through humanitarian interventions" (Squire 2015, 33; italics in original).

In this sense, humanitarian practice (or 'interventions') is closely related to humanitarian discourse – the latter to be studied here. For this strong interdependence between practice and discourse, Fassin uses the notion of 'humanitarian reason', which beyond action "has become a language that inextricably links values and affects, and serves both to define and to justify discourses and practices of the government of human beings" (Fassin 2012, 2). From this perspective, two premises will be held true throughout this dissertation and will serve as the foundation for the research presented here. First, it will be argued that the consensual force ascribed to humanitarianism by Fassin can be extended to its manifestations in common humanity. In this context, common humanity is understood as an appeasing construct that can obscure injustice, subordinate the concept of inequality in the face of commonality, or render hierarchies self-evident. In such a constellation, a politics of pity replaces a politics of justice, where questions of what is just are subordinated to questions of (mis)fortune and our response to it (Boltanski 1999, 3–5). Second, the notion of common humanity is internally fractured and subsequently ordered in different hierarchies in which, in some kind of an Orwellian way, all are human, but some are more human than others. In other words, while vulnerability, more than any other condition, highlights the concept of common humanity, it is also the case that it exemplifies those moments when humanity might be lost (physically in the loss of human life or metaphorically in the loss of human dignity). In this sense, while fortunate spectators are human 'by default', vulnerable others are not. In contrast, vulnerable others are what deviates from what is 'desirable' in common humanity. Together, these two arguments form one of the fundamental paradoxes of humanitarian communication. As Chouliaraki points out, while humanitarian communication "speaks the language of common humanity, the spectacle of vulnerability simultaneously evokes the language of power, and thus tends to reproduce existing global" (2013, 29).

This is not to say that the concept of common humanity holds no value, that it cannot amplify well-grounded commitment to justice and solidarity, or that it may not be truly inspired by egalitarian fraternity. The question, therefore, is not whether common humanity is essentially a bad thing. Instead, the argument is that the discourse of common humanity is subject to a struggle over its meaning and thus cannot be understood as having an essential meaning in the first place. Thus, the question to be addressed here is how the construct of common humanity is *represented* and *produced.* The quest is to denaturalise the concept, despite the fact that it exudes a particularly strong aura of self-evidence to it. As the perceived self-evidence of common humanity is a product of modern history (as is the concept of 'development'), this context will first be explored a little further – particularly since this legacy is increasingly critiqued and self-reflexively addressed in the humanitarian sector.

Modernity, critique, and reflexivity

For Mignolo, deconstructing the category of the human serves a very particular aim. The point, he says, "is not to find the true and objective definition of 'what is Human,' but to show that such projects are filled with an imperial bend, a will to objectivity and truth" (Mignolo 2015, 110). This reference to the imperial bend in which discourses around the human are grounded signifies the importance of postcolonial theory in critiques of humanitarianism, its communicative practices, and associated discourses of common humanity. From this perspective, Mignolo argues that the human is "the product of a particular epistemology", namely that of Western modernity (Mignolo 2015, 108). Indeed, from the field of critical development studies, Arturo Escobar emphasises that 'development' can be viewed as "an anthropology of modernity, that is, a general investigation of Western modernity as a culturally and historically specific phenomenon" (Escobar 1995, 11). The emergence of the "modernisation paradigm", which has significantly influenced development discourse, has been a pivotal event in the fusion of Western modernity and development (Rist 2008, 93). The field of critical development studies has provided some seminal works on the ethnocentric character of development studies, practice, and discourse (among them Escobar's and Rist's) and these studies provide a telling historical analysis about the particular epistemology of Western modernity and definition of what is human (to use Mignolo's vocabulary). The critiques of Walt Whitman Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) were exemplary in this regard. The economic analysis proclaimed by Rostow centralises industrialisation and capitalism as the preferred (and supposedly natural) endpoint of the development of societies and was used in defence of capitalist ideology during the Cold War – which is emphasised in its subtitle "a non-communist manifesto". According to the book, "it is possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of five categories: the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption" (*ibid*, 164). The universalised linearity of such a proposal, which places 'underdeveloped', 'traditional' nations at the bottom and the 'developed', 'modern' (capitalist) nations on top of the same ladder, has been widely criticised and, and it has come to be regarded as a text where the modernisation paradigm culminated. Along these lines, critical development studies has offered essential insights into the ethnocentric aspects of the development discourse. This dissertation breaks from many of these conclusions, as the field has been able to highlight how universalist and naturalist conceptions about progress depict some individuals and societies as farther distant from the ideal of common humanity than others.

However, both the modernisation paradigm and its configuration of a common humanity are being tested under what in the next chapter will be defined as the historical context of "post-humanitarianism" (Chouliaraki 2013). Whereas "development has often been linked to, or equated with, modernization" (Hobart 2002, 5), a range of critiques (both popular and institutional) have shaken the profound strength of this development discourse, which used "to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming" about modern

futures for all (Rist 2008). The introduction to disintegration and critique presented in the next chapter will thus illustrate the ambivalent and unclear relationship that contemporary development discourse has with modernity and modernisation. As will become clear, such ambivalence does not imply a complete abandonment of principles and objectives of traditional development. Rather, the ambiguity has prompted a search for amendments that channel and repurpose the stakes associated with traditional development in a context that has demanded considerable reflection on the side of NGO's other institutional actors in development. As Eduardo Gudynas notes, the discipline of "critical development studies", which accompanies these introspective pursuits, is caught in a paradox between conservative and progressive elements in the development sector. According to Gudynas, the persistence of "a basic core" of development traditions is supplemented by a "diversity of instrumental expressions of development" (Gudynas 2017, 88). Similarly, Gilbert Rist notes that "nowadays it is thought quite proper to criticize Rostow and his evolutionist theory" (Rist 2008, 93). Nonetheless, he concludes that the "final goal has remained the same, and the means towards it (spread of technology, industrialization, exploitation of nature) have not changed" (*ibid*, 103).

In an attempt to do justice to these dynamics special attention will be paid to the idea(l)s of modernity and its discontents. Consider, for instance, how modernity has been associated with critiques of excess and hastiness, as stressed once more in the Family Meal. On its website, it is stated that "In today's rushed world, it is more important than ever to make time to sit down with your loved ones and enjoy a meal together. That is why we are shining the spotlight on the universal custom of the family meal". That 'today's rushed world' particularly pertains to the European audience and Western modernity is explicated by Diane Fresquez, an American journalist living in Brussels, responding to this statement by writing that, "to my surprise, many of the images made me feel, not pity, but delight – even a bit of envy, because we who do not suffer from hunger sometimes claim we are 'too busy' for family meals" (Fresquez 2015).[8] Such an implicit reflection on the 'rush' of modern life, and of being driven away from values judged more essential than living a wealthy life, is made time and again – being trapped between the modernist discourse of development and humanitarianism, and the ways to overcome this as well. Taking the vulnerable Other as an idealised (and exotic) source for contemplation over modernity thereby comes to be an aspect of humanitarianism to be reckoned with; it will therefore be addressed here by enquiring into what remains of the modernist discourse that is being reflected upon.

[8] More generally, in the popular Western imagination, 'the West' usually connotes a rushed world (as in, among other things, modern, efficient, profitable and, ultimately, developed), while the global South is often euphemistically associated with (innocent) tranquility and (static) charm (Driver and Martins, 2005; Sheller, 2004; Slater, 2004). This also often times means that poverty comes to be celebrated with the idea that those living in poverty are actually better at seeing what 'actually matters' in life, not being 'corrupted' by prosperity (or even luxury).

The sentiments of delight that one can feel when confronted with allegedly primitive scenes are however hardly at odds with the putative hierarchy of 'stages of economic growth' or the modernity paradigm. It merely expresses an ambiguous relationship with notions of modernity – an ambiguity that is prevalent throughout humanitarian communication. As post-humanitarian communication is defined by the condition of *late*-modernity, it mirrors much of what came to be characterized in post-modern or post-structural terms, or other movements that Ulrich Beck discusses as being denominated by "the unremarkable prefix 'post'" (Beck 1986, 9). According to him, this "hints at a 'beyond' which it cannot name, and in the substantive elements that it names and negates it remains tied to the familiar. Past plus post – that is the basic recipe with which we confront a reality that is out of joint" (*ibid*). This is the key reason for attempting to comprehend the post-humanitarian situation in conjuncture with what has come before: to recognise how it both builds on, reflects on, and departs from it. It is thus noteworthy that Beck and his colleagues label the condition of late modernity (that is explicitly associated with the notion of post-humanitarianism; Chouliaraki 2013, 22), as *reflexive* modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994).

Indeed, humanitarianism has grown to be profoundly (self-)reflexive, as is emphasised in Chouliaraki's account of post-humanitarianism as well. Chouliaraki's main focus for this is the self-oriented morality that stems from reflexions on the feelings and identity formation of the benevolent spectator, for which the act of caring is a means to self-actualization. However, reflexivity refers not just to how humanitarian communication has come to revolve increasingly around the donor's self-image, but also to how campaigns are increasingly self-referential: (sometimes critically) assessing themselves as a mode of representation and as a way of raising funds. As will be unpacked, humanitarian communication both explicitly and implicitly discusses its own discourse and history, reflecting on where it came from and what that means. Explicitly, the jury reports for the Family Meal photo competition reflect on this process, as they examine the aesthetics of the images as well as the context they depict. Take for instance one of the winning pictures from the Philippines. Here, the formal caption reads: "A small family in the southern Philippines enjoys their supper despite the darkness of their home. After the devastation of Super Typhoon Bopha in 2012, many families in these areas suffer power shortages every day". After this, the commentary (by professional photographer Chris Terry)[9] highlights the aesthetics and affective capacity of the photograph: "Breech's candle-lit image of the family eating during a power outage has a lovely intimacy and warmth. It draws the viewer in, emphasizing the human need to gather around light, and company, when sharing a meal". While this is quite unremarkable

[9] Terry actually was a central figure in the Family Meal campaign, who kicked off by a traveling photo exhibition around Europe with pictures of family meals shot in the areas that were served by the WFP aid program. This photo exhibition was the cornerstone for the rest of the campaign; to be accompanied by the videos, the photo competition, the website and social media use and the distribution of recipes discussed here.

language for a jury report, it ties together the most basic aspects of humanitarian communication: addressing the precarious situation (the power outage), the aesthetics (the photo being candle-lit; giving it 'warmth'), the way the viewer is being addressed (or is 'drawn in'), and the appeal to humanity that underscores the need for solidarity ('the human need to gather around light'). Opening up the act of representing vulnerability to a wider audience is thus not only an interactive and competitive element, but also an act of reflecting on imagery that is part of humanitarian campaigns (in often less apparent ways).

As our attention is now drawn to the "ongoing reflexivity of the sector" (Chouliaraki and Vestergaard 2021, 3) in international development and humanitarianism, the emphasis on platforms in this dissertation becomes evident. Platforms, which will be characterised as "meta-organisations" in the following chapter, provide a major organisational principle that maintains and advances reflexive endeavours. The role of platforms as meta-organisations in this dissertation is distinguished primarily by the fact that the core case studies presented in the following chapters are not the primary content creators. To illustrate, broadcasters produce campaigns for the disaster relief platforms under scrutiny, NGO confederations conduct content produced by their members, individual users provide the profiles and interactivity on which Kiva relies, and film makers produce content for the human rights film festivals studied in the last chapter. The platforms channel and conduct content rather than producing it. They aggregate, integrate, curate, and distribute messages and images, and reflect upon them. On top of this, the platformed organisations are (or at least present themselves as) alternatives to modern "structures" and "topologies" and thereby thoroughly reflect on the modernity paradigm – as a model that is partially sustained and partially replaced with the rise of platformed organizations. As Noortje Marres argues, platformed organisational structures have historically fitted the institutional set-up of NGOs very well. According to her, features that distinguish NGOs "are their propensity to form partnerships, both among themselves and with (inter-)governmental bodies and, sometimes, for-profit actors, and more radically, their commitment to decentralized and distributed ways of working" (Marres 2006, 3). However, during the last two decades, we have witnessed the professionalisation and expanding impact of a number of organisations that operate on an (often explicitly mentioned) platformed and meta-organised logic. As will be shown, this increase in platformed organisations is presented as an alternative to the modernisation paradigm in development, particularly in reference to characteristics attributed to platforms as organically organized, non-institutional and egalitarian.

As will be seen in the case studies, reflexivity and platforms mutually reinforce each other in their aim of sustaining the discourse of common humanity and, more practically, countering the many kinds of critique that have befallen the humanitarian sector (Andrews 2009). Questions about its alleged lack of economic success (Riddell 2008; Kharas 2008), critique concerning its supposed cultural insensitivity and ethnocentricity (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 2000), and the idea that most developmental practice promotes dependency on others (Bauer 2000) and is thus *dis*empowering (Crocker 2009) are

frequently raised. Rist observes that regarding development "euphoria has been somewhat checked" (2008, *xi*) since the turn of the century, citing the advent of the anti-globalist movement, the 9/11 attacks, and financial crisis as all unsettling geopolitics and checking cosmopolitan discourses. Thus, in the different chapters, it will be discussed how media spectacles of humanitarian disaster reflect on their own extraordinary character; how codes of conduct for humanitarian communication reflect the representation of human dignity; how micro-finance presents itself as a solution to conventional forms of development and aid; and how human rights NGOs reflect on the position of their appeals in a media-saturated environment. As such, the reflections on some core principles of the development discourse will be highlighted – as arguably, self-reflexivity is itself a core principle of humanitarian communication. The self-reflexive capacities of platforms will thus be addressed in the following chapters, in an analysis of how contested accounts of common humanity are constructed in the context of post-humanitarianism.

Chapter outline

The next chapter provides a framework upon which the different case studies will be built. A more comprehensive historical reflection on disintegration and critique from a post-humanitarian perspective underlines two challenges to the discourse of common humanity. Following that, the notion of the platform will be theoretically investigated, as it is argued that the rise of platforms is a response to these challenges. This notion is deliberately defined in the broadest sense of the term, in order to emphasize how platformed logics impact many cultural domains such as organisations, technologies, and discourses. To gain a better understanding of their role in humanitarian communications, it will be discussed how the platform and its implications for various domains are intertwined and mutually constitutive as they advance in tandem. Lastly, before delving into the case studies, the methodology will be presented. Here, it will be outlined how the objects are approached as 'conjunctures' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002, 22) to do justice to both their linguistic aspects and the organisational and technological contexts in which the campaigns emerge. The concept of 'conjunctures' is based on discourse analysis but tied to linguistic formations and new materialist approaches to "relatively durable assemblies of people, materials, technologies and therefore practices" (*ibid*). Conjunctures are informative in this context because it is exactly in such constellations that the discourse of common humanity is not just represented, but also debated and constructed. While extending to (new) materialist approaches, the framework as a whole will remain firmly grounded in cultural studies approaches. Through discourse analysis, culture is presented as a ground for contestation in which humanitarian communication is a genre (with its own linguistic 'rules') that presents us with popular representations of common humanity as a form of identity formation.

Following the chapter outlining the framework follow four chapters (chapter 2 to 5) that deal with three different forms of humanitarian communication; those campaigns that address (1) disaster relief, (2) long-term development (two chapters) and (3) conflict

and human rights. In these three 'domains' common humanity is sustained in different ways. In the first, post-humanitarian disintegration is combated in a way that emphasises unity and integration, and in doing so common humanity is re-established. This is different from the two cases in long-term development, where common humanity is being repurposed. Here, through thorough reflections and utopian imaginations, common humanity taking different forms in response to critiques on development and its representations. In the third domain, conflict and human rights, common humanity matches the disintegrated context of which it is part. Here, simply the range of different understandings of common humanity is matched in the heterogenous set of interpretations of what human rights entail. The use of three different categories (albeit messy by default and problematic in specific instances) sheds light on different explanations of vulnerability and, as a result, highlights how exactly the notion of vulnerability is being depoliticized in very diverse ways.

The Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) will take centre stage as an "integrative" platform in the second chapter. The EAA is a member organisation for national emergency appeals platforms, the majority of which are member organisations for NGOs to unite in times of crisis. Through both an analysis of the campaigns launched by some of their members in response to the Haiti Earthquake in 2010 and interviews with employees of the different national emergency relief platforms, it will be argued that the notion of common humanity is embedded in a discourse of holism. It is suggested that the claims of holism are problematic because they explicitly sideline politics, arguing for political struggle to be 'put aside in times of crisis'. Questions about why humanitarian disaster nearly always strikes in already disadvantaged areas are thus left out of the equation (Carrigan 2015), instead explaining their existence by little more than mere chance. Simultaneously, publics, organisations and discourse are encouraged to gather around an ostensibly neutral 'mediated centre', to celebrate holism, and to coalesce in support of a very concrete and neatly demarcated cause. Building on this, it will be argued that the "myth of the mediated centre" (Couldry 2015) is enabled by the existence of the platforms in which different NGOs and media channels are assembled. To put it another way, without the platforms being there to embody unification, the discourse of holism could not be performed in the first place. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that the emergency relief platforms are a necessary precondition for this integrative and consensual discourse to flourish.

The third chapter is the first of two looking at long-term development and introduces the role of European NGO confederations in drafting communication guidelines. Where the prior chapter mainly zooms in on a platformed response to disintegration, the third chapter mostly addresses the problem of critique. These critiques are multifaceted but are reinterpreted in ways that, it will be claimed, sideline an otherwise complex debate on power relations in international development and its representations. In an attempt to construct a "humanitarian identity" (Barnett and Weiss 2008) for the

sector as a whole, the NGO confederations represent and conduct a multitude of stakes that come to play out in the discussion over representation. As such, they function as reflexive platforms that struggle with two different institutional worries: a scepticism on the side of "fortunate spectators" (i.e. potential donors), and critiques regarding stereotyping and dehumanising representations of "unfortunate others". The chapter will argue that the concomitant emergence of these two issues for NGOs makes it hard to discern between instrumental and ethical considerations (Nolan and Mikami 2013) regarding fundraising concerns and equitable representation. The ways in which both considerations become enmeshed impedes structural and fundamental changes to humanitarian communication in ways that respond to critiques of power imbalances in representations of long-term development and the development practices that underpin these. Critically, the chapter argues that, while it appears hard to historically isolate a thread of 'pure' ethical considerations, the sector fruitlessly seeks an understanding of its position in which solutions to their instrumental and ethical concerns can or even do necessarily run parallel. As such, a debate on the reproduction of unequal power relations in international development through representation is reduced to questions of "optimism", "reality" and what came to be known as "deliberate positivism" as a claimed remedy.

The fourth chapter will present an analysis of Kiva, a social micro-lending platform. Building on the findings of the third chapter, the shift in representations proposed in the communication guides aligns very well Kiva's (neo-)liberal discourses of self-reliance and commercial trade. The chapter describes how Kiva positions itself as a revolutionary outsider (or 'disruptor' – a position so keenly appropriated by tech start-ups) to the development sector. Yet, while the platform appropriates a utopian outsider's position, it will be argued that the platform neatly matches most tendencies in the development sector and may be viewed as an expression of how the modernisation paradigm came to be superseded by an "empowerment discourse". With the empowerment discourse, a range of values negatively associated with modernisation (such as top-down organisation, impersonal social engineering, bureaucracy) were turned upside down in a celebration of ostensibly organic growth strategies, human-sized approaches, and, more generally, "adjustments with a human face". This approach flourishes in traditional NGO appeals, which will be addressed in an analysis of a range of "girl-oriented" initiatives in which agency and empowerment are constructed around girls as individual changemakers for their communities. Subsequently, it will be scrutinised how Kiva not only propagates this approach, but also embodies it in its very setup, interface and structure as a platform. It is therefore maintained that through the notions of "connectivity" (associated with networked, digital media) and "connective capital" (related to open and free markets as platforms) are central to the empowerment discourse.

The fifth chapter addresses a stronghold of common humanity, the terrain of conflict and human rights. While post-humanitarianism is partially defined by "solidarity without 'grand narratives'" (Chouliaraki 2013, 9–15), human rights can be considered an

exception, as "they survived as a moral utopia when political utopias died" (Moyn 2012, 214). However, as a "last utopia" (*ibid*), the discourse of human rights gives way to a very broad range of struggles and campaigning styles that will be studied through an analysis of human rights film festivals. Here, the eclecticism that festivals provide is used to illustrate platform culture, allowing activists, campaigners, journalists, politicians and audiences to come together around films and cross-media programmes. The festivals, united in the *Human Rights Film Network,* are in the position to conduct the multiplicity of styles and struggles, and so handle the ambivalences and polemics around the meaning of human rights. Particularly over the last decades, the programming of the festivals has broadened the number of issues and themes that are considered to be human rights related – expanding the number of perspectives from which human rights can be approached. As such, this chapter focuses on the tension between such open-ended multiplicity in comprehending (and implementing) human rights, and their restricted connotation as definitely derived from humanity as a 'natural category'. In doing so, the chapter on conflict and human rights reflects on the former chapters, returning to the tension between naturalist and constructivist conceptions of common humanity – and how these are mediated through platforms.

In the conclusion of this dissertation, the capacity of platforms to "bring us together" will be reviewed by looking at the consequences of their rise to prominence in humanitarian communication. It will be outlined how the platformed logic is a direct response to post-humanitarian disintegration and to the mounting criticism that has befallen the development sector. As platforms will get defined as 'meta-organisations', they are able to mould existing organisations to new purposes and provide NGOs with the flexibility to answer to scepticism – a scepticism brought about by a general distrust in institutions, critiques of the failure of development projects, and the rise of an anti-cosmopolitan populist discourse. It will be argued that the adaptations in the sector span across infrastructures (i.e., media technologies), organisations (NGOs and institutions) and the campaigns themselves (as audio-visual, textual, and discursive products), and that these many layers mirror each other and are mutually constitutive. This will be examined against the backdrop of an issue that is conspicuously absent in this dissertation: migration and (forced) displacement. As in the last decade migration has been a focal point in societal debate, the role of common humanity has emerged as a significant battleground in political discourse. Here, migration will be considered separate from the focus on distant suffering taken up in this dissertation, as migration (either physically or psychologically) affects the perception of distance that has dominated development discourse for decades. Yet, as practices and discourses in development, humanitarianism, and migration increasingly converge, the political debate on migration underscores the centrality of the notion of common humanity once again. These debates recentre the discourse of common humanity as a battleground for justice and solidarity, while populist rhetoric is riddled with division, segregation, and exclusion.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY

"Global Citizen is a community of people like you". This statement summarises the mission of Global Citizen, an activist lobbying network for social and environmental action. The headline is emphasised on a red banner on Global Citizen's website, encouraging visitors to "learn more".[10] Clicking this option expands the banner and displays the proposition of three steps that can be taken to get involved in the community: "get informed", "take action" and "connect with others" (all proposed in imperatives). Building on these three starting points, Global Citizen's quest to connect and unite people across a broad range of different causes is reflected in its language and self-descriptive comments. Apart from naming itself a 'community' (of people like you), Global Citizen also refers to itself as 'a movement', 'a collective' and as 'a platform'. Notably, all of these descriptions connote non-hierarchical and non-institutionalized 'organic' forms of collaboration. The vocabulary of community, movement, and platform is reinforced across the website and shapes its rhetoric and style – from imagery of united masses to active language about 'commitment', 'impact' and 'mobilization', as well as a focus on 'the extensive reach' of digital channels. What Global Citizen proposes is a new way of finding unity, as evidenced by images of people coming together and the goal to "building the world's largest movement for social action".

In this chapter, the (historical) context for the new ways of finding unity is explored. First, the historical tendencies that pave the way for initiatives like Global Citizen to flourish will be summarised in an exploration of post-humanitarianism (Chouliaraki 2010; 2013); setting the stage in a contextual sense. It will be claimed that cultural disintegration and contemporary critiques alter humanitarian communication and force NGOs to reinvent modes of campaigning. The disintegration of institutions, grand narratives and (centralised) media channels serve as the backdrop of a changing cultural landscape in which NGOs operate and communicate – a cultural landscape that will be assessed under the label of post-humanitarianism. Concretely, this context exploration will demonstrate how the discourse of common humanity is undermined by a multitude of disintegrative forces and challenged in contemporary critiques of cosmopolitanism. Monitoring the response to such disintegration and critique, the second section will highlight how a logic of platformisation has taken root in humanitarian communication. This is related to the promise of platforms to offer new forms of organisation and collaboration (in response to disintegrative forces), as well as its supposed ability to promote change and commons-based action (in response to critique). It will be argued that since the field of platform studies has evolved alongside the surge in social media platforms, its assessment of 'platforms' is too narrowly focused on technological infrastructures and issues of political economy. Therefore, it will be proposed that platforms should be looked at as cultural objects or, building on Raymond Williams (1974), as cultural forms. From this perspective, it is evident that besides (but in

[10] The different references to and interpretations of Global Citizen made here are based on an analysis of its website, that can be found at https://www.globalcitizen.org/.

combination with!) their technological and economic materiality, platforms are discursively used and constructed, and perpetually performed in forming organisational alliances. Building on this, the third and last section of this chapter introduces discourse analysis as the methodological approach of this dissertation. The tensions between discourse analysis and the more material approaches that are usually associated with platform studies will be discussed here. This tension is addressed by relying on the notion of 'conjunctures' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002), where a range of different actors dynamically relate to different issues – as happens in platforms.

In their proposition to build the "world's largest movement for social action", Global Citizen proposes an appealing combination of a commons-based approach (as "a *community*") and an individual one ("of people like *you*"). In reference to both the idea of community and individuality, Global Citizen clings to feelings of belonging in what will be articulated here as 'humanity as identity' (Rancière 1999, 124; Agier 2010). The choice for identity is deliberate, as the stakes over identity have risen to the forefront of contemporary political debate – particularly in globalisation-related issues that *Global* Citizen and other developmental and humanitarian organisations relate to. Identity, in short, plays a central role in what Boltanski highlights as the tension between universalism and communitarism as

> "it is often in terms of this opposition that promoters and opponents of humanitarian action confront each other, the first siding with global solidarity against national particularisms and preferences, while the second unmasks the hypocrisy or, at best, naive eirenic idealism which ignores the primacy of interests and ties forged by history"
>
> (Boltanski 1999, *xiii*)

Particularly highlighted by cross-border political issues of displacement, forced migration, climate change, and international trade, identity politics are one crucial lens that underlines the significance of global 'community-building' discourses as is proposed by Global Citizen. To emphasize identity struggles here thus means to position the discursive construction of common humanity vis-à-vis the broader societal debate that informs it (and is informed by it). Proposing humanity as an identity marker also stresses how this study is indebted to a classical form of cultural studies, in addition to the more organisational and materialist approach that is addressed by the emphasis on the platformed character of present day humanitarian communication. To arrive at this point of platformisation, the tendencies and developments that lead to its presence will be dissected further here. Therefore, the exploration of Global Citizen in this chapter serves to highlight some the key concepts of this research, providing several reference points to build on in the remainder of this study. Rather than as empirical 'proof', Global Citizen is thus used as an illustration (albeit hopefully a compelling one in itself) that precedes the case studies that more rigorously show how 'common humanity' is retained in platformed humanitarian communication.

Post-humanitarian disintegration

Although the lightheartedness touched upon above is an interesting aspect of humanitarian communication in and of itself, particularly in light of the moral claims that are being made in it, it is part of a more general trend that will be addressed here. In many ways, Global Citizen mirrors what Chouliaraki describes as "post-humanitarianism" (2013). The term post-humanitarianism mainly refers to a changing style or mode of campaigning in humanitarianism, as well as an assessment of the historical conditions that underpin this. If we accept that common humanity is a contingent construction, as suggested in the introduction, a contextual framework such as 'post-humanitarianism' is key, which is why it will be explored here. In resistance to the appeal of common humanity to be unchanging and universal, the tendencies that give shape to post-humanitarianism are taken up here to understand and explain the direction in which appeals to common humanity are moving. This is particularly important since, under post-humanitarianism, Chouliaraki witnesses "a generalized *reluctance* to accept 'common humanity'" (2013, 2; italics mine).[11]

While Chouliaraki's assessment addresses what has come to replace common humanity, in a sense asking what comes next, this dissertation stays with the concept to understand how it is reconfigured and revitalised to fit contemporary contexts. The main causes of fragmentation pointed to in Chouliaraki's *The Ironic Spectator* will be detailed in a brief overview below, and although her book addresses what such fragmentation looks like, this study addresses how unity is reconstructed and invigorated through platformisation. So, while post-humanitarianism will take centre stage as a framework to depart from, the question is different: rather than asking what comes next, the question is asked what remains behind – or, to put it another way, what persists and what is reinvented. While the post-humanitarian context is undeniably shifting, existing discourses are studied *as these become part of* newer contexts. To be sure, *The Ironic Spectator* does not dismiss older perspectives or their influence. Chouliaraki does not deny or neglect them, but she moves on to what is new about the new – leaving the struggle between old and new perspectives mainly unexplored. Thus, this dissertation is about morphisms rather than alternatives, translations rather than transitions, and what persists rather than what changes. How is the bull seized by the horns, discursively and organisationally, and how are the new contextual factors of post-humanitarianism integrated into existing institutions, customs, and campaigns? To answer this question, post-humanitarianism will first be unpacked by focusing on the three distinct developments identified by Chouliaraki in defining the concept: the instrumentalisation of humanitarianism, solidarity without 'grand narratives', and the technologisation of

[11] Interestingly, in defining the very term 'humanitarian communication', Chouliaraki uses the concept of common humanity. She describes humanitarian communication as "the rhetorical practices of transnational actors that engage with universal ethical claims, such as common humanity or global civil society, to mobilize action on human suffering" (Chouliaraki 2010, 108).

communication (2013, 5-21). To help ground subsequent discussions, these will be briefly detailed below as a way to map how common humanity is put under pressure from different perspectives.

For Chouliaraki, the instrumentalisation of humanitarianism demonstrates that, while humanitarianism has never been entirely antithetical to market logics, its commercial drive has over the past decades grown to determine the logics of humanitarianism. Particularly the shift in official development assistance (ODA) from governments to organisations that are deliberately *non*-governmental (NGOs) has facilitated this shift, and therefore Chouliaraki stresses that NGOs and the competitive market in which they operate "commodify private emotion and philanthropic obligation" (7).[12] Though commercialisation has been central in the move towards instrumentalisation, it does not tell the entire story. Along with it, a more wide-ranging shift toward managerialism occurred, as did the rise of goal-oriented rationalisation and the production of administrative and scientific knowledge in the humanitarian sector. In this respect, the term instrumentalisation is more appropriate than 'just' marketisation, because NGOs more generally, according to Chouliaraki, tend to "adopt a modus operandi that depoliticizes questions of development in favour of a focus on 'impact' and 'measurable indicators'" (Chouliaraki 2013, 8).

Beyond this organisational focus, Chouliaraki characterises the changing nature of solidarity itself in post-modern spirit as being devoid of "grand narratives". Two moral certainties that, according to Chouliaraki, figured as 'grand narratives' formed the basis of a discourse of common humanity that was anchored in either 'salvation' or 'revolution'. 'Salvation', an apolitical aspiration "to save lives and comfort human suffering" (2013, 10) was based on both secular and Christian traditions of aid and charity, whereas 'revolution' has its roots in Marxist social critiques of exploitation and injustice. Though they differ in many ways, Chouliaraki notes that "these two forms of solidarity, salvation and revolution, are nonetheless informed by similarly universal norms of morality" (*ibid*, 11), hence its appeal to common humanity. The morality of altruistic benevolence, which informs the former, and the morality of social justice tied to the latter, are both part of a bigger scheme of things that usually ties in well with the 'grand narratives' of ideologically integrated worldviews – worldviews that are said to have suffered a setback in times of late-capitalism. Instead, according to Chouliaraki, low-intensity forms of solidarity have

[12] At the start of the 1970's, Jane Nelson (2008, 149) points out, governments and state institutions had a share of about 70% in the resource flow of official development assistance (ODA). More recently however, in 2008, 80% of the recourse flows came from private citizens, corporations, NGOs, religious groups and foundations. According to David Harvey, "the NGOs have in many instances stepped into the vacuum in social provision left by the withdrawal of the state from such activities. This amounts to a process of privatization by NGO. (…) NGOs thereby function as 'trojan horses for global neoliberalism'" (Harvey 2006, 51–52).

taken centre stage, focusing on the donor's gratification and identification, as well as 'feel good' activism.

Third, in the realm of media and communication, 'technologisation' mainly points to the privatisation of and self-expression through (digital) media use. The 'moral subjectivity' to accompany the end of grand narratives is therefore expressed through (or bound up with) the rise of digital media channels, just as the invitation to self-expression is linked to a heavy use of interactive technology. Going beyond the theatrical conception of 'distant suffering' (Boltanski 1999)[13] that classically portray the figures of the sufferer, persecutor, and benefactor, new and digital means challenge existing positions. Chouliaraki evaluates this shift in ambivalence by both recognising the liberating possibilities of such new positions (specifically when they challenge the existing dualism of fortunate spectators and unfortunate others, opening up new cosmopolitan dispositions), as well as rise of self-oriented morality. While, according to Chouliaraki, morality was formerly "anchored on the spectacle of the other, inspiring the normative moralities of salvation or revolution", the new configuration of solidarity increasingly highlights the "spectacle of others like us, inviting our capacity for self-reflection" (Chouliaraki 2013, 20).

While analytically distinct, these aspects are largely interdependent and mutually informed by notions of disintegration, fluidity and rationalisation; defining the post-humanitarian situation and approach are part of these grand cultural shifts.[14] Under this condition, Chouliaraki claims, the audience is being constructed as ironic spectators, with irony here pointing to "a disposition of detached knowingness, a self-conscious suspicion" (2013, 2). In this framework, the self-conscious spectator is motivated less by a commitment to solidarity, but more by introspection, self-actualisation and an appeal to the feeling that something meaningful has been done.[15] Either emotionally or in more concrete ways, Chouliaraki outlines that the ironic spectator is constructed through "minor gratifications to the self" (3). In practice, Global Citizen takes this to a new level by offering rewards to users who contribute stories, retweet certain news messages on the website, or share videos. As the platform puts it: "The best way to contribute to Global Citizen is to take action on our platform. You can start by downloading the Global Citizen app and registering to be a Global Citizen. With every action you take, you'll earn

[13] For the theorization of the three figures of sufferer, persecutor and benefactor, as well as in the understanding of the fortunate spectator and its relation to the unfortunate other, Chouliaraki borrows from Boltanski's theatrical understanding of 'distant suffering' (1999).

[14] The parallels between the prefix 'post' in post-humanitarianism and the cultural tendencies that define the post-modern, post-structural and post-industrial are evident; though this is not explicitly reflected upon by Chouliaraki.

[15] The possibility "to 'realise oneself' through action" (Boltanski 1999; *xiv*) is evidently not new. Richard Rorty for instance traces such attempts to actualize one's own identity by means of solidarity back to antiquity and Christianity. He outlines how "The attempt to fuse the public and the private lies behind both Plato's attempt to answer the question 'Why is it in one's interest to be just?' and Christianity's claim that perfect self-realization can be attained through service to others" (Rorty 1989b, *xiii*).

points that you can redeem for Rewards, like attending a Global Citizen Festival, or seeing other music performances, sporting events, and more" (Global Citizen 2019). The actions that Global Citizens can take mainly consist of sharing news and stories through social media to accumulate points that help them advance to certain levels: 'Global Citizen', 'Activist', 'Leader', or 'Champion'. Along with quarterly bonus points and the use of awards and lotteries, a system is put in place that rewards contributors in material ways, with a recurring emphasis on meaningfully contributing to change and the self-actualisation that comes with it. It is here that identity formation takes centre stage, both in reference to the individual that can be rewarded, appreciated, and recognised as such, as well as in reference to collectivity where the individual can become a celebrated member of the community of global citizens. Indeed, after creating a profile on the Global Citizen website, new users receive an email that emphasizes this process of rising through the ranks of citizenship as "the more actions you take, the higher you advance in our citizenship tiers". As such, Global Citizen can easily be understood as a post-humanitarian campaign *par excellence*. Its focus on personalised, transitory involvement with the vulnerable 'other' and self-oriented, reflexive morality characterises the ways in which humanitarian audiences are, according to Chouliaraki, addressed as 'ironic spectators'.

Cosmopolitan identity and critique

While Global Citizen is representative of the disintegration depicted above, its attempts to bring audiences together are apparent as well – at least on an imaginary level. Global Citizen's measurement of involvement with (and contribution to) the community of global citizens provides a scale of credibility and belonging to a cosmopolitan identity. Obviously, it should be emphasised that the word 'cosmopolitan' is etymologically similar, if not literally identical, to being a 'global citizen', and possibly the ludified and quantified construction of cosmopolitanism is the basis of its existence. Before delving into platforms as one particular cultural way of imagining global communities, two sceptic critiques on cosmopolitanism need be unpacked in the next two paragraphs coming up, in order to understand the historical context in which platforms like Global Citizen operate.

For this, the term cosmopolitanism is used rather than the term 'common humanity' used in the introduction of this dissertation. This is due to the naturalness with which common humanity is endowed that is less available to cosmopolitanism, which is more or less considered to be a political process. Although unmistakably related, a move from common humanity to cosmopolitanism involves a bit of a shift. Cosmopolitanism will be taken to closely resemble "the notion of common humanity that translates ethically into an idea of shared or common moral duties towards others by virtue of this humanity" (Lu 2000, 245). Cosmopolitanism is therefore more of a perspective or an idea, or what Harold Baldry calls "an attitude of mind" that centres human unity (Baldry 2009, 2). It goes beyond the ostensible naturalness of common humanity and highlights the position that one can take in relation to such a globalist attitude. In some ways,

cosmopolitanism is more explicitly political – it is more openly perspectival than common humanity. As an ethical perspective, cosmopolitanism is being challenged and critiqued more directly than the notion of common humanity, and while common humanity sometimes successfully presents itself as beyond doubt and critique, cosmopolitanism rarely does so. Although common humanity can be discussed as such as well, the notion of cosmopolitanism can therefore provide an entry point for highlighting some of the political and societal discussions that affect the humanitarian and development sector as a whole, and its communicative endeavours more specifically.

This is to argue that, beyond the challenge of disintegration as such, cosmopolitanism itself is also susceptible to more direct political debates and critiques. These cannot be neglected since they have led to significant changes in how the sector views itself and reflects on its position, responsibilities, and communication. In other words, the critiques that have befallen international development and the cosmopolitan project of transnational integration play a significant role in humanitarian communication. While cosmopolitanism, its history, and its many branches and debates are beyond the scope of this dissertation, two particular critiques speak to the reluctance to accept common humanity in humanitarianism and humanitarian communication. First, from a postcolonial perspective, a critique of the ethnocentricity of international solidarity was expressed, raising existential questions about the nature of solidarity, power, and aid (Gilroy 2006). These are questions that have haunted the sector for many years, and they will become particularly apparent in the third chapter where the struggle of NGOs for legitimacy and moral authority is addressed. Second, recent backlashes against cross-border developments and challenges (such as climate change and migration) highlight long-simmering discontents with political, economic and cultural cosmopolitan elites (Calhoun 2003), which have spiked in recent times. Here, also the institutions that embody cosmopolitanism, such as international development NGOs, have been confronted with scepticism and mistrust.

Although it is hard to pinpoint the moment when these critiques surfaced, some key debates can be located in the 1990s. These are, for instance, the "imagery debate" that discussed the victimisation discourse in humanitarian communication (Dogra 2013), the "age of suspicion" that marked a range of scandals in the humanitarian sector (Vestergaard 2014), the rise of the anti-globalist movement that culminated in the protests in Geneva and Seattle in the late 1990s (Seoane and Taddei 2002) and the instalment of what Craig Calhoun calls a 'false opposition' between cosmopolitan liberalism and reactionary nationalism in discourses on global civil society (Calhoun 2003). While these and other controversies arose concurrently, they should not be mistaken as similar or unproblematically connected. The two critiques delineated below, for instance, differ substantially in terms of their political background, where the first is issued from a progressive perspective, while the second is informed by conservative politics. Regardless of such differences, together they amount to an "age of suspicion" in which trust and legitimacy of (mediatised) humanitarianism are put under pressure (Vestergaard 2014).

~ From a postcolonial perspective "cosmopolitan solidarity became suspect"

Given the strong relations between postcolonial and poststructuralist academic work, the notion of common humanity has been subjected to consistent critiques addressing its supposed universal naturalness. In line with this, postcolonial development scholars have attempted to deconstruct the political and economic project of international development itself. At this point, Didier Fassin notes that "although [humanitarianism] is generally taken for granted as a mere expansion of a supposed natural humaneness that would be innately associated with our being human, humanitarianism is a relatively recent invention" (Fassin 2012, *ix*). Parallel to this, Gilbert Rist makes a similar remark with regard to the notion of development as "for centuries no one – or virtually no one – took it into their head to relieve the misery of others by structural measures" (Rist 2008, 1). By historicising humanitarianism and development as recent inventions, both scholars also call into question the common humanity that supposedly lies at its roots. Rist's approach pairs up the historical 'invention' of humanitarianism with its roots in postcolonial power structures, thereby sticking to the maxim that solidarity cannot but deal with (and thereby also reiterate) inequality.

Indeed, according to Andrew Linklater, "colonial practices demonstrated [that] great dangers are inherent in perspectives which believe it is self-evident that all human beings have some interests in common" (Linklater 2007a, 23). Regarding international development, this position is mainly taken up in what became known as critical development studies, where power relations that underlie the practice of international development are highlighted. The situation where solidarity and inequality are not only intimately tied up but also mutually dependant can be summarised in relation to Hannah Arendt's assessment of pity. She outlines that "without the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has a vested interest in the existence of the weak" (Arendt 1963, 79). This is to say that one strand of critique directed towards humanitarianism and its communicative practices is that in addressing them, they reinstate existing power relations. In weighing different positions and critiques regarding humanitarian imagery, Chouliaraki, for instance, describes critiques of the 'dark side' of humanitarianism where "solidarity may be claiming to be a manifestation of benevolence in the cosmopolis, yet it ultimately contributes to reproducing an unequal world order founded on the colonial legacy of the West" (Chouliaraki 2013, 35). In this sense, solidarity is attacked in its logical relation to hierarchy. "A critique of compassion", Fassin states, "is necessary not because of the attitude of superiority it implies but because it always presupposes a relation of inequality" (Fassin 2012, 4).

Here, as Paul Gilroy outlines, the power relations implicated in the narratives of common humanity made that "cosmopolitan solidarity and translocal affiliations became suspect" (2006, 70). This suspicion is shared by for instance Rist (2008) and Arturo

Escobar (1995) in their opposition to the modernisation paradigm in development discourse, where a linear conception of history leads to an ethnocentric understanding of the future for all societies. It critiques "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 581) that eclipses the partiality and contingency of its own perspective. Particularly this strand of critique has a broader base in postmodern thought, as becomes apparent in Zygmunt Bauman's *Postmodern Ethics* where he critically assesses the "utilitarian recipe for universal happiness" (1993, 103) in which care for others frequently supplies an "excuse for cold and relentless cruelty with which 'the best interests' of the other are pushed their throats" (*ibid*). As such, a strand of postcolonial responses to the discourse of development consisted of "a rejection of a universal ethic that was seen as tied to the western project" (Dower 2018, 20).

At this point, where postcolonial power relations, ethnocentrism and solidarity collide, disintegration can be proposed as a virtue rather than a problem, as in this context unravelling the construct of common humanity might imply deconstructing and diversifying it in a post-structuralist manner. This is, however, not without consequences. In defying the ideal of 'a common human nature', sceptics, according to Rorty, argue that it "is that at the 'deepest' level of the self there is no sense of human solidarity, that this sense is a 'mere' artifact of human socialization" (Rorty 1989b, *xiii*). What Rorty points to here is a substantial strand of reasoning that maintains that common humanity, or common vulnerabilities, "provide the most accessible route to a cosmopolitan ethic" (Linklater 2007b, 10). This position finds its theoretical roots in the quest for a universal ethics of justice, to which Rorty (1989) refers as the 'fellow citizen' approach that he finds in Marx, Mill, Dewey, Habermas, and Rawls.[16] From this background, and inspired by Kant's cosmopolitanism, Martha Nussbaum contends that in this ethic, the primary allegiance befalls the "community of human beings" (1994). As a result, the acceptance of the maxim of common humanity is seen as a precondition for solidarity or as a safeguard for human dignity. This position is particularly concerned with human vulnerability and wary of those moments when the human dignity of others is violated. Therefore, its advocates aim "to ground human solidarity on a shared experience of suffering and

[16] Apart from this particular overview of advocates of a universal ethics grounded in common humanity as sketched by Rorty, alternative accounts of its roots are provided as well. Benhabib, when discussing the belief that that "human nature consists of stable and predictable passions and dispositions, instincts and emotions, all of which can be studied", for this turns to the likes of Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Adam Smith (Benhabib 2002, 26). Others, on top of this, seem to prioritise classic philosophy to point the emergence of a cosmopolitan ethic, such as there are Hippocrates (see: Lu 2000, 254), Cicero (with Kant in his wake; Nussbaum 2002, 133–34) and Plato (Benhabib 2002, 82). From yet another perspective, also the religious roots of universal solidarity (Linklater 2007a, 44), and particularly Christianity (Weil [1933] 2015) as common humanity is recurrently recognised in 'the mystical body of Christ' (Boltanski 1999, 7). In this sense, it is clear that quite many different origins and approaches can be considered to have shaped the development of the idea of common humanity. Although it is hard, not to say impossible, to sketch a comprehensive overview of this, the schools of utilitarianism and Marxism are recurrently being named.

creaturely finitude" (Berry 2016, 76)[17], as a result of which "the vulnerability of the human body [is] the clearest manifestation of our common humanity that has historically informed the emergence of humanitarianism in the West" (Chouliaraki 2013, 26).

On a practical level, this limits the manner in which NGOs can lay claim on common humanity and global citizenship. While nearly all claims to 'translocal solidarity' involve an appeal to some kind of global commonality, the 'fellow citizen' approach is refracted in the face of power and provides unequal access to cosmopolitanism – a cosmopolitanism that is recurrently challenged for being tailored to Western perspectives and interests (Mignolo 2011), and particularly neoliberal economics and politics (Cheah 2006). What we end up with, from the perspective of the postcolonial critique, is a situation where promoting cosmopolitanism results in "developing countries having to wait for their arrival into 'development'" (Biccum 2007, 1116) before they can participate in this particular configuration of cosmopolitanism.

~ Cosmopolitanism, elitism and "the new political divide"

Whereas the postcolonial perspective highlights the representation of the 'vulnerable Others', a critique of elitism considers the position of the Western spectator. In this sense, the critique is directed at the other end of the supposed binary between the 'benevolent benefactor' and the 'vulnerable beneficiary'. However, the origins of the critique are rather different. While the postcolonial perspective is mainly brought forward by activists and academics, the argument of elitism stems from common scepticism and populist politicians and media outlets.

Despite particular and concrete utterances of common humanity, the 'abstract universalism' of cosmopolitanism (Boltanski 1999) is at stake in the numerous debates on migration and international cooperation that are now present in the Western world at large – highlighted in the construction of walls in the United States and Hungary, the denunciation of international treaties and agreements such as NAFTA or through Brexit, or the pervasive (negative) emphasis on migration and multiculturalism in election campaigns. These disputes have come to define political debate up to a point where political analysts argue that the divide between the cosmopolitan elite and the communitarianist working and middle class is the dominant political division of our time. In the *New Yorker,* Pankaj Mishra reflects on Donald Trump's victory in the US election, stating that Rousseau's "attack on cosmopolitan élites now seems prophetic" (2016), *The Huffington Post* headlined with Craig Calhoun's analysis[18] of Brexit as "a Mutiny Against

[17] Adding to the evermore complicated overview of school associated with the approach of common humanity, Berry grounds this position in Horkheimer's materialism and Schopenhauer's pessimism (2016). In other writings, particularly the Frankfurt School is recurrently being named as having taken a firm position in this; see for instance Linklater (2007a, 23) on Theodor Adorno and Lawrence Wilde (2004) on Erich Fromm – adding to the already mentioned references to Horkheimer and Habermas.

[18] It is important to give Calhoun credit for the fact that he, thirteen years earlier, already stated that "cosmopolitan liberals often fail to recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, presenting it as

the Cosmopolitan Elite" (2016), and Zack Beauchamp for *Vox* explains the popularity of Western European leaders along similar lines, stating that "nationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism will be one of the defining ideological struggles of the 21st century" (2016). *The Economist* summarises all the before referring on its front cover to "The new political divide" (*The Economist* 2016). Such critiques, which associate cosmopolitanism with elitism, are not new. In discussing how the concept of cosmopolitanism has moved from an intellectual ethos to an institutional embedded 'global consciousness', Pheng Cheah highlights that the lofty ideal of cosmopolitanism has for long been "criticized for being a form of elitist detachment" (Cheah 2006, 487). As a result, Cheah states that "for various reasons not many people are able to feel [the] pull" of "the bonds of humanity" (*ibid*).

Yet, while he posits that "the philosophers of the French Enlightenment could not envision feasible political structures for the regular and widespread institutionalization of mass-based cosmopolitan feeling"(*ibid*), it can be argued that the language of international humanitarianism is one of its closest attempts. This is to say that humanitarian communication is one of the most obvious (and maybe one of the very few) realms of cultural production that propagates cosmopolitanism through popular culture and mass media, and is aimed at a relatively wide audience. For example, the different 'genres' of humanitarian communication make ample use of advertising (appeals), celebrity culture (who act as ambassadors), pop music (charity hit songs, appeal concerts and festivals) and vlogs and blogs (both by NGO professionals and 'influencers'). While NGOs are often times denounced for using the lightness of popular culture while simultaneously communicating hardship and vulnerability (these critiques are often times directed, but not exclusively, at celebrity humanitarianism; see: Littler 2008; Brockington 2014), NGOs have eagerly adopted these genres and styles. In fact, it would be impossible to do justice to humanitarian communication without openly recognising its structural reliance on popular culture, as will be discussed shortly in the methodology section of this chapter. For now, it is critical to examine how the elitism that cosmopolitan ideals have been accused of is actively transgressed by the communicative styles and approaches of NGOs – a way of working that has become so naturalised that it is hard to sometimes recognise. With a clear appeal to a cosmopolitan identity and by strongly embedding the notion of common humanity in the domain of popular culture, humanitarian communication is one very particular field where the accessibility of the cosmopolitan ideal is enhanced.

Yet, it seems difficult to entirely disassociate humanitarianism from the realms of the well-travelled and privileged elites, since the "notion of a 'citizen of the world' would seem to fit rather well with the image of the globetrotting humanitarian worker" (Yanacopulos and Baillie Smith 2008, 298). As Jonathan Friedman puts it: "One might

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freedom from social belonging rather than a special sort of belonging, a view from nowhere or everywhere rather than from particular social spaces" (2003, 235). It is this neglect that, more than ten years later, is said to have culminated in a naïve underestimation of the communitarianist contempt of globalization and cosmopolitanism.

also suggest that there has emerged a global class structure, an international elite made up of top diplomats, government ministers, aid officials and representatives of international organisations such as the United Nations, who play golf, dine, take cocktails with one another, forming a kind of cultural cohort. The grouping overlaps with an international cultural elite of art dealers, publishing and media representatives" (Friedman 1995, 79–80). To ask the question of whether this is actually an accurate picture to paint is rather beside the point here, as it is the public image of the sector of humanitarian aid and development cooperation that is at stake. Unmistakably, NGOs struggle with their public image in association with liberalism, elitism, and cosmopolitanism – despite their appeal to popular culture.

The critique on cosmopolitan elitism is delicate as it regularly gives way to intolerance, racism, and exclusion, while it cannot be denied that the critique is (mis)directed to very real and pressing discontents with which many (primarily low-income) people are confronted under global, neoliberal capitalism. This dissertation is not meant to settle such a dispute (if it ever could), but growing sentiments of nationalism and communitarism hit the sector hard and are commonly grounded in a denunciation of cosmopolitan elites - in extension of populist rhetoric that typically establishes a binary opposition between "the elites" and "the people" (Serhan 2020).

The two critiques outlined here highlight that the sector does not only face a latent disintegration under post-humanitarianism but that the legitimacy of its cosmopolitan endeavours is also challenged in more direct ways. Thus, the firm basis in common humanity for humanitarian communication is not only abated at the level of abstract disintegration under post-humanitarianism but is also disputed more concretely in contemporary debates on cosmopolitanism. As a result, it will be emphasised in the subsequent chapters that NGOs respond to disintegration not only on a strategic meta-level, but also by self-reflexively reconfiguring their rhetoric and discussing its position. As such, the idea(l) of reinventing organisations, development work, and the sector at large is continuously present (either explicitly or implicitly) in the rhetoric used in humanitarian communication. This is to say that platforms, as they will be discussed now, are not only a means for organising and distributing content; they are also an argument or a style – a form that is actively propagated and celebrated.

Platforms: countering disintegration and critique

A maxim of participation is central to Global Citizen. Rather than aiming for membership or a donation, 'global citizens' are encouraged to be a part of the community by their acts rather than through affiliation. The community (or "movement", or "platform") suggests a flat organisation (or maybe not even an 'organisation' at all) that facilitates the assembly of ideas, people, and causes. Global Citizen, in keeping with its self-presentation as an organic, commons-based, and loosely organised facilitator of social action, optimistically reframes the notion of citizenship as a participatory mode of action – as something that one *does*. As the platform's name highlights the centrality of 'citizenship', it rhetorically

replaces the rigidity and hierarchy that is regularly associated with formal notions of citizenship with creativity, decisiveness and, above all, action. Global Citizen appeals to a broad definition of citizenship beyond membership or rigid ideological pledge; a definition that is defined by what one does and how one positions oneself vis-à-vis a concrete problem or particular case. In short, the campaign appeals to what Isin and Nielsen call 'acts of citizenship' (2008). At least some of the optimism that surrounds Global Citizen's imperative of 'participation' may be traced to the positive connotations from relatively early internet cultures that emerged as "participatory culture" accompanying the advent of "Web 2.0". In Tim O'Reilly's influential overview of Web 2.0, such participatory culture came to be associated with "the web as platform" (2005), which yielded great enthusiasm and optimism about the future of communication, political participation, and bottom-up cultural production (Shirky 2009). It is this notion of the platform that has now been widely appropriated within development organisations and humanitarian communication, much like today's social media companies, which, according to Jose van Dijck, "still seem eager to align the benevolent halo of early web technology with their 'alternative' corporate ethos" (Van Dijck 2013, 11). As a result, the platform is not just a technological architecture and a means of organisation and distribution; it is also a style that, as is argued here, is being adopted and widely employed in the humanitarian and development sector. This style builds on qualities commonly associated with networks and platforms. This includes ideals of organic organisation, mounting to open-ended and flexible operations, bottom-up action, and a power-neutral environment for the exchange of information and ideas. Such promises are implicitly showcased in Global Citizen's mantra "because we are more powerful together", as well as under the heading of "#impact", where success stories are shared on the website.

While the utopias associated with platforms may be deemed unattainable, their appeal demonstrates that platforms are an argument in themselves, by means of style. Platforms are technologies and modes of organisation, but they also constitute ideas *about* technology and organisation. This is why platforms will here be studied as a 'cultural form'.[19] This cultural form encompasses style, technology, and organisation, and assembles these aspects in an all-round socio-linguistic structure, bringing with it affordances and limitations, (social) rules, and ideals. Through an analysis of organisations like disaster relief platforms, NGO confederations, and human rights film festivals, it will be shown that media technologies, organisational change, and modes of expression constitute a cultural form: a broadly actualised mode of social organisation.

Literature on this, however, falls short. Platform studies as a subfield of media studies flourishes, but since its emergence coincided with the rise of social media platforms, its approach has been shaped by the technological and economic materialities of these digital platforms (Srnicek 2017; Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018). While the phenomenon of social media platforms can certainly be aligned with the approach taken

[19] The use of the term 'cultural form' here is no coincidence as the approach is indebted to Raymond Williams' approach of television, a phenomenon that he described as a technology *and* as a cultural form (1974, *xiv*). Platforms are here approached in a way similar to his argument that television is not just a media technology but also a style and a cultural form that can be understood as having developed parallel to a broad range of social transformations as well.

here (and may actually be the clearest and most explicit manifestation of platform culture generally) their dominance in societal debate and scholarship obscures the fact that the cultural form of platforms can be found in many constellations, including those that exist beyond the digital realm. To be clear, this is not to argue that the broad societal impact of digital media platforms is not adequately addressed. Rather, it is to say that social media platforms (and their innovations in technical and economic terms) are taken to be indicative of cultural change and social organisation – instead of reasoning the other way around. Alternatively, to define platforms as a cultural form is to emphasise that platforms are one of the most prominent and widely established modes of organisation of our time (as it can be recognised, for instance in social media platforms, among other manifestations). While platform studies today is dominated by a focus on digital technology and its economic impact, scholars like Gillespie (2010) and Van Dijck (2013) make note of the broader applicability of the notion of the platform – but do not explore it further as a mode of social organisation. For instance, Jose van Dijck notes that the platform can "also be understood figuratively, in a sociocultural and a political sense, as political stages and performative infrastructures" (Van Dijck 2013, 29).

To follow this thread and seek to define platforms more widely as a cultural form, a somewhat older definition of the platform drawn from organisational theory (for an overview, see: Kornberger, Pflueger, and Mouritsen 2017) serves my purpose best: the platform as meta-organisation. According to Claudio Ciborra, what sets a platform apart is its meta-position: "A platform is a meta-organization, a formative context that moulds structures, and routines shaping them into well-known forms, such as the hierarchy, the matrix and even the network, but on a highly volatile basis" (1996, 103). According to this vantage point, the platform is a meta-structure in the sense that it reconfigures what is already there: it brings together, it conducts action, and it critically reflects on and channels information. Platforms are ideal for temporarily integrating different organisations (such as the emergency appeal platforms explored in Chapter 2), for meta-critical reflection (as showcased in codes of conduct drafted by NGO confederations discussed in Chapter 3), for envisioning connectivity (as Kiva does, discussed in chapter 4), or for the construction of heterogeneous assemblages (which is one of the central aims and features of the human rights film festivals taken up in Chapter 5). Platforms reflect upon and conduct existing action and are thus defined here as meta-structures – a perspective that not accidentally coincides with the reflexivity and critique that has a solid grip on the humanitarian sector. As a cultural form, platforms do represent styles, organisations, technologies, and meta-structures. They cut across conceptions of meaning and materiality to connect manifestations of platform culture in rhetoric, organisation, and infrastructure.

Arguably, the discourse of common humanity is one defining meta-discourse in humanitarian communication. It is therefore the aim of this thesis to unpack how the meta-discourse of common humanity is sustained in the face of disintegration by centralising the notion of the platform. Global Citizen is not just a platform in an organisational or technological sense: it *performs* the very notion of citizens being 'global' by appealing to its organisational and technological features in its rhetoric. In other

words, it concretises what common humanity can be in reference to itself and in relation to an (idealised!) look, feel, and practice of what a platform can be. While Global Citizen uses its website as its primary portal to access the contents it distributes and uses social media to emphasise its participatory approach, it also functions as an organisational platform for major NGOs (listed as 'partners') to showcase their campaigns. Global Citizen also reaches out to events, meet-ups, public consultations and concerts as offline manifestations that are characterised by a platformed logic. In short, Global Citizen taps into a platformed structure since it is a meta-organization, where the different realms of platformed action are integrated. The story of global citizenship cannot be told here without the organisational structure in place and it cannot be told without an appeal to the ideal of online participatory culture. In that sense, it cannot be organised like this without the technological infrastructure in place, and the infrastructure cannot be sustained without its rhetoric being shared and the organisation supporting it. As a result, it will be argued here that the platformed logic can be observed in different realms (technological, organisational, rhetorical) of humanitarian communication and that these domains are mutually informed and dependent. All of these features, from the organisational framework in which campaigns are created to the technical means by which they are distributed and accessed, to the stories themselves, do not occur in discrete, separable moments, but are part of a comparable logic.

The technological, organisational, and rhetorical meta-position of platforms responds directly to the disintegration under post-humanitarianism and will be treated as such throughout the different case studies examined here. As Jean-Christophe Plantin and his colleagues argue, "platforms rise when infrastructures splinter" (Plantin et al. 2018, 299). In their historical analysis of this argument, they refer to tendencies comparable to those underpinning post-humanitarianism – as centralised media systems disintegrate and policies of privatisation and deregulation are implemented throughout the 1980s. To historically contextualise the turn to platforms, it is therefore also important to note that the platforms studied in this dissertation either emerged or gained prominence from the turn of the century onwards. Notably, some of them were established earlier, but they were either professionalised and institutionalised around the turn of the century (as was the case with disaster relief platforms) or their intervention in the communicative process was formalised around that time (which for instance happened in the 'codes of conduct' for humanitarian communication drafted by NGO confederations). More generally, the rise of Kiva as a mirror image of social media platforms and the proliferation of human rights film festivals accompanies this shift. As a result, it will be claimed that the humanitarian sector, as an institution, is following what can be called the 'platform society', thereby embedding the discourse of common humanity in the context of platforms as meta-structures. A historical overview will thus frame the case studies presented in all of the subsequent chapters.

Platforms, as argued in *The Platform Society*, cannot just be seen as causing a revolution (in technology, economy, or otherwise), but rather they "are gradually infiltrating in, and converging with, the (offline, legacy) institutions and practices through which democratic societies are organized"(Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018, 2) – thereby not leaving the humanitarian sector aside. Critically, it is interesting to note that Global

Citizen (and most of the platforms discussed in the following chapters) does not produce any images, stories, or appeals themselves – which is one of the main critiques that has befallen contemporary social media platforms such as Facebook, Uber and Airbnb, where power and finances are accumulated while the actual work, means of production, and responsibilities are averted and externalised (Srnicek 2017; Kornberger, Pflueger, and Mouritsen 2017, 81). While the critiques directed at these social media networks have not (yet?) been levelled against platforms for humanitarian communication, it is important to recognise that platforms, both within and beyond humanitarianism, are characterised by their meta-position. In addition, their added value lies in facilitating existing processes and in disseminating content rather than producing it – to the point, where, for instance, the Belgian disaster relief platform Consortium 12-12 has only a very minor influence on the visuals and rhetoric of the appeals issued in its name.[20] As such, none of the platforms discussed in the following chapters are the primary producers of the content that is regarded as their main body of work. The relief shows launched in the name of emergency appeals alliances are produced by their broadcasting partners; the appeals in long-term development are produced by the member organisations of the NGO confederations that conduct them; the lending profiles on Kiva are drafted by users themselves; and the film festivals programme films that they did not shoot themselves. As a result, conducting, channelling, framing, and assembling are their primary roles.

Therefore, it is important to avoid mistaking the facilitation role played by platforms for humanitarian communication as *just* (that is to say 'neutral' or 'transparent') facilitation. On the contrary, and in the words of Van Dijck, "a platform is a *mediator* rather than an intermediary: it shapes the performance of social acts instead of merely facilitating them" (Van Dijck 2013, 29). This contrasts starkly with the purported impartiality that the word 'platform' connotes in popular discourse, as platforms imply "neutrality with regards to the activity" (Gillespie 2010, 350). As the recently invented term 'platformisation' (Nieborg and Poell 2018) implies, platforms do not just neutrally exist, but intervene and do something. Despite the fact that this appears to be rather obvious, the neutral connotations attached to the notion of the platform should not be underestimated. Therefore, it is crucial to note that 'platformisation' echoes Ciborra's approach in which platforms are thought to *transform* existing practices: the role of the platform is to facilitate, but in doing it also affects structures and routines. As will be shown in the different case studies, reality also defies the idea(l) of platforms being flat, non-hierarchical, and power-neutral structures.

[20] The CEO of Consortium 12-12 explains: "We do not produce any materials. We provide visuals, a logo, a slogan, sometimes an image. (…) [The appeal] is then proposed to us by way of notification. We then get about ten minutes to say 'okay' or 'not okay'. In the two occasions that I made a comment, the appeal was kept in place. So it is the media [partners] that offer the appeal to us, we are the beneficiary".

Methodology

Discourse analysis will be the main method used for the assessment of how platformed organisations recreate common humanity. This means to study different types of texts – some of them directed at general audiences, others drafted for professional use. This means to go looking for patterns across different representations of common humanity to see how it is linguistically imagined, constructed and realized. These texts (and the institutional contexts that shape them) will therefore not be studied in isolation, but rather as expressions of the social structures that underpin them.

Discourse analysis provides ample opportunities to assess the power structures in the platforms in humanitarian communication. This is mainly because of how closely its focus on language and power relates to the communicative, representational aspects of humanitarian communication *and* with the power struggles present in the platforms that conduct the messages and their distribution. By means of discourse analysis this dissertation sits in between a semiotics-based approach of the campaigns launched by humanitarian NGOs and the organisational politics of the platforms through which they circulate. As scholars have observed, the dynamics of image production and organisational politics in humanitarian communication have been largely disregarded in academic research (Orgad 2013, 296), and "empirical studies on the production of humanitarian narratives by NGOs are scarce" (Pantti 2021, 35). The "small but significant" (*ibid*) body of literature on the subject focuses on the work of makers; that is, of those who actually design, shoot and edit campaigns (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Dogra 2013). Here, a more institutional approach is taken to complement such literature by examining the environments in which the 'makers' produce and distribute their material. This is done using a range of different sub-methodologies, including in-depth interviews (for the disaster relief platforms), analysis of policy documents (for the study of NGO confederations), social network analysis (for the case study of Kiva), and an analysis of two informative guides on how to set up a human rights film festival (in the case of the Human Rights Film Network).

One key reason for the institutional approach adopted here is the fact that the sector of humanitarian communication is highly institutionalised as a result of its complicated background in between the public and the corporate sphere. Additionally, the processes underlying humanitarian communication have been "undergoing change and further complexifying" due to their increased managerialisation (Cottle and Nolan 2007, 863), whereas the study of the sector on communicative terms has remained underdeveloped. Indeed, a focus on 'organisational politics' in humanitarian communication can highlight the fact that the "production of humanitarian and development communications constitutes an arena of struggle between and among individuals, departments and organizations for symbolic power" (Orgad 2013, 298). With an even more specific emphasis on the concept of common humanity, Nandita Dogra explains that "the theme of 'oneness' remains relevant to the production side of INGOs' communication" (2013, 125). While the language of common humanity has been reflected

upon through different forms of semiotic and discourse analysis of image and language, the institutional background that informs the production of these pictures has been receiving less attention.

Methodologically speaking, this approach has a dual outcome. On the one hand it can be considered to be a 'mixed methods' approach. In a deliberate attempt to match the means of obtaining and interpreting data to the characteristics of different platforms under study, the approaches vary between case studies. For the different chapters, this looks like the following. In the upcoming chapter on the integrative platforms for disaster relief (chapter 2), ten semi-structured interviews with key actors in those organizations have been conducted. Interviews were held with directors, communications professionals and partnerships managers from different national platforms. With the Emergency Appeals Alliance as the central framework, employees of its counterparts in the UK (Disaster Emergency Committee), Belgium (Consortium 12-12), the Netherlands (Giro555), Germany (Aktion Deutchland Hilft) and Switzerland (Swiss Solidarity) have been interviewed for between 30 minutes and two hours. The broad set-up, with representatives from a range of different countries allowed me to compare and contrast, but also to consider how integrative structures are implemented in the appeals alliances. As the platforms exist precisely because of their small-scale set-up with a limited number of employees, interviewing some of them provided an decisive inroad to the platforms. This was particularly the case because the central position of the platforms between humanitarian and media organizations. This position asked for the employees to consider their work in maintaining the central role of the platform and to contemplate their reliance on people and organizations beyond it.

The two chapters on long-term development discuss two platforms: NGO confederations as integrative platforms and microcredit social network Kiva as a utopian platform. For the former, instructive guides for NGOs on "ethical" and "effective" communication are studied. A total of sixteen documents (mostly Codes of Conduct on communication) issued by confederations from eleven different European countries have been studied. Some of these have been translated by external translators if no Dutch or English version was available. The guides have been assessed as documents indicative of the debates, considerations and worries present in the sector when it comes to representations of human vulnerability. As a result, the Codes of Conduct allowed for a mapping of how sector organizations aim to establish a collective framework for dignified representations of vulnerable Others in the face of a competitive market where individual organizations defend their stakes in fundraising. Such fundraising is also key to Kiva, the next platform under scrutiny. For a thorough understanding of Kiva, a walk-through analysis (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018) of its web-based platform is employed to make sure that all aspects of the user-experience are scrutinized. This method allows for an understanding of how the position of users is constructed as part of the discourse of platformed development. The walk-through analysis includes all actions that one can perform to become part of Kiva, from being addressed as a potential user through

promotion videos, to signing up and agreeing to the terms and conditions applicable to the platform. Subsequently, the use of the interface of the platform, including iconography and its affordances is experienced and explored. As part of this, some ancillary texts and options provided by the platform are made part of the analysis. These include the newsletter emails, the "Kiva Store" and the participation in "Lending Teams", to get an all-round understanding of the platform.

In the last chapter on human rights film festivals as heterogeneous platforms, the mixed methods approach is expressed most clearly. This is the case exactly because of the heterogeneous and multifaceted character of the platform under study, that calls for a versatile approach. In an orientation on the festivals, four festivals (in London, The Hague, Prague and Glasgow) have first been visited as an informal exploration of how festivals function as platforms and meeting places. While the visits allowed me to get acquainted with the wide range of activities, environments, audiences and informal interactions at the festivals, the "positioning" of the festivals have been studied by an analysis of program guides – the booklets that allow visitors to browse the films and activities that are on offer. After informally exploring the festivals, the archives of OneWorld (Prague) and Movies that Matter (The Hague) have been assessed more quantitively to get a grip on historical tendencies in kinds of films that have been programmed. Through an analysis of the tags and labels available in the archives, the programming of films around certain themes and issues has been studied, to indicate how over the past fifteen years the thematic scope of the festivals has widened to include a broader range of concerns. As such, human rights activism is very broadly defined in the festivals, who together aim to build a "global civil society" (Piekarczyk 2015, 8) through the Human Rights Film Network. This network, lastly, has been studied through an analysis of the two handbooks for setting up a human rights film festivals – that are scrutinized in their aim to establish a network for in which the different festivals share their knowledge and expertise in organizing the festival.

Besides being mixed-methods, however, all these different case studies have been read as texts – be they the interviews with professionals, policy documents of NGO confederations, the interface of a microlending social network or instructive guides on film festivals. Indeed referring to all of them as linguistically constructed social realities is done in a deliberate choice to take on discourse analysis as the central (and overarching) methodological approach for this dissertation. In all the cases (audio-visual) language is understood in reference to social relations. Therefore, all the different platforms are contextualized by a thorough analysis of campaigns and appeals that give an insight into the kinds of audio-visual materials that circulate. Therefore, the chapter on disaster relief is complemented by an analysis of the *Hope for Haiti Now!* campaign, where it is highlighted that the tendency to integration and unification culminates in a depoliticized, holistic discourse of common humanity. An analysis of the *Girl Effect* campaign is used in both chapters on long-term development, where in the first chapter the continuous reflexivity of the campaign is discussed in order illustrate the critiques and worries to

which the Codes of Conduct respond. In the second chapter on long-term development, the *Girl Effect* is analysed together with other girl-oriented development campaigns by Educate Girls, PLAN International and Africaid in order to get a grip on the empowerment paradigm that lies at the heart of Kiva's functioning. For the chapter on human rights film festivals, several appeals by Amnesty International, the Red Cross and War Child are studied to understand the cinematic, immersive kind of storytelling that renders (audio-visual) human rights discourse so close to the medium of film.

Analyses like these are particularly fruitful because a discourse analysis of images and texts of the campaigns can easily be teamed up with the scrutiny of the platforms through which they are distributed – and both because of them will be read as texts. In doing so, it will become clear that the different kinds of platforms produce and circulate campaigns that are informed by their set-up: the contexts of creation and circulation is mirrored in the campaigns as they are presented to their audiences. Indeed, by adopting discourse analysis as my method, the campaigns *and* the platforms that facilitate them are put in line by reading them all as textual entities rooted in power structures. Looking at the matter like this paints the picture of a method that is not so much 'mixed methods' and indeed much less eclectic or diverse approach. One might therefore as well argue that the methodology is strongly rooted in a particular understanding of how to treat cultural artefacts or processes.

Whether we label this approach 'mixed methods' or not is however not of my interest. Rather, what is important is that discourse analysis is here positioned closer to organisational and technological characteristics of platforms than is typically the case. This dissertation thus enters a contested space between the 'semiotics only' approach that is sometimes ascribed to studies of representation and the ideal to make 'matter matter' (Kissmann and Loon 2019, 4) in more recent critiques from the field of 'new materialism'. A middle way will be investigated here, albeit from *within* the domain of discourse analysis, despite the fact that discourse analysis has been claimed to prioritize text, semiotics, and representation over the material. It is thus maintained that discourse analysis is adequately equipped to address a renewed interest in objects, organisations, and social realities beyond what is supposed to be the textual realm. This is mainly because discourse analysis (in contrast to "textual analysis") includes practical and institutional layers: it looks for patterns in meaning production that structure institutional practices and that result from these same institutional practices.

Nonetheless, as discourse analysis generally prioritises text and representation, it is not self-evident that the organisational and technological aspects of this research project can be accounted for in discourse analysis. Indeed, discourse analysis has been criticised for focusing solely on text and hermeneutics (Iedema 2003), whereas in media studies some new approaches have centralised and emphasised elements that are not purely textual. Consider disciplines such as science and technology studies (STS), which highlight technological affordances of media technologies (Latour 2007; Moats 2019); affect

studies, which focuses on bodily experiences (Ahmed 2014; Lünenborg and Maier 2018); and the renewed interest in ownership and governance from a Marxist-materialist perspective of political economy (Mosco 2009; Wasko 2018).[21] Under the term 'new materialism', a broad range of researchers (emphasising 'matter' in very diverse ways) have rejected the distinction between 'matter' and 'the social' (Kissmann and Loon 2019, 5). Since 'the social' has come to stand for the *social construction of reality* through language in the humanities (*ibid*) as well as in this dissertation, new materialism encourages us to consider the configuration of matter in (social) reality as well. Matter, in this sense, can comprise of bodies, technologies, objects, or anything else. Indeed, and also beyond the realm of media studies *per se,* Benno Herzog notes that "since the beginning of the new millennium, sociology has contributed critical input regarding discourse analysis, leading to further developments in the relationship between text and material and between practical and/or institutional infrastructural elements and consequences" (Herzog 2016, 54).

In response to this, some methods for studying "texto-materiality" (Siles and Boczkowski 2012, 235) are explored. As "little research has assessed how materiality and content intersect and how their interdependence matters" (*ibid*, 228), this dissertation seeks to contribute to filling this gap in the study of humanitarian communication. As outlined above in relation to platforms, it is exactly the interdependence (and mutual constitution) of the humanitarian campaigns and the platforms that conduct, construct, and disseminate them what is at issue in this dissertation. Mainly, this conviction stems from the assumption that "all social phenomena and objects obtain their meaning(s) through discourse" (Carpentier and Cleen 2007, 267) and that they can be studied as such.[22] Thus, opening up the study of "social phenomena" (in this case, the organisational, technological platforms that facilitate and conduct humanitarian communication) does not necessitate abandoning discourse analysis and the focus on meaning-making processes; on the contrary, it means to carefully select and study texts that contribute to our understanding of these social phenomena.

How to actually (and practically) do this? That is to say: how to develop this study in such a way that it can appreciate what lies beyond the 'immediately' textual questions of representation? Two steps have been taken to assure this. First, a *broad range of texts is selected* for scrutiny; texts that can shed light on the different stages that precede the moment of reaching out to the public with a humanitarian appeal. This means that,

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[21] In fact, in conclusion to his book, Vincent Mosco outlines how the rise of STS highlights the "clear affinities" between STS and political economy, because "it supports a strong realist position because it asserts the reality of both material things and the ideas that describe them" (Mosco 2009, 238) – again highlighting the emergence of fields that explore the borderland between materialism and discourse.

[22] This approach is indebted to what Laclau and Mouffe call the "radical materialist position" where they "reject the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 107). This means to take notice of the discursive aspect to whatever object, organization, technology or indeed platform, because all of them have meaning-making capacities and can be read as texts.

alongside the different campaigns (broadcast shows, social media messages, webpages, films, shorter videos, and more general appeals), the sector and its platforms are reached out to by the different means shortly touched upon above. For the chapter on disaster relief, semi-structured interviews are conducted with employees of different national disaster relief campaigning platforms that are united under the Emergency Appeals Alliance. The study of long-term development campaigns is accompanied by a study of policy documents on communication (issued by NGO confederations, under the umbrella of CONCORD) and an analysis of the interface of the social media microlending platform KIVA. Finally, the Human Rights Film Network's *Setting Up a Human Rights Film Festival* handbook (Porybná 2009a; Kulhánková et al. 2015) as well as the websites and programming booklets of film festivals will be investigated in the chapter on conflict and human rights. In short, this means to examine what John Caldwell refers to as (semi)embedded or publicly disclosed 'deep texts' (Caldwell 2008, 26). Such texts are part of what Caldwell calls the 'cultural-industrial method of research' which combines interviews (long considered the most efficient way to gain an understanding of the organisational and symbolic politics of cultural production) with a broad range of texts that can shed light on the discourses that structure the production of cultural texts (*ibid*, 351).[23] Therefore, Caldwell proposes emphasising the value of ethnographic observation and the analysis of artefacts and spaces used by professionals (*ibid*, 345). Short reflections on the decisions made regarding the ways of working are added to the different chapters, most often in footnotes.

Secondly, there *is the deliberate use of case studies* to obtain insights into the 'vertical integration' of discourses on various levels of its production. This means that case studies can illuminate how campaigns and the platforms that facilitate them are mutually informed. When disaster relief campaigns, for instance, celebrate their integrative abilities by presenting a narrative of what could be called 'wholesome holism', it becomes apparent that such a story can only be told adequately and effectively in the face of actual integration on an institutional level – which involves NGOs joining forces and media forms and channels converging. As another example, it can be seen that Kiva tells the story of 'new' and 'revolutionary' models of benevolence and development, precisely because it relies on and showcases the affordances of the distributed internet technologies of the social media platform. Such case studies have the obvious advantage of being specific and targeted, which facilitates the exploration of how exactly a phenomenon is constituted. As a result, it will become apparent that platformisation permits a particular way of 'bringing us together' that is vertically integrated from its set-up to its messaging and campaigns. In total, four kinds of platforms are explored, using four case studies: the *integrative* platform of the Emergency Appeals Alliance (Chapter 2); the *reflexive* platform of CONCORD and the *utopian* platform of KIVA (Chapter 3); and the *heterogeneous* platform

[23] Such a complementation of interviews is according to Caldwell necessary because "scholars should remain appropriately sceptical about 'behind-the-scenes' explanations offered in industry's corporate, publicity, or marketing contexts, since such insights are invariably spin driven"(Caldwell 2008, 351).

of the Human Rights Film Network (Chapter 4). Despite the fact that case studies have an "imaginative and argumentative force that most (…) writers find it hard to ignore if the material allows for their development", they contain the "hazards of unrepresentativeness" (Corner 2003, 278). To mitigate these hazards, the case studies are contextualised in short historical overviews and compared with similar cases. By doing so, according to Corner, case studies are "one important way of (…) producing a more comprehensive yet dynamic sense of past conjunctures" (*ibid*). Case studies do, in fact, aid in addressing questions in the domain between institutions and representations. When does a disaster 'acquire' the status of a disaster in order for different actors to rally around them? How exactly do development NGOs respond to scepticism and critique? What are the aesthetics of human rights, and how are these reflected in human rights film festivals? Case studies enable the exploration of such questions in ways that expose internal linkages as well as the vertical integration of discourse in text and context.

From the approach of discourse analysis, the above is best summarised as a "conjuncture". Chouliaraki and Fairclough use the concept of conjunctures to point to "relatively durable assemblies of people, materials, technologies and therefore practices (in their aspect as relative permanencies) around specific social projects in the widest sense of the term. Conjunctures cut across and bring together different institutions" (2002, 22). Conjunctures, in other words refer to those constellations in which different social actors, both human, institutional and material gather around a certain theme or event. The notion of the conjuncture in this sense links the method of discourse analysis to the role of platforms in contemporary humanitarian communication. In other words, platforms are a manifestation of the theoretical notion of the conjuncture: assemblies of actors gathered in 'issue networks' (Marres 2006). Issues and themes that hold together these conjunctures can be found in Global Citizen, where users are encouraged to rally around certain causes like 'environment', 'health' or 'water and sanitation', as they are asked to join to remain updated on these. Related events can be found anywhere in humanitarianism. They can be identified in specific disasters where organisations and audiences have gathered or at film festivals where people have congregated in physical spaces. Indeed, as Chouliaraki and Fairclough highlight, conjunctures make use of both physical and symbolic resources alike (*ibid*, 23). This balance between physical and symbolic resources emphasises the increased significance of non-discursive approaches to media and cultural studies (post-humanism, new materialism, affect studies), which challenge what Chouliaraki and Fairclough label 'discourse idealism' in which one ends up "seeing the social as nothing but discourse" (*ibid*, 28). For them, conjunctures are a direct response to this pitfall.

Nevertheless, adopting the notion of conjuncture means to purposefully choose discourse analysis as a way of explaining how the 'relatively durable assemblies' are formed around certain themes, causes, and events. Choosing discourse analysis as an approach here, is to argue that these assemblies always have a discursive element to them.

Thus, conjunctures draw attention to the discursive element that enables an integrated approach to cultural forms that spans across their various modalities, including linguistic, but also the material and organisational qualities. For these reasons, every chapter in this dissertation discusses both a platform and a narrative as they are mutually constituted: the tale of integration cannot be uttered without such integration being attempted in disaster relief platforms, the utopianism of Kiva's rhetoric is built on its material network, and the NGO confederations loosely conduct the narrative of dignity and agency in humanitarian communication. In short, it is exactly the point that discourse extends beyond the immediately presented text or representation. More precisely, a discourse of common humanity is moulded to the platforms that disseminate it and vice versa and platforms do not just exist to facilitate the distribution of messages and campaigns but they allow them to be constructed in the first place. What the messages and campaigns come to look like in the end is however also subject to text-analysis – centralising popular culture and cultural identity in the tradition of studies in cultural studies.

~ Popular culture, humanitarian communication and its audiences
Building on discourse analysis as discussed above, this study is additionally informed by cultural studies, as drawn from the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies and similar schools in the study of popular culture and its audiences. This is due to the fact that humanitarian communication is entrenched in popular culture. It does so by borrowing from genres and (visual) styles in advertising (Vestergaard 2010), pop music, celebrity culture, cinema and television, festival culture, and social media network sites. While the methodology outlined above sheds light on how the discourse of common humanity is produced, facilitated, and circulated through platforms, this cannot be accounted for without considering popular culture in order to comprehend how "humanitarian reason represents a powerful social imaginary of our time" (Fassin 2012, 247).

Popular culture is usually studied as an "arena of consent and resistance" (Hall 1981, 239); a dualism that is particularly applicable when it comes to humanitarian communication. At face value, humanitarian communication appears to be strikingly similar to activist rhetoric, with a vocabulary full of imperatives around change, revolution, and bottom-up action. For instance, Global Citizen points to the "mix of content and events, grassroots organizing, and our action platform" to account for its mission to achieve "lasting change" (Global Citizen 2019). Though humanitarian and development NGOs vary in how they approach and (presumably, conspicuously, or actually) challenge the status quo, the 'aura' of bottom-up activism is aligned with the sector, as will be seen in many examples throughout this dissertation. Yet, at the same time humanitarian communication is embedded in a range of consensus-oriented mechanisms, such as institutional rigidity, a neoliberal market in which they compete for funds, and the language of popular culture. In popular culture, John Fiske argues, "social differences are seen finally as harmonious, not as conflictual" (2010, 10). From this

perspective, it is frequently suggested that alterity and rebellion are appropriated in popular culture. While discussing contemporary protest, for instance, Mark Fisher notes that "'alternative' and 'independent' don't designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact *the* dominant styles, within the mainstream" (Fisher 2009, 9). For example, with regard to humanitarian communication, this has resulted in a range of critical perspectives on "feel good activism" (Chouliaraki 2013, 14) "wrist band activism" (K. Nash 2008, 137), "the marketing of rebellion" (Clifford 2005), "brand aid" (Richey and Ponte 2011) and "compassionate consensus" (Fassin 2012, 176).

More generally, it can be noted that Global Citizen represents both progressive and conservative forces, which is illustrative for how the humanitarian sector attempts to reinvent itself. Global Citizen positions itself both as collaborating with major and established NGOs in the fields of development and humanitarianism while also seemingly assuming a role as a newcomer. While the platform for instance works with organizations like World Vision, Safe the Children and CARE, the word 'organization' is not used in relation to Global Citizen itself. In doing so, Global Citizen discards both the heavy language of an all-encompassing ideological framework and the rigidity associated with big institutions and instead exchanges them for a cheerful straightforwardness that is evident in its visual language. The website, for example, uses a simple and unambiguous iconography to communicate the very broad variety of subjects covered by the community: a light bulb for "innovation and finance", an ear of wheat for "hunger", and a waving flag for "citizenship" – all depicted in plain red with black accents. The icons' basic straightforwardness, making issues accessible in coherent and upbeat visual symbols, means stripping development of its burdensome connotations and releasing the engagement with them from the bureaucratic grip of institutions. In fact, after registering, users are prompted to select one or more causes they want to support by clicking the icons, after which the registration is completed: "Congratulations! You're officially a Global Citizen". After being inaugurated as part of the human identity, Global Citizen tells its users that from this point forward, many opportunities to make a difference are now available: "It has never been easier to make a real positive impact!".

However, making an impact in the face of distant or mediated suffering has never been easy or straightforward. Rather, it is recurrently asserted that in humanitarian communication "[i]t is action above all that is the problem" (Boltanski 1999, 17). In fact, the distance in mediated suffering, foreclosing an immediate response from spectators towards the plight of others in distress, is what has taken centre stage in many studies on humanitarian communication. This means that the distance in 'distant suffering' raises a number of questions about the fortunate spectator's ethical position, which prompted a range of academic studies on audiences in humanitarian communication. It is exactly because of the fundamental ethical implications of distance in suffering that questions and inquiries about spectators and audiences are rarely absent in studies on humanitarian communication. Studies that address this topic generally follow one of two approaches.

One approach looks at the audience as a kind of model that can be derived from an understanding of what it means to witness distant suffering. Here, audience responses are construed by the discourses provided in humanitarian communication and the theoretical positions that can be taken are explored (Boltanski 1999; S. Sontag 2003; Chouliaraki 2006).[24] The spectator is implied in and through mediated suffering in this instance; as a result, the many potential spectatorial dispositions are investigated and evaluated in light of this. The second approach, which empirically investigates the audience itself, was created in response to the claim that "this mostly theoretical literature has not yet been sufficiently matched with substantial and rigorous empirical efforts" (Joye and von Engelhardt 2015). This approach focuses on how images of distant suffering are understood on the side of the audience, and how "text-based suppositions (…) are received and negotiated" (Orgad and Seu 2014, 19).

[24] Particularly this approached is indebted to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, whose moral theory examines the "correspondence of sentiments between the *spectator* and the *person principally concerned*" (Smith 1759, 21; as cited in: Boltanski 1999, 36).

CHAPTER 2: DISASTER RELIEF

"It is a total chaos here", TV presenter Beau van Erven Dorens exclaims. Indeed, the total chaos is confirmed both in word and in gesture by DJ Rob Stenders: "Yes, I'm on the radio, so I'm going to disturb this party a little (…) it is a bit awkward with this radio gear all over me, well whatever". The 'party' referred to by the DJ, is the live television broadcast *Nederland Helpt Haiti* ('The Netherlands Help Haiti') in which funds are raised to relieve the suffering of Haitians hit by the Earthquake in 2010. The chaos, amidst of a cross-media excess, is not regarded as a problem; rather, it is being cheerfully celebrated as it points to the ad-hoc and upbeat character of the show. What is interesting here is not so much the light-hearted approach toward a devastating earthquake that may have claimed the lives of more than 200.000 people.[25] Although the show is heavily influenced by popular culture, what catches the eye is the media-saturated, collaborative endeavour to raise funds in what can be understood as carefully coordinated chaos. The turmoil in this segment, and in the show as a whole, reflects two different aspects of emergency relief campaigns.

First, it conveys urgency. The reason for this urgency is that disaster more often than not occurs unexpectedly and always indicates a temporary, out-of-the-ordinary situation. As such, emergency relief implies a sense of urgency because situations change dramatically over short spans of time. Though the light-heartedness of *Nederland Helpt Haiti* will never allow for an explicit comparison, the calamitous situation and urgency for relief on the ground in Haiti is in this sense mirrored in the chaos in the Dutch television studio. Here, the disruptive nature of the earthquake resonates in the show, with certain parts of the show appearing unprepared, improvised, and spontaneous. Also, the fact that the flow of regular programming on Dutch TV has been suspended in favour of the show points to a disruption of schedules. Running for 95 minutes on prime time without any commercial breaks, the show was prioritised over other leading shows that usually underpinned the regularities of broadcasting. Secondly, this signifies that the mix-up results from a situation in which different media are involved in a combined operation. As radio, television, and digital media work collaboratively to make a compelling case for the victims of the Haiti earthquake, it becomes clear that an abundancy of media channels is employed for the evening. In a self-reflexive manner, the profuse media attention reasserts itself in confirming that we are dealing with an exceptional media event and that the case for Haiti cannot be disregarded. The Dutch show, which was broadcasted on January 21, 2010 (Eyeworks), was indeed presented as an inescapable event because the joined television networks broadcasting covered all major national television channels, leaving viewers with no choice but to tune in to the fundraiser. The same was true for radio during the day, with no less than seven national broadcasters replacing their regular

[25] Estimates on this de vary. See O'Connor (2012) for a critical review of the different estimates.

programming in favour of 'Radio555', a cooperation between various broadcasters and their DJs. The name referred to the bank account to which donations could be made.

Connecting these two aspects of the chaos, *Nederland Helpt Haiti* conveys the notion of unity where doubts and differences are suspended in the name of urgency. This notion of unity is centralised in this chapter. The chapter will focus on how discourses of unity (and togetherness) are upheld in solidly institutionalised disaster relief platforms and sweeping across-the-board campaigns. Therefore, it is argued that the platforms and the campaigns that are being launched in their names are a direct response to the tendency of disintegration under post-humanitarianism – described in the previous chapter. This claim will be substantiated by an analysis of the unificatory endeavours of the Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) and its member platforms. *Nederland Helpt Haiti* is one example of a television relief show that was produced in the name of the Dutch disaster relief platform 'Giro555' – which is itself one of the members of the international network of disaster relief platforms, the EAA. The discourses of unity that become apparent in the setup, identity, and working 'repertoires' (Wetherell and Potter 1988) of these platforms will be aligned with the togetherness conveyed in the campaigns themselves, outlining how these are mutually informed and mutually dependant. In other words, the institutional work done by the platforms serves as the foundation of the discourse of unity showcased in the appeals.

The discourse of common humanity is closely related to the unity implied in the "collective heartbeat" (Dayan and Katz 1992, 9) or the "integrated news spectacle" (Compton and Comor 2007) of disaster relief shows. This is, however, not as straightforward as it seems. Common humanity manifests itself in disaster relief efforts in a variety of ways. For instance, the conspicuous nationalism that drives many of the campaigns already becomes evident in the title of *Nederland Helpt Haiti*. Rather than being at odds with the cosmopolitan ideal of common humanity, the combination of nationalist unity and benevolence appeals to both communitarian *and* universal togetherness. What this demonstrates, and what will be discussed throughout the chapter, is that a range of different 'holisms' (in word, style, and setup of the campaigns) in disaster relief can underscore the appeal to common humanity.

According to Dayan and Katz, whose study of the phenomena of media events is still directive today, media events are characterised by *disruption* of the daily routine (or "flow") of television and the near *monopoly* that these events hold over public and media attention (1992, 5). Moreover, media events are mostly prepared for, yet they are *live* and unpredictable as well. This is particularly true since the 'event' itself is typically organised *outside of the media* that report them, though often by "public bodies with whom the media cooperate" (6). This approach to (and definition of) media events has been taken up to study disaster relief in numerous cases. For instance, to study Live Aid (Franks 2013) and Live 8 (Compton and Comor 2007)[26], as well as more generally in Lilie Chouliaraki's

[26] Strictly speaking, Live 8 does not qualify as a disaster relief campaign, since it did not aim to relief suffering due to a particular disaster, but rather meant to more generally address the problem of

conceptualisation of 'ceremonial humanitarianism' (2013) and other cases (Devereux 1996; 1998; Driessens, Joye, and Biltereyst 2012; Vandevoordt 2016). Indeed, according to Dayan and Katz, "We Are the World" can be referred to as "the appropriate theme song for media events" (1992, 14).[27]

Despite the aforementioned unity, however, holism and common humanity do not spontaneously appear nor do they naturally result from the inherent characteristics of either 'disaster' or the 'media events' that surround them. While disasters are frequently clearly demarcated in their timely and geographical focus, which allows them to build on their acuteness to integrate audiences and discourses alike, such unity is always a construction. From identifying what constitutes a disaster to building conjunctures around them and appealing to a discourse of common humanity; the entire cycle needs to be carefully produced and maintained. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the platforms that actually accomplish this, and it theorises them in light of what Nick Couldry calls the "myth of the mediated centre". According to him, media institutions "have always been heavily engaged in producing discourse about the collectivities they bring together" (2015, 613). In response to Dayan and Katz' work on media events, and in accordance with Chouliaraki's remarks on post-humanitarianism, Couldry notes that the construction of "mediated centres" is even less self-evident in times of "deeper fragmentation of the audience" (Couldry and Hepp 2018, 114). In short, the idea that unity seems to 'naturally' arise from media events and from the particularity and urgency associated with disaster is challenged. Instead, it will be outlined how emergency appeals alliances construct unity – while at the same time describing such unity as inexplicable.

Such inexplicability is the "myth" in Couldry's myth of the "mediated centre" – present in both popular discourse and in academic work on media events. For Couldry, "the problem (…) lies with Dayan and Katz's Durkheimian assumptions" (2003, 64) in their assessment of media events. He disputes the assumption that media events hold societies together by uniting people together around an existing, hegemonic societal middle point. Yet, in a situation where such a centre is becoming more and more elusive, Couldry maintains that media sociologists should start looking at "how media events work to *construct* a sense of the 'centre'" (*ibid*, 66). In a disintegrated media landscape, then, an understanding of centralisation in terms of performance prevails over an approach in which the centre is regarded to be invariably located in institutions or other hegemonic societal centres. In his later works, together with Andreas Hepp, Couldry emphasises that

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worldwide poverty – in response to the G8 summit in Scotland in 2005. The event also marked the 20th anniversary of Live Aid.

[27] More generally Bennett explains that: "During the 1980s, popular music became the focus for a series of globally broadcast mega-events (Garofalo 1992b), beginning with Bob Geldof's Live Aid concerts in Britain and the US in aid of the famine in Ethiopia. Geldof later described the Live Aid event as a 'global juke box' to raise awareness about the famine. Although the political naiveté of Live Aid has been justifiably criticized (see, for example, Garofalo 1992a) the event's principal success was that it was able to focus, however briefly, people's attention on a world problem by utilizing a key element of their leisure and lifestyle" (2001, 1–2).

Dayan and Katz's understanding of media events as functionally perpetuating (national) societal integration has been threatened by the proliferation of distributed and dispersed media channels. Their response, however, is not to dismiss the concept but "to argue that it was the functionalist trappings of the concept that needed, once and for all, to be dropped, leaving a concept that was extremely well suited to grasping the continuing pressures to *construct* a (social, political, national or even global) 'centre' through the managed output of media institutions" (Couldry and Hepp 2018, 115). It is also for this reason that this dissertation addresses disaster relief platforms first: to make clear how, even our understanding of disasters (that at face value seem tangible and clearly delineated) is socially constructed.

This chapter will first discuss the cultural construction of disaster alongside the historical emergence of mediated disaster and relief. This history, which outlines how disaster relief campaigns came to be run by thoroughly coordinated, platformed institutions, will pave the way for the rest of the chapter. Following that, these institutions are studied by highlighting the different platforms united under the Emergency Appeals Alliance. In order to comprehend how a "myth of the mediated centre" is created, the integrative endeavours of selecting certain disasters for appeals and of crafting fundraising momentum for these will be mapped. This will be done based on ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees of the emergency relief platforms – employed by Consortium 12-12 (Belgium), the Disaster Emergency Committee (United Kingdom), Giro555 (The Netherlands) and Swiss Solidarity (Switzerland). After this, it will be demonstrated that the institutional integration of these platforms is extended in the discourses of unity and togetherness that are constructed in the appeals. In an analysis of 'Hope for Haiti Now!' campaign, the holistic discourse will affirm the integrative work of the platforms and highlight common humanity in disaster relief campaigns.

Importantly, it will be concluded that the emphasis on unity frequently implies the suspension of doubt, difference, and politics. It will be shown that while togetherness and integration can take many forms (communitarian or cosmopolitan, secular or religious, serious or light-hearted), the responses to disaster are consistent in that they become top-heavy rather quickly and hardly accommodate for doubt, ambiguity, or multiplicity. This is best understood in reference to Dayan and Katz's description of media events that "*integrate* societies in a collective heartbeat" (1992, 9). Particularly important here is that the integrative force of disaster relief, in line with media events more generally, "evoke a *renewal of loyalty* to the society and its legitimate authority" (*ibid*). This means that antagonisms and politics in general are suspended, which is crucial for supporting the integrative force of the media event. Didier Fassin, therefore, notes that "disasters represent consensual parentheses in the flow of history, privileged moments in which solidarity is displayed, inequality is erased, and conflict suspended" (Fassin 2012, 182). This performance of unity is carried out through an integration of NGOs, media and communications organisations; styles, genres, narratives and icons; technologies and

networks; and political opinions and worldviews. Here, it becomes clear that the integrative power of emergency relief campaigns functions on many levels, culminating in a discourse of unity – and ultimately common humanity.

Context: the construction of disaster and relief

The emergence of emergency relief campaigns sheds light on what is understood as an emergency in the first place. The understanding of the constructed nature of emergency and disaster (here used synonymously) can be historically and generally explored through the notion of the "emergency imaginary" – a term coined by Craig Calhoun (2008). This overview will provide insight on how disaster came to be mediated, as well as how emergency relief surfaced and became institutionalised. It will be argued that, among other factors, institutions like the Emergency Appeals Alliance do not only campaign for relief efforts in response to emergencies, but that they constitute their meaning and play an important role in the construction of the emergency imaginary. In their relief efforts, the platforms associated with the EAA identify specific events as disasters, emphasise them as unprecedented, one-time occurrences that cannot be accounted for by regular means, constitute their meaning through reporting on them, and make them accessible as discrete issues to rally around. In short, the disaster relief platforms function as gatekeepers and interpreters of disasters and are important actors in constructing the meaning of "disaster" as a concept.

The question of what a disaster or an emergency is in general informs what emergency relief campaigns specifically are or entail.[28] Attempts to define emergencies have been made in policy reports, most notably in an attempt to account for flows of capital as part of what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls 'official development assistance' (ODA). Together, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and OECD define an 'emergency' as:

> "an urgent situation created by an abnormal event which a government cannot meet out of its own resources and which results in human suffering and/or loss of livestock. Such an emergency can result from (a) sudden natural or man-made disasters, or (b) food scarcity conditions arising from crop failure owing to drought, pests and diseases".
>
> (IMF and OECD 2000, 6)

[28] It should be emphasised that the definition of an emergency, disaster or crisis is not just a matter of semantics, but that it can make all the difference – particularly also in the realms of policy and law. Beyond the case of emergency relief campaigns, a very insightful case study can be found in Spijkerboer and Steygers assessment of the 'crisis exception' in the Trust Fund for Africa. In their study of "European External Migration Funds and Public Procurement Law", they outline how the European Union circumvents its own procurement laws for its migration fund (EUTF) by declaring emergency "in all countries covered by the EUTF Africa for the duration of the Trust Fund" (Spijkerboer and Steyger 2019, 502).

Despite the existence of definitions like this one, it is hard to pin down what emergencies 'mean'. Craig Calhoun proposes the term 'emergency imaginary' in response to this because, in his words, "[t]he term 'emergency' became a sort of counterpoint to the idea of global order. Things usually worked well, it was implied, but occasionally went wrong" (2008, 85).[29] In opposition to this, Calhoun argues that the 'global order' and the conduct of everyday politics are not antithetical to emergency but rather are deeply intertwined. Emergencies do not run contrary to the general order of things; rather, how they are (or: are not) mitigated, understood, responded to, and reported on are *part of* the general order of things.[30] Therefore, Calhoun critically examines how emergencies are being singled out (note that they are defined as 'abnormal' in the IMF and OECD's terminology) as having no cause in everyday proceedings in world politics and economics. In short, Calhoun argues that "the very term 'emergency' and the discourse to which it is central naturalize what are in fact products of human action" (*ibid*, 86) – an argument that is being proposed by a range of different authors (Wijkman and Timberlake 1984; Benthall 1993, 11; Anderson 2011, 1; Franks 2013, 93; Carrigan 2015, 118).

Following this, it is useful (at least for analytical purposes) to distinguish between two different attempts to denaturalise the emergencies that are the subject of this chapter. First, there are the socioeconomic and material realities of vulnerability and risk. As Mark Anderson posits, "Anthropological and sociological researchers have demonstrated that disaster events do not simply owe their existence to the presence of catastrophic natural forces, but rather represent the intersection of natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions with human populations in varying states of economic, social, and cultural vulnerability" (2011, 1). This understanding is undoubtedly supported by the rapidly evolving perception of climate change as a man-made ecological disaster, which has led to a rise in calls for climate justice and an integrated understanding of the political and historical origins of (vulnerability to) disaster (Schlosberg and Collins 2014; Antadze 2019). Nevertheless, in many accounts of disaster in popular culture and journalism, the supposed 'naturalness' of most disasters is only incidentally challenged – especially since calls for justice are often relegated to the background in view of the acuteness of emergencies and the urgency for relief. For this reason, Anthony Carrigan calls for a 'postcolonial disaster studies' more generally. This field should enhance our understanding of how large-scale catastrophes "take a disproportionate toll on the world's poorest communities" (2015, 117) as a result of systemic inequality. According to

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[29] In a related approach, Mark Anderson put this as such: "disaster is a conceptual negative that has no inherent meaning beyond opposition to socially defined normality" (…) "they must be endowed with their own meaning when they are encountered, which can only happen through inscription within the existing cultural system" (Anderson 2011, 6).

[30] A somewhat similar argument is put forward in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2008), though Klein goes even further as she argues that disaster is actually fundamental to the functioning of capitalism. Without disqualifying this line of argumentation, this approach is here put aside, as the depoliticized understanding and construction of disaster is central to the study undertaken here (and not its economic of political use).

Carrigan, the field of disaster studies is still heavily influenced by its inception in the 1950s as "its growth as a sociological research area came in the context of Cold War militarization" (*ibid*, 119). In support of incorporating a postcolonial perspective, Carrigan argues that the field has still not been able to disentangle itself from the violence associated with its institutional birth. As a result of the institutional roots of disaster studies, "technocratic management strategies (…) coupled with a largely US-centric approach continues to perpetuate critical blind spots that limit the field's global applicability even as its findings are adopted by multinational actors like the UN and the World Bank" (*ibid*, 120). The ongoing tendency to depoliticise the notion of disaster while concealing "the social, political and economic *processes* that put particular groups at risk and underpin the scale of disasters" (*ibid*) is particularly concerning in this context. To cite him at length, this means that:

> "The development of disaster studies is compelling for postcolonial and environmental researchers partly because (…) its role in situating disaster response as key to what Andrew Rose calls 'planetary management' – a process whose 'centralized rationalization' tends to obscure the social causes of global crises (1991, 207-08; see also Sachs 1993, 19-20). It is precisely this occlusion that a postcolonial approach to disaster must confront, and at the most fundamental level this involves reframing the question of 'what is a disaster?' in postcolonial contexts."
>
> (Carrigan 2015, 118)

Therefore, according to Carrigan, a 'postcolonial disaster studies' "involves analysing the cultural politics that accompany narratives of disaster mitigation and recovery" (*ibid*, 117).

This in turn leads to the second aspect of denaturalising emergencies, which focuses on representation. Discourse and representation play a significant role in determining which emergencies are acknowledged and how they are understood once they occur (regardless of how they did so). This means that even if an emergency is a social reality, it still needs to be constructed to become meaningful. This is not to say that there is no reality to disaster; rather, disaster needs to be understood and recognised as such to obtain its singular meaning. It needs to be acknowledged as an emergency, reported and narrativised, and made accessible for parties to rally around it – to form conjunctures around it. These reports on particular disasters feed back into what we understand as disasters more generally, including what qualifies as a disaster and how it is defined. Importantly, it also feeds back into the material impact and the risk positions outlined above. This constructivist understanding of an emergency is what Calhoun addresses as the 'emergency imaginary', and it will be explained below how it emerged through early disaster reporting and relief endeavours, and how it came to be conducted and institutionalised in disaster relief platforms. As will be shown, the depoliticising

effects of the emergency imaginary that Calhoun addresses coincide with the singularisation of emergencies and their unificatory force.

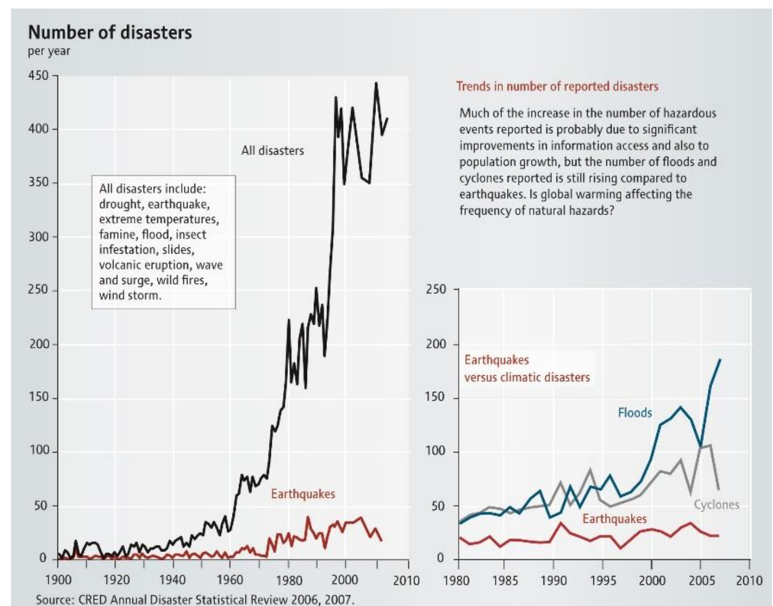
~ Recognition, popularization, institutionalization

When considering the rise of mediated emergencies, different starting points are mentioned in the field of 'disaster studies', as historically "communication technologies have invariably been used to convey disaster events and their impacts across space and time" (Cottle 2014b, 5). For instance, Cottle cites Daniel Defoe's *The Storm* as a key historical example of disaster journalism because it is "based on eye-witness accounts of the devastating storm of 1703 that caused the loss of over 8000 lives in Britain" (*ibid*).[31] In another instance, Sliwinski points to the coverage of the Lisbon Earthquake in 1755 "as an alternate origin point for human rights discourse" (2009, 24), pointing to the wide dissemination of drawn images that had a "global effect upon human imagination" (*ibid*, 29). According to Eva Illouz, Voltaire's response to the Lisbon earthquake can be taken as "the first time that a philosopher directly addresses his community of fellow philosophers *and* the general public about a contemporary but distant disaster" (2003, 189). Contemporary notions of disaster and their inception in the media are thus far from new. However, three more recent stages in the history of (mediated) emergency relief should be addressed: (1) the recognition of emergencies as an important phenomenon by governmental and academic institutions immediately following the Second World War; (2) the popularisation of disaster relief endeavours around the ground-breaking Live Aid rock concerts in 1985; and (3) the further professionalisation and institutionalisation of emergency relief fundraising around the turn of the century.

Many theorists point to the institutionalisation of disaster studies as an academic discipline around the end of World War II and the 1950s (Quarantelli 1987; Carrigan 2015). The advent of the discipline coincides with what is understood as a vast increase in the number of emergencies worldwide. In the second half of the 20th century, according to research by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (Pravettoni 2006; see figure), the number of *reported* disasters began to increase exponentially. However, one should be extremely cautious when interpreting this as an increase in emergencies more generally. Given that the growth is exponential, we should not be too easily distracted by the sharp increase in absolute numbers in the 1980s and 1990s; for example, the rise in the early 1960s also accounts for a factor three increase in just a few years. The emergence of the field of disaster studies is a reflection of this rise in disasters that are publicly known, reported, and discussed. This is not surprising given the "applied

[31] Interestingly, in a historical outline of disaster relief in distant history Benthall points to another seminal publication by Defoe, highlighting the importance of *A Journal of the Plague Year* that came out in 1722. The book according to Benthall is "a vivid evocation of London during 1664-5 when the author was a small child" (Benthall 1993, 222). This account however is certainly not journalistic in the sense of either *The Storm* or the engravings of the Lisbon earthquake.

orientation of the earliest [disaster] studies" as they were "supported by U.S.A. military organizations with very practical concerns" (Quarantelli 1987, 288). Parallel to this, Anthony Carrigan names the ushering of the 'development era' closely after the end of the Second World War[32] and "the global-economic transitions that accompany the formation of the UN and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (to evoke the World Bank's original disaster-responsive title)" (2015, 119). Institutionally speaking, this means that during the two decades following the Second World War, the topic of disaster relief gained traction, despite the fact that representations of disaster in the realm of popular culture and humanitarian communication had not yet materialised.



Number of reported disasters per year, according to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

After this initial but structural recognition of disaster as objects of interest, popular representations of emergency followed during the 1980s and the early 1990s; for instance, see Benthall's account of 1991 as a year that was saturated with mediated emergency (1993, 29–36). Certainly, the clearest landmark in this process is provided by *Live Aid* in 1985. The show, broadcast live from both Wembley in London and the JFK Stadium in Philadelphia, provided a 16-hour rock concert and media event to raise funds in response to the Ethiopian famine. The event altered the understanding of emergency, fundraising, and the role of entertainment in humanitarianism (Franks 2013). According to Suzanne Franks, it is hard to overstate how important Live Aid was in the maturation of fundraising in general and of emergency relief efforts in particular. Live Aid, she states, "spawned a whole new means of fundraising on a mass scale" (78). Parallel to this and in relation to financial flows of Official Development Assistance (ODA), Franks observes a wider trend "throughout this period [late 80s, early 90s] towards spending on emergency relief at the expense of the more politically contentious development aid" (60).

[32] For this, see also Rist on 'the invention of development' (2008, 69–79). Here, Rist explains that "Second World War turned everything upside down" (*ibid*, 69). It's aftermath (the Marshall aid, and the instigation of supranational bodies like the UN and the NATO) is taken to have constituted what is called the 'development age'. "Whereas the world of colonization had been seen mainly as a political space to encompass ever larger empires, the 'development age' was the period when economic space spread everywhere, with the raising of GDP as the number one imperative" (*ibid*, 79).

The event's lasting impact marks the importance of (broadcasting) technology and especially the concepts of liveness and simultaneity. These two technology-enhanced experiences enabled the ideal of watching 'together' all over the world. Although the actual social integration associated with this can be disputed (Couldry 2003), the *idea* of integration was accentuated regularly during *Live Aid*. From this point, the creation of a 'cosmopolitan public' was argued to result from the technology of live satellite broadcasting. Indeed, according to one argument, "the creation of a cosmopolitan public, is regarded as a direct consequence of the integrative function of media events. Evidenced in the more-than-two-billion spectatorship that [*Live Aid*] attracted, the rock concert is the media event, par excellence, to achieve 'social integration of the highest order'" (Chouliaraki 2013, 109). Although Couldry and Chouliaraki both challenge the idea that simultaneous witnessing and 'enchantment' automatically lead to an integrated society per se, the presumed integration *as such* signifies the imagination of a common humanity. In Chouliaraki's words this means "to treat enchantment as a discursive effect of ceremonial humanitarianism" (2013, 116). As such, the act of witnessing something live with others both non-discursively enhanced (in an experience of watching 'together') and discursively accentuated (the discursive effect of this) the ideal of integration. In light of this, it is not just a matter of television technology, but also a matter of style: of popular culture and politics being mixed in the face of tragedy. This is how *Live Aid* was a seminal moment in what Franks calls "a revolution in giving" (2013, 71–88). More generally, Kevin O'Sullivan notes that "The Biafran humanitarian crisis holds a critical place in the history of non-government organizations" (2014, 299).

Despite *Live Aid's* monetary success and cultural impact, an important aspect is the level of unprofessionalism that pervaded the planning and the execution of the event. As Franks notes, the event organisers had close links with the "all powerful channel controllers" at the BBC, which allowed them "the ability to punch above its weight, as was the case with Live Aid" (2013, 74). To illustrate this, Franks refers to an interview given by one of the senior producers of the show, who "recalls looking around the small and shambolic office and thinking 'We just can't do this show … it feels like getting BBC radio Cambridgeshire to cover the entire General Election'" (*ibid*). In line with this, Benthall recalls that "Emergency relief operations were characterized by a World Food Program expert in 1984 as 'the last bastion of unprofessionalism'" (1993, 38). Although the latter example comes from the actual relief-providing sector rather than the field of humanitarian communication, it signifies how the ad-hoc character of emergency relief resulted in a lack of robust and professional structures that were adequately equipped to respond to the typically unpredictable cases that catastrophes confront us with.

With respect to popular communication and fundraising, this seems to be changing, in line with the 'production of administrative knowledge' in development studies that, according to Chouliaraki, reached a high point in the 1990s (2013, 6). Also, Benthall notes in 1993 that the judgement of unprofessionalism is becoming outdated.

Looking at the years that the various national emergency relief platforms that make up the EAA are either established or receive the status of legal entities provides ample evidence for this, particularly in response to public demands for greater accountability and transparency, which is in turn instantiated by the enormous increase in the amount of money that flows through these organisations. As the CEO of one EAA member recalls: "for us, the turning point came with the tsunami [the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake]. With that campaign we raised 205 million euros – more than ever before, a bizarre amount of money. So then everyone said, wow, what are you going to do with all those funds? Will that go all right? And already then, public opinion was getting a bit more critical also. (…) So then a foundation was established, with articles of association, with regulations – how are we going to do this. So it came to be way more formalized". This case does not stand on itself and can be witnessed in other countries as well. Although quite a few of the platforms have existed for centuries, their professionalisation and legal foundation were frequently effectuated around the turn of the century. Such formalisation is now also occurring on the international level of the EAA, with the initial exploratory meetings in 2008, their legal foundation in 2013, and the establishment of a permanent office in Geneva in 2016 (EAA 2016). Here, these different appeals alliances will be studied as integrative platforms that counter post-humanitarian disintegration.

~ *The power of joint appeals*

In the following, the Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) is scrutinised to assess this tendency to institutionalise and professionalise emergency relief campaigns. The EAA connects a range of national platforms that together constitute the most robust network for disaster relief campaigns in the world.[33] The EAA is a membership organisation made up of ten national appeal alliances mainly based in (Western) Europe, with the exception of the Canadian and Japanese branch. In an internal report titled *The Power of a Joint Appeal* (De Vries 2014) it is stressed that "competition between humanitarian organizations is still the norm" (6), while "EAA members believe that this does not benefit the reputation of humanitarian organizations and that significant opportunities for improving fundraising results are being missed" (*ibid*). The various national member organisations have diverse organisational structures that depend on a broad range of cultural, institutional, and political contexts. Yet, the necessity to perform unity is one of the very foundational aspects of the network, as the EAA requests from its members that they are "mandated to run national appeals for international disasters" while they only admit "one

[33] The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) arguably is the leading organization with regard to disaster relief, but it is not (as the EAA) an organization that actively deals with publicly communicating any disaster that it responds to. This is to say that while OCHA might be the go-to organization for coordinating disaster relief, the 'emergency imaginary' is shaped by the EAA (and other fundraising organizations) more strongly.

organisation from each country (…) at any one time”.[34] Generally, this means that the national member organisations are platforms that tie together most of the major local NGOs and broadcasters or other media organisations.

The EAA is best conceptualised as a ‘platform of platforms’, as its national members are in fact platforms that, in the event of an emergency, bring together a range of NGOs and media partners. In essence, the majority of EAA members have a far longer history than the EAA itself, which was officially founded in 2013 (though the first meeting leading up to this took place in 2008). At the moment of writing, the EAA comprises of ten national appeal platforms. The EAA's members are listed below in order of their founding year:

Name	**Country**	**Founding year**[35]	**Staff (FTE)**
Radiohjälpen	Sweden	1939	7
Swiss Solidarity	Switzerland	1946 [1983]	19
Disaster Emergency Committee	United Kingdom	1963	15
Consortium 12-12	Belgium	1979 [2005]	0.6
Giro555[36]	The Netherlands	1984 [2007]	3
Nachbar in Not	Austria	1992	0[37]
Japan Platform[38]	Japan	2000	32
Aktion Deutschland Hilft	Germany	2001	33[39]
Humanitarian Coalition	Canada	2005 [2010]	7
Agire	Italy	2007	5

In turn, the national platforms are member organisations themselves, as they unite NGOs on a national level. These NGOs must adhere to a number of requirements, which, while they differ slightly depending on the country, essentially boil down to (1) accountability and amenability, and (2) the ability to respond to emergencies. The aspect of accountability comes down to taking ethical responsibility regarding finance,

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[34] See: http://www.emergency-appeals-alliance.org/about/about-emergency-appeals-alliance/

[35] Between brackets the ‘official’ founding year, which refers to the moment the organization has been established as a legal entity.

[36] Officially, Giro555 is known under the name Samenwerkende Hulporganisaties (Cooperating Relief Organisations). Giro555 is, however, the more commonly known name of the organization.

[37] Nachbar in Not is managed by the Board of Trustees, rather than by separately appointed staff members. As is the case with all the other platforms, there is a board, but these are not considered to be staff.

[38] Although the different platforms have different origins and different ways of working, particularly the Japan Platform is significantly different from the others as it (1) has strong ties with the national government in Japan and (2) is also recognized as an important institute for domestic affairs.

[39] For this, different numbers circulate. Almost certainly, the actual number of FTE will lower than projected here, as the number 33 seems to refer to all staff, while not all of them work on a full-time basis.

communication, and the actual aid work. Therefore, a range of policy documents and codes of conduct are in place in the various national platforms that set the ethical standards that all members must adhere to. The ability of NGOs to respond to emergencies is more practical in nature, as member organisations (if they want to be part of the disaster relief platform) should be able to scale up quickly and act internationally in response to an emergency. Particularly as a result of the latter, the members of the platforms tend to be prominent NGOs, such as the national branches of CARE, Caritas, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, PLAN, Save the Children, The Red Cross and World Vision, among many others.

The main motivation behind these various NGOs joining forces under the umbrella of a national appeals alliance is to "establish clarity with a one-stop-shop"[40] for donors in the case of an emergency. For this to happen, a dramatic shift takes place when the platforms decide to launch an appeal. The member organisations cease or significantly reduce their own fundraising efforts when an appeal is launched, while the appeals platform scales up in terms of personnel, activity, and most obviously, public visibility. Because the number of staff available to run most of the platforms is limited, a large number of volunteers, independent contractors, and temporary staff from the member organisations or affiliated broadcasting organisations are requested when an actual appeal is running. This situation is directive for the duration of the campaign (which usually spans two to three weeks, counting from the decision to launch an appeal), as reducing the activity of separate NGOs in favour of the platform to saturate media outlets is the primary reason for these platforms to exist.

This one-stop-shop model has different origins in the different countries, but mainly has been initiated or supported by public broadcasting services, which possibly explains the notable absence of the US in an international organisation that spans most of the Western world. This means that, for instance, Radiohjälpen, Swiss Solidarity, and Nachbar in Not have been founded by the Swedish, Swiss, and Austrian public broadcasters respectively, while the Dutch Giro555 has been founded after their strong solicitation.[41] As Benthall notes, also the formation of the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) in the UK can be explained by the strong position of the BBC. According to him, the legacy of such a strong public broadcaster is an important reason for the leading role that the DEC could take in the world as it is "widely admired in other countries" (1993: 5). As one management employee of the DEC notes, the BBC's role has been important in both the establishment of the DEC and its success, especially given the strength and widespread recognition of their public role. He states that cooperating with the BBC "has been key to DECs success, and the trust. Because the public has a lot of trust in the BBC, maybe a bit more historically than now, but certainly that is enduring,

[40] See: http://www.emergency-appeals-alliance.org/about/why-joint-appeals/

[41] The respective broadcasters that founded the platforms are the SVT, SR and UR in Sweden and the ORF in Austria. Swiss Solidarity has been founded as a radio show and now works in close cooperation with SRG and SSR.

and that has really helped the public trust in the DEC as well". The different national platforms have adopted this mode of working either from the beginning or along the way, and strong partnerships with public broadcasters have now (in many instances for decades already) been implemented by most of them.

As follows from the description above, the entire practice of disaster relief campaigns as facilitated by the platforms is hourglass-shaped.[42] The platform itself is the narrow section in the middle; here we can locate the rules and regulations set by the platform, the staff, the platform's brand, its identity, and so on. It functions like a hub and, ideally, as is the case with an hour glass, it functions as a passage that cannot be skipped. This is also mentioned as one of the important elements determining the character of the different platforms united under the EAA, as the national platforms should be a "single united voice in emergencies" (De Vries, 2014: 8). This is supported by the fact that within the EEA "only one organisation from each country can be a member at any one time", highlighting the aim for platforms to hold a 'national monopoly' over emergency relief fundraising. The 'bottleneck' of the hourglass pertains to an ideal of unity that characterises disaster relief campaigns and will be discussed as the establishment of the 'myth of the mediated centre' in the following paragraph. On either side of this bottleneck, one can find (1) organizations dealing with media and communications and (2) NGOs – these respectively reaching out to (1) the fortunate spectator and (2) the unfortunate other. As both the media organisations and the NGOs disperse themselves in non-calamitous times, the bottleneck-like setup of the emergency relief is established in and through the networks.

As mentioned, the EAA extends throughout what is generally understood as the Western world, with the US being a particular exception. Thus, when looking at the appeals for the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which is more thoroughly discussed later on in the chapter, it cannot go unnoticed that the US-based show *Hope for Haiti Now* was launched with an intermediary platform in place to receive and distribute the funds: the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF).[43]

As the EIF posits, "the Entertainment Industry Foundation (…) was established on the belief that the entertainment industry was in a unique position to truly help others. Their vision was to unify Hollywood's generous giving in order to maximize the amount of charitable dollars raised annually, and guarantee that worthy charities receive these contributions" (EIF 2017). This goal of unification runs very much parallel to the aims of the EAA and also their ways of working (having both strong partnerships with charities as well as with major media institutions, such as MTV) are strikingly similar. At the same time, however, the EIF is less strong institutionally speaking. Its brand is, for instance,

[42] Benthall refers to the DEC as occupying "a nodal position", this an elegant and accurate way of putting it as well (1993, 10).

[43] In its 2010 tax report, the EIF states this role as acting as fiduciary in the process after "the foundation was approached by George Clooney and MTV Networks to lend its expertise" (EIF 2011, 2).

never mentioned during *Hope for Haiti Now*. Additionally, its organisational aims and procedures are less strictly formulated than those of EAA members. In contrast, the EIF prides itself with its ability to "champion a wide variety of worthy causes" ranging from "critical health, educational and social issues by harnessing the collective power of the entertainment community". The organisation's annual report states that "EIF also responds to urgent needs generated by natural disasters and national or international tragedies" (EIF 2016, 2), highlighting their dedication to shows such as *Hope for Haiti Now* while also identifying it as a by-product of the organisation. This is demonstrated by the fact that other programmes (such as 'Stand up to Cancer') are initiated by the EIF itself, whereas in the Haiti case, the foundation was approached by MTV who took up the initiative. Thus, unlike having an established and thorough institutional structure that is specifically aimed at emergency relief (such as the members of the EAA have), EIF is a more open-ended and has a less rigidly defined protocol for emergency relief.

These differences can be attributed to broadcast history, as nearly all members of the EAA have roots in or close relationships with public broadcasting media, whereas a US-based institution obviously cannot. As a result, London was one of the cities from which *Hope for Haiti Now* was broadcast, but the UK also ran its own campaign via the DEC. The difference between the DEC and the EIF is emblematic of the differences between western European and American approaches. This is due to the fact that the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) is, according to Benthall, based on a "particularly well-developed and diverse" NGO scene in Britain along with an esteemed public broadcasting system "which goes back to the foundation of the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) in the 1920, which has hitherto avoided the excesses of both state control and commercial opportunism" (1993, 4). According to Benthall, the DEC is characteristic for the British establishment, which stems from "a preference for solving problems discreetly behind doors and a commitment to regulatory authority in broadcasting" (*ibid*, 42). The EIF, in contrast, arranged the *Hope for Haiti Now* appeal in a more ad-hoc manner, where the fundraiser was initiated by George Clooney, Wyclef Jean, Joel Gallen and MTV Networks. This is to say that while similar relief shows launched by the national counterparts of the EAA had a carefully managed run-up to the show (the telethon shows themselves were understood as the moment of climax after a two-week long campaign), the EIF held a similar position as a platform, but organised its campaign very differently.

The integrative platform: The Emergency Appeals Alliance

> "It gives me goosebumps, that it's really the entire Netherlands. That kind of feeling that you're working together real hard for the people who're going through a hard time at the other side of the world. That is really cool, and that feeling, that at some point you're one. (...) That kind of feeling, that cannot just be created. You cannot create that in communication... it is something that has grown over the years. It has

grown bigger than many other things and I find that really unique. It is... I wonder how you could describe it".

Here, one Giro555 official describes what in academic discourse came to be known as enchantment, referring to "the affective power of charismatic performance that brings global audiences together under a single collective identity" (Chouliaraki 2013, 116). Indeed, in her theorisation of enchantment, Chouliaraki echoes the sentiments of Giro555's director as she mentions how enchantment is typically interpreted as "magic connectivity" (*ibid*) and an "indescribable quality of uniqueness" (*ibid*, 120).

However, the ten interviews conducted for this analysis of the member platforms of the EAA show that enchantment is a conscious construction – even if the very people working at it do experience the result as something that cannot be created. As a result, paradoxically, it seems that there is only a thin line separating improvisation from meticulously scripted procedures, just as there is a fine line between spontaneous enchantment and deliberate coordination and cooperation. This is not to imply that spontaneity and enchantment are false sentiments behind which we can find a 'hidden reality' of cold calculations. Rather, focus should be on how integration as an organisational principle structures the national appeals alliances and results in discourses that can be neatly aligned to ideals of unity. Groups, in Bruno Latour's view, can never be understood as pre-existing structures that can exist without active formative labour. Rather, the unification that can be witnessed in disaster relief campaigns is always actively performed and perpetuated, or, as Latour puts it, there is "no group, only group formation" (2005, 27). In other words, he asserts, "no work, no group" (2005, 34), which holds true for disaster relief platforms. Since their boundaries are constantly challenged and renegotiated, these platforms need to be kept in place "by some group-making effort" (*ibid*: 35). Indeed, in one of the interviews a relationships manager posits that "it is an ever, kind of, evolving structure. Like all things in life, it never sits still". At the same time, the platforms' ongoing goal of performing unity is made clear at one point when one of the platforms' coordinators discusses the efforts of his platform to get everyone to cooperate: "Sometimes we get into a dispute. Then we don't get to do one event in unity, but we get two, or maybe three – which does not work at all. The media just do not understand that". Here, the importance of cooperation on a strategic level is linked to conveying unity in a general sense; something that is confirmed by another CEO who states that "cooperating with many big players is not necessarily easy, but Giro555 is a national platform so yes, we do want to cooperate with as many players as possible – also in order to convey that the Netherlands in its entirety supports Nepal, Haiti or the Philippines".

In this part of the chapter, the experiences and ideals of the people managing the appeals alliances will be central. It will be argued that integrative endeavours structure the platforms at every level of the organization, taking into account financial opportunities and constraints, technical infrastructures, and organisational dynamics.

~ Positioning the platform

First and foremost, the credibility of disaster relief platforms depends on its central position in a network that is mostly self-managed. The platforms' ability to speak in the name of a broad range of organisations is key, especially when doing so upholds the ideal of national coverage across various demographic layers. For instance, a representative of Aktion Deutschland Hilft uses the metaphor of religion to illustrate this point, saying that among its member organisations "we have Catholics, protestants (...), we have Islamic Relief as a Muslim organization, and we have a Jewish organization (...) so what we show in our alliance is hey, come on, we can do it. There is a possibility to all work together". This leads to reaching out to civil society at large, as in the Dutch case, where through religion, a broad range of civil society organisations can be addressed through very short lines. "For instance, ICCO, will at a national level approach the Kerkenraad [the board of Dutch protestant churches]: we want all the donations collected this Sunday in all churches will benefit Giro555. Can we arrange that? (...) If we get a yes, that means that a letter will be send to all protestant churches. Cordaid does the same with the people high up in the Catholic church. So in principle, we try to get this done on a national level."

Besides reaching out for donations, this means that the ability to get in touch with a network of civil society organisations is critical in a symbolic sense. It is, according to the Giro555 official, "the benefits of having such a diverse group of organizations aligned with you", where interviewees from the various platforms mention a broad range of civil society organisations (churches, schools, unions, kindergartens, hospitals, and elderly homes), corporations (banks, telecommunication providers, media organizations) and people (both in their boards, that often hold politicians or people "very well connected" in the media, and as ambassadors, such as celebrities and influencers). As a result, the platforms are created to aggregate socio-cultural capital, not only to accomplish tasks but also to maintain the symbolism of what Couldry refers to as the myth of the mediated centre: "the belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world, and that, in some sense, the media speaks 'for' that centre" (2003, 2). The platforms' nodal position in the hourglass-shaped relationship between media organisations and NGOs is, therefore, furthered and strengthened in a network of civil society organisations.

As a consequence, the brands of the platforms boast "a huge credibility in the country; 96% of the country knows who we are" (Swiss Solidarity) and a "near-100% brand awareness" (Giro555), as they have "we have a strong national presence" (DEC) and strive to be "the only, or most central partner" for the media (Consortium 12-12). There are two modes of operation for the platforms: one in which a national appeal is underway, and the other during periods between emergencies. The latter prove to be the primary times for sustaining the platforms in terms of their central position and integrative capacities during an appeal. So, while the platforms are shaped during the

moments of the appeals from the audience's point of view, the alliances maintain their nodal position outside of those short timeframes by working on building a network of partners and audiences - mainly through PR, networking and reporting.

The rootedness of the platforms in civil society that affirms their symbolic position at the centre of the emergency imaginary is accompanied by partnerships that provide infrastructure to support this position. For instance, the DEC arranges these partnerships in what they call the 'Rapid Response Network' – a network that is established for both disseminating the fundraising message as well as for managing the response to it. Besides the major broadcasters:

> "There is a large number of others who assist us in a variety of ways. I should mention the British Banking Association. Much like the DEC, the British Banking Association works as sort of an umbrella organization. (…) What they assist us with doing is disseminating out to the high-street banks for the launch of our appeal. And what this enables is that 'over the counter donations' can be made. So if you as a customer of Barclays were out with friends in a location where a Barclays bank was not proximate but there was a Halifax just a couple of doors down, you can simply go in and donate the money that you've fundraised".
>
> (DEC official)

Most partnerships, like the British Banking Association's assistance of the DEC, are supportive in that they facilitate the infrastructure upon which the campaigns rely. Apart from financial institutions, this also includes the infrastructure needed to connect to the public and to receive their messages and donations. As someone from Consortium 12-12 recalls, the Haiti campaign contained a fundraising event that was "broadcasted live, which meant a relay from Oostende and another relay connected to the call-centre where more than 200 Flemish celebrities and politicians were answering phone calls [from potential donors]. That evening, 1200 people were working in that call-centre, it was huge". The infrastructure and staff required for this are usually provided to the platforms for free, or at significantly reduced rates by telephone, cable, and production companies or, increasingly, digital agencies that partner up with the platforms. When there is a telephone panel, also the Dutch Giro555 ask of their communication partners "can you please provide us with the computers, phones, lines and all the staff around it? Then we're talking about 16000 or 20000 euros, but we ask them to provide it for free".

~ Deciding on disaster

In his explanation of the different levels of appeals used by Swiss Solidarity, one employee mentions "one exception, a very interesting one". He goes on to discuss the tsunami that hit Japan in 2011:

"Japan was hit, it was bad, the images were huge, the story broke for a couple of days, I mean, everything was there to do a real appeal. Just with the exception that the Japanese government said: 'we don't need international help, (...) great to have your solidarity, but we don't need your money, and particularly we don't want you to come in'. So for us, it was clear we cannot do an appeal. But radio and TV were pushing us. 'Listen guys, we have to do something. If you look at these pictures, it is all over the news. Why do you exist if you do not do something right now?'".

In the end, the platform decided to launch an appeal on the "lowest" level, where they opened an account, issued a press release, and left it to that. The exception, however, points to the fact that emergency appeals alliances host different conceptualisations of what sufficiently 'counts' as a disaster to be singled out as a matter of public concern and collective action.

In fact, since the definition of the category is constantly up for debate, it is often unclear what 'counts' as a disaster. Yet, the fact that the notion of disaster is up for debate, and the fact that its meaning is not fixed in the calamitous event itself, does not mean that it is random – even though the notion of randomness is quickly evoked when a clear and fixed framework is missing. For instance, Jonathan Benthal claims that the "coverage of disasters by the press and the media is so selective and *arbitrary* that, in an important sense, they 'create' a disaster when they decide to recognize it" (Benthall 1993, 11; emphasis mine), while also Suzanne Franks posits that the "role of the media in sometimes *arbitrarily* highlighting certain causes at the expense of others is highly problematic" (2013, 135; emphasis mine).[44] Even though both Benthal and Franks exhibit some sensitivity to the dynamics that shape the decisions made, their references to the arbitrary nature of these decisions are indicative of a debate that tends to point to any inequitable framework as random or indeed arbitrary – disqualifying the framework in place in a way that actually overlooks why it is problematic in the first place. What might seem 'arbitrary' from the outside, and what may not actually have an objective ground in morality or in numerical facts, is not altogether random.[45] Actually, it should be argued

[44] The word arbitrary can be interpreted both as 'random' but also as a way to point to individual decision-making and preference. Though that second interpretation would make more sense to understand the choices made in the appeals alliances, also this understanding is arguably incomplete (or plain wrong). This is the case because there *are* clearly set frameworks in place (as is explicated on here) even though these might not seem 'fair' or 'just'. Individuals in the appeals alliances are by no means free to just 'arbitrarily' make their own decisions, free of frameworks are preconceived notions about what should count as a disaster worthy of reporting.

[45] An 'objective measurement' that in its crude cynicism came to be quite well-known is 'the calculus of death'. This is a measurement that adds 'proximity' (between the site of disaster and the fortunate spectator) to the equation of pure death toll. Cottle and Nolan note that this calculus of death has "become institutionalized and normalized in the professional judgements, practices and news values of the Western media, a calculus based on crude body counts and thresholds as well as proximities of geography, culture and economics" (2007, 863). Proximity can however also be measured in terms of economic

that launching and configuring disaster relief campaigns is a highly sophisticated and thoroughly managed process. Even though decisions may not always seem 'fair' (as also those making such decisions acknowledge themselves), they are not made at random – which makes the process more (rather than less) problematic.

Due to their profile and extensive brand awareness, the appeals alliances are decisive gatekeepers in the recognition of calamities as emergencies and a case of national interest. Although the platform officers emphasise their dependency on others (the media, the audience, broader contextual factors) to launch appeals, the symbolic power that platforms have in recognising emergencies is a result of their positioning. Public trust in the alliances, their seemingly neutral identity and their near-monopoly turn the organisations into public authorities, who thus occupy a nodal position in the discourse on emergency. As their decision to launch an appeal or not lends meaning to disasters, an understanding of this procedure helps reconstructing the meaning of disaster. As we will see, the platforms are only partially autonomous in their decision to launch an appeal, as they also need to adjust to how the media covers particular disasters. In this sense, the platform not only depends on existing discourse, but also feeds back into it and reiterates or repurposes it. Even if the platforms themselves do not determine what 'counts' as a disaster, they must decide whether or not to give the 'full effort' – thus acknowledging their exceptional status. Generally speaking, when deciding whether to launch an appeal or not, disaster relief platforms follow three rules: one on the side of the victims of disaster, one on the side of the NGOs, and one on the side of the media public. As the organisations describe it themselves, three factors determine whether a national appeal is launched or not:

1. "the scale and seriousness of the disaster and humanitarian needs;
2. the ability of member organizations to provide adequate humanitarian aid; and
3. the public's willingness to donate for the disaster."

(De Vries 2014)

Although all of these aspects are debatable and open to different interpretations, the interviews show that "the public's willingness to donate" is the most contentious aspect of the decision-making process. While the scale of the disaster and the ability of member

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influence as a report by CARMA International outlines that "There appears to be no link between the scale of a disaster & media interest in story [sic] (...) [b]ut there is a clear correlation between the perceived economic impact of a disaster on western markets and the quantity of media coverage" (CARMA International 2006, 6). Put short, they conclude that "Western self-interest is the pre-condition for significant coverage of a humanitarian crisis" (*ibid*, 5). Indeed, Cottle (Cottle 2014a) notes that coverage is "refracted through a cultural prism of ethnocentrism and Western interests" (86). In this latter source, Cottle also includes an overview of studies discussing the privileging of "some disasters as worthy of extensive media coverage, and yet conspicuous under-reporting of others" (2014a, 86).

agencies to respond to this are discussed with a self-evident manner, the role of public support for an appeal is discussed rather hesitantly. "Often, that is the hardest question to answer", says one management employee when discussing the decision of whether or not to launch an appeal. Organisations treat media coverage of the disaster as a primary proxy of public interest when determining whether people are ready to donate. As a DEC employee observes:

> There are traditional broadcasters and media houses, like BBC, ITV, Sky, who, well… them buying, if you like, is essential in the ticking off of that third box: the public appetite. (…) It is a case of, very kind of top-level discussion, negotiation as to whether there is the belief amongst those houses that there is a sufficient appetite to address it.[46]

Whether accurate or not, however, the organisations struggle with the possibility that what is important to them may not always be reflected in the media or public attention, as one interviewee explains:

> "So, this is rather crude, since there are disasters in the world that deserve more attention, but that do not get it. And in those cases, it makes no sense to launch an appeal – also since launching an appeal is quite expensive, you can't run a campaign for free. So if it does not pay off, than you have something to explain. So it is crucial to have media coverage on your side."

This weighing of costs and benefits not only applies to monetary considerations but also to public and media goodwill. "You can't just keep launching appeals – we need to reserve this for exceptional cases, also for the public", states one Consortium 12-12 official.[47] As he remarks, "the dynamics of such appeals have news value on their own", and this exceptionality is in fact recurrently stressed in and throughout the campaigns themselves. Therefore, the importance that can be attached to what could otherwise be considered a catastrophic situation like many others is of utmost importance.

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[46] The aspect of 'public appetite' taking an 'essential' detour via the major news channels is historically problematic, as the 1989 'DEC Handbook' states under the 'criteria for launching appeals' that decisions "should not be influenced unduly by the amount of publicity which has been given to it by the press" (Benthall 1993, 45). Rather than taking this is a sign of inconsistency, this shift strategy underlines difficulties in prioritizing one emergency over another. While in future cases, social media and data analysis might be gaining increasing influence (possibly at the demise of the role of broadcasters; something that is mentioned and put into practice by the professionals working for the EAA platforms already) the problem will persist.

[47] Research by Van Leuven and Joye confirms Consortium 12-12 being aware of this. Having interviewed two professionals from the organization (in order to understand the ties between NGOs and national Belgian media), they cite the press and communications officer who outlines that "if you communicate too much, you undermine your own message because people will stop paying attention to it" (2014, 168).

However, the organisations see their curating task as mainly determined by external factors, which can at best be influenced a little, and only through hard work. Particularly in the case of a slow-onset disaster, the platforms sometimes try and nudge the media and public attention towards potential or occurring disaster. This was the case, for instance, with regard to the East Africa appeal, which was launched in March 2017 but that had been anticipated by the various national platforms for months or even years prior. As the El Niño atmospheric phenomenon had already been identified by many as a significant threat that was growing, an employee of Consortium 12-12 explained in his interview in May of the previous year:

> "We are monitoring the situation closely. It is almost certain that something will happen over the course of this year. (…) There is a problem – that is clear. That we [the NGOs] have the capacity to intervene is also clear. But when is disaster going to spike? On the basis of this, public support should grow. But to what extent, and this is an internal discussion, should we help and create public support? I am hesitant when it comes to that. It is not our task to do that. If it does not work by itself, we have a problem"

Ten months later, when a disaster appeal was running at DEC, one of its employees reflected on how the UK-based organisation had coordinated the lead-up to the appeal. Their approach demonstrates a more active role in generating support for particular causes:

> "[Our CEO] and our director of communications went to South Sudan last May, as we had tried to do a media push the year before, when it was bad, that didn't get anywhere. So then we send them on a comms-trip, we got a lot of materials and we shared that with the EAA – because we thought we could launch in June or July. That didn't work. (…) So this was a challenge, to get the public awareness, and to get things to happen at the same time"

In both these cases, and in other as well, it becomes clear however that (regardless of whether the organizations aim to nudge the public opinion) they see themselves being mainly dependant on support from the outside world, in the form of media, journalism and their publics. In short, EAA members function as gatekeepers that can grant the status of exceptionality to the events as they unfold even though they are not in a position to decide for themselves to launch an appeal (as they are too reliant on others for this). Subsequently, they can capitalise on this new status in which exceptionality is followed by joined action, since, as one of the platforms' CEOs underscores, "the dynamics of joint action have news value on themselves". Thus, rather than being 'arbitrary', the dynamics of joint action are managed closely and depend on existing discourses, news coverage, and decisions made by the strategic officers and board members of the emergency appeals

platforms. As expressed by one of the CEO's: "This is intuition. I notice this with [international] partners: we work on an intuitive basis. As soon as you know the mechanism, and you experienced this a few times, that works well".

~ The integrative moment: time and space during the appeal

Disaster relief campaigns can be defined by their ability to integrate notions of space and time (Perry and Quarantelli 2005; Compton and Comor 2007). In relation to space, the side of disaster is demarcated in reference to a specific place that is usually highlighted in the campaign's title (Haiti, Nepal, Ukraine), even if no particular country can be named (Indian Ocean earthquake, drought in the Horn of Africa). This contrasts with long-term development, where themes like education, nutrition, and health are prioritised and occasionally generically addressed in reference to 'Africa' or the 'Third World'. While this particularity of place is not surprising given that disaster "has clear geographical connotations with defined extent and boundaries", Perry and Quarantelli demonstrate how the compressed notion of space is "in fact a 'construction'" (2005, 51–52) in disaster. Also with respect to time, not only the urgency for relief but also the build-up and culmination of the fundraising appeal itself (both of which are closely managed by the emergency platforms) are emphasised to demarcate a timeframe. The culmination in live shows and broadcast events offers a simultaneous viewing experience that compresses time, while also providing a clear timeline in advance to build suspense.

From the audience's perspective, the appeals alliances fulfil their role as an authoritative centre only on a temporal basis that strictly relies on the cause that is being addressed. These platforms become credible focal points of public attention by rendering the disaster at hand intelligible. This means that the appeals alliances exist only in reporting disasters and in making a narrative out of an event. One of the CEOs who was interviewed offers the following explanation:

> "Look [draws a line]. First, we have the moment of crisis; that is moment zero. And at some point – and yes this is television, nothing you can do about it – there is a climax. The time in between should serve to build suspense, on which we can build our campaign. (…) The press will focus on this as well. It is a window of opportunity that will take about two or three weeks and then we're done. You have to stay within this timeframe, but the suspense-building should also not be too short."

He continues by asserting that "if they [the media partners] decide not to aim for a climaxing moment, we just try and create it ourselves" after having discussed the role of the media partners connected to the platform. While the appeals alliances themselves will almost certainly decide on the climax, the prior paragraph made clear that 'moment zero' is not as self-evident as one might think. The director of another platform, for instance, outlines a situation where an Ethiopian famine has been going on for months, but is only

ready for a campaign when general awareness has increased to a point where it can 'carry' the weight of a national appeal. Therefore, appeals alliances set the stage for an authoritative and singular understanding of disaster through the building of suspense, carefully crafting a sense of time, and clearly defining the timeframe that for the campaign.

The appeals alliances safeguard the condensation of time by managing and demarcating the appeal's timeframe, while representing the disaster at hand similarly emphasises an integration of space – both on a national and international level. This is done when representing the campaign's national rootedness by stating, for example, that small-scale fundraising events, which "range from waffle bakeries to classical concerts", are "tremendously important to the dynamics of the campaigns". These dynamics then consist of representing these small-scale set-ups during the appeal and encouraging the audience to participate. In another case, for instance, it is also mentioned that when, during an appeal "we are all together, everyone gets things done. All of a sudden, children will start baking muffins and will go out on the streets selling them". Representing such initiatives is frequently referred to as an important part of the appeal's coverage by the interviewees. Such coverage is then managed and visualised both in broadcast media and online to ensure reach and interactivity, for instance through the 'Take Action Platform' by Giro555:

> "So we have the 'Take Action Platform', where you can announce your initiative; where you can post a photo and a target. (...) Everyone can show what he or she's doing. During the national appeal itself, there are people from our side monitoring everything and who then send out an email 'good luck with your running event', because it is so cool that people do these kind of things. And we also visualize this: we for instance have a big map of the Netherlands, with all kinds of photos and post-its on it, to tell the people what we're doing. So we make sure that it will all come together."

Although the online platform in this case enables representations of integration, the interviewees' assessments of how digital media challenge the mode of operation of their platforms vary. As the appeals alliances are so clearly based on correspondence with broadcast media, one digital media officer outlines that broadcast media are "still our core business. And it is still our core business because we do want to differentiate ourselves from other NGOs. So this is really a strategic position". Particularly, this is done because the broadcast model provided the platforms a position of near-monopoly during some of the live events, which is now under pressure due to increased digitisation and a general disintegration of the media landscape. As one of the interviewees puts it, in the age of broadcast media "The channels weren't many, and that was easier for people to

communicate, because they had fewer channels. (...) Now, the younger generations have many ways to get informed, so how to get their attention is a concern".

While Dayan and Katz's approach to media events was established in the era of broadcast, the fate of disaster relief campaign should be re-examined in light of contemporary circumstances, particularly since media events in general, according to Mirca Madianou, "need to be rethought in the context of a converged and fragmented media environment" (2013, 261). Indeed, the 'near monopoly' of attention that characterises media events is hard to maintain in the face of personalised and flexible media consumption, while at the same time the common ground created by centralised viewing experiences plays an important role in discussing the unity conveyed by disaster relief campaigns. Contemporary tendencies towards fragmentation of cultural life and a dispersion of media channels, the latter of which has been particularly fuelled by the rise of digital technologies, are key to these considerations. As such, they serve as a reminder of the more general trend toward disintegration brought on by the proliferation of media outlets that is part of Chouliaraki's outline of the post-humanitarian situation described in the previous chapter.

While the socio-technical monopoly provided by broadcast now seems like a thing of the past, platforms do manage to reclaim their position as a "mediated centre". As one strategic officer explains when discussing the use of digital media for their campaigns:

> "I think the phrase 'content is king' has been used a lot. So, trying to get as many images, as many bits of footage, as many celebrity backing as we can. To really saturate all those channels. Because that kind of saturation that we used to get by having a broadcast on all channels with everyone watching at the same time, that is not there anymore".

In this case, the saturation strategy displaces the more 'self-evident' monopoly that the appeal platforms could formerly rely on. However, it should be noted that such strategies do not *just* aim to maximise the number of viewers. As the word 'saturation' suggests, the sense of omnipresence is sustained by overflooding the public – retaining the notion of a ubiquitous, directive, and authoritative centre to which one can turn to to understand disaster. As the digital media officer from Swiss Solidarity notes: "We are everywhere. So, if you do not see that there is a fundraising day that day, it is really that you're not connected and that you are not following the media". As a result of such omnipresence, one director explains that "as of itself, the brand is so big that people do want to participate".

Through saturation, the appeals alliances thus aim for a short timeframe in which their central position is affirmed in an omnipresence sustained through both traditional and digital means. As one marketing manager summarises, the alliance is present during an appeal on "television, press, print, advertising, outdoor advertising, online, online marketing, Google, Paperclick, direct mail, we can send a letter, SMS, email... all kind of

offline and now online marketing channels". As such, broadcast media and their institutional means of integration are accompanied by other nodal points that confirm their centrality, ranging from local initiatives assembled on a map to the extensive use of ambassadors and other celebrities. The latter is frequently mentioned, both in reference to the phone panels helping to establish the studio from which national appeals are broadcast as the centre of attention, and in terms of their ability to channel the attention of a large audience. The platforms thus create a timeframe in which they ensure that a vast array of local initiatives, different messages, celebrities, and online marketing come together, leading back to the studios where the live show presents a celebrated but mystified "mediated centre".

~ Unity and neutrality

Closely related to the integration of time and space during an appeal, is the discourse of unity that is present on many levels in the platforms. Interviewees, for instance, refer to the internal dynamics of the organizations within which days of a national appeal are experienced as "inspirational" and "a team-building exercise". At one of the platforms, the 'action team' that is on stand-by and prepared to scale up in the event of an emergency is supplied by the various member organisations on a rotating basis, which has practical reasons but also "helps with feeling connected" to the platform. In this sense, the employees, member organisations, and other partners mirror the most basic ideal of unity that the platforms aim to tap into with regards to the audience: "they want to be part of this as well, of something bigger".

In the interviews, it becomes apparent how the discourse of unity in all its different constellations is easily intertwined, combined, and mutually informed. When making an appeal, one interviewee from Swiss Solidarity mentions, "you can feel the movement in the whole of Switzerland, because you get people phoning, telling stories, and you can really feel that humanity can be good". When the movement is jointly considered in terms of "Switzerland" and "humanity", these different scales are easily bridged as expressions of similar unities that hold the movement together. The discourse of unity and commonality cuts across all the different layers of the platforms: whether it is occurring at the organisational level or on the audience's side; whether it originates from informal waffle bakeries or from the institutional power of broadcasters or a Rapid Response Network; whether it is rooted in churches or banks; and whether it is local, national, or on the level of humanity as a whole. This is expressed in the platform's branding which continuously combines layers of unity. For instance, an interviewee from Aktion Deutschland Hilft highlights the idiom used by the organisation:

> "We have different brandings. We have... 'we are German', 'we are together', 'we are united', and so on. 'We are fast', 'we are strong', 'we are for emergencies'. And from all these adjectives, we sometimes put the claims [together]. You see, on our posters: 'Aktion Deutschland Hilft, strong alliance for emergencies'. Or, somewhere else,

> ‘together, *gemeinsam schneller helfen* [helping faster together]’. Or, somewhere else, you know, we put ‘13 German NGOs’. You know we really try to use these words in our language”.

Such reflections on wording and the branding of togetherness as part of the platforms appear to be at odds with the naturalisation of unity that permeates the interviews as well. In other words, the interviews paradoxically highlight the deliberate construction of unity through cooperation, integration, and representation, while simultaneously mystifying unity as an external force and as an inexplicable aspect of humanity and humanitarianism. As one interviewee puts it, the platform should “just remove all the barriers. (...) Facilitate. And, for the appeal, just make sure that people... because they feel, they are touched by the emotion of the disaster, and they want to be all together. To make sure that it is the community that is helping other human beings. And then you just have to facilitate that”. It is such a facilitating role that the platforms are keen to pick up. One of the CEOs described the alliance as being “like a communication platform. Towards the media and also towards our own [member] organizations. Because information is flowing in and getting out. And we just want to make sure that the right information gets to the right persons”.

Together, the facilitating role that is generally associated with platforms, the centralised position in civil society, and the focus on unification across different parts of society make that appeals alliances are oriented towards neutrality. When discussing the various causes for which an appeal can be launched, the interviewees frequently emphasise this because there is a general consensus that the platforms are ill-suited for anything that is perceived as ‘political’. As one of the interviewees, for instance, explains: “We tried to launch an appeal for Gaza, which we have done a couple of times before. But it is challenging because people have strong opinions about that”. For the same reason, the platforms were reluctant to launch an appeal regarding the war in Syria. In general, the orientation towards neutrality implies separating the emergency at hand from its socio-political context, which is comparable to the historical dynamics of understanding disaster that were touched upon in the introduction to this chapter. Indeed, the platforms tend to mirror a “concept of disaster [that] tends to imply “natural” as distinguished from human causality” (Kastenbaum 1974, 67). In fact, as soon as politics seem to interfere with a singular understanding of disaster, the model of the appeals alliances is not well-equipped and the emergency will most often be side-tracked because the possibilities for a successful appeal are slim.

When the maxim of integration is extended to every aspect of the platforms and its campaigns, unity neutralises the socio-political reality of disaster. This encompasses (among other things) an integration of NGOs and media, but also styles, genres, groups, political opinions, and worldviews. The appeals very explicitly bridge differences by using

diversity (ranging from musical styles to people from different backgrounds) as a symbol of how differences can be suspended in the name of unity. In the 'collapse' of difference and multiplicity, disaster relief temporarily defies post-humanitarian fragmentation by providing what is deemed to be an authoritative, neutral, and urgent 'centre'. This is why a short analysis of the 'holistic' discourse of integration in the *Hope for Haiti Now!* appeal will be studied next as blueprint for what such integration can look like.

The holistic discourse of integration: the case of the Haiti earthquake

One of the largest fundraising campaigns in the 21st century has been launched in response to the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. *Hope for Haiti Now!*, initiated through the Entertainment Industry Foundation, together with MTV represents what they themselves call a global appeal that can be considered a blueprint for the EAA appeals that followed. Therefore, the run-up to the campaign and its contents will be analysed to see what a discourse of integration looks like. It will be argued that, attempting to integrate a broad range of styles and narratives, *Hope for Haiti Now!* represents a holistic understanding of the disaster – while depoliticising the impact of the earthquake.

Although there is no objective standard for what causes media and NGOs (and in turn the EAA members) to rally behind a certain cause or emergency, there are very important precursors for attention and sometimes action that are based on historical, cultural, and political ties between countries that are providing or receiving aid. These ties are a result of, for example, histories of colonialism, migration, tourism, or political intervention. They increase cultural or perceived proximity that at least partially determines the response to any emergency (Van Leeuwen and Wiepking 2013, 230) – even though such decisions might be unjust or deemed 'arbitrary'. "Reaffirming the underlying geo-political parameters of selective news interests", Cottle and Nolan argue, "the news media also seek out (and for the most part NGOs happily render up) stories and personnel that regionalize and 'bring back home' the relevance and cultural proximity of the events portrayed" (2007, 870; see also Tester 2001).

In the Haiti case, the historical ties that underpin geopolitical interests and allow reporters to easily 'bring back home' to donor countries are twofold. First, ties have been established in the French colonialisation (settled upon in the treaty of Ryswick and abolished some years after the French Revolution; 1697-1825). Second, they are forged in a long-lasting history of political intervention of the US in Haiti, beginning with the US' invasion of the country between 1915 and 1934. This intervention "helped to shape the course of much of Haiti's subsequent political history" (Hallward 2010, 14), as Haiti approximately two decades later became entangled with US foreign politics when it succumbed to containment politics during the Cold War. Following that, this kind of politics has been extended since the 1990s in what Hallward calls a "humanitarian strategy of containment" (*ibid*, 311; see also Buss and Gardner 2015). In line with these two

histories the earthquake according to Fassin "precipitated a remarkable mobilization worldwide, particularly from France and the United States". He continues stating that "We witnessed in fact a competition between the two countries, whose governments and populations rivalled each other in solicitude toward the victims, bounteously sending troops, physicians, goods, and money, while raising the suspicion of the pursuit of goals other than pure benevolence toward a nation that was successively oppressed by the former and exploited by the latter" (Fassin 2012, *xi*).

In the wake of the US and France, other countries followed quickly – as did all the EAA members. This can most logically be explained in reference to what is called the 'CNN effect' (Livingston 1997; Robinson 2005). The CNN effect, which has been the subject of much discussion since the 1990s, roughly entails that leading global news channels like the CNN set the agenda for different national news media. When applying this to humanitarian emergencies and the NGO sector, Cottle and Nolan outline that "there is little doubt that national news media often take their cue from leading world news services" (2007, 689; see also Tester 2001, 104; Franks 2013, 4). The CNN effect is particularly applicable here because it addresses both the possibility of subsequent interventions and other forms of international response or action in addition to the agenda-setting role of news channels. As Livingston notes, "We may speak of the CNN effect as 1) a policy agenda-setting agent, 2) an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and 3) an accelerant to policy decision making" (1997, 2). This dynamic, in which public attention lies at the heart of international action, ties in with the tenets of the appeals alliances, who critically look at the "public appetite" for a disaster. As a result, in the Haiti case, the American response served as the impetus for the majority of non-American platforms as well.

In regard to the earthquake, Hallward notes that "Although the earthquake has no precedent in Haitian history, the factors that magnified its impact, and the responses it has solicited, are all too familiar" (Hallward 2010, 317) – stressing the fact that natural disasters tend to be depoliticised and detached from their (geopolitical) context all too often.[48] Hallward critically assesses this situation in his historical exploration of how Haiti became part of US containment politics. Primarily focusing on international politics, Hallward exposes US interference in domestic Haitian politics. While the character of such interference was initially military, Hallward outlines that around the 2000s "Haiti's elite and its foreign allies now had to develop a more indirect, more humanitarian strategy of containment" (*ibid*, 311). This approach, in which the earthquake (and the circumstances under which it could strike as hard as it did) is understood as embedded

[48] More specifically, McAlister outlines that the causes for the high death tolls in the Haiti earthquake "lie most directly in Haiti's inadequate housing, a result of poverty largely tied to international debt and inequitable trade deals" (2012, 30). For similar reasons Corinne Mason argues that "the 'naturalness of the earthquake, especially the high number of related deaths and injuries, must be historicized" (2011, 101).

within an existing political structure, is one particular example of how an emergency is part of everyday life – contrary to what the "emergency imaginary" implies.

Extending this to disaster response, it is interesting to see that according to the IMF and OECD's definitions, one pertinent aspect of 'emergency' is a government's inability to meet the 'urgent situation' (IMF and OECD 2000). Considering the ability of a government to respond to the events as they unfold typically reveals the more structural aspects that underlie the impact of a disaster. This approach, which aligns questions about intervention and help with considerations over more structural circumstances, is adopted by campaigns themselves. George Clooney's opening statement for *Hope for Haiti Now*, for example, begins with precisely this question:

> "Why? That's the question so many of you were asking. Why should we give more? Why should we believe our help can rebuild a country where more than 80 percent of the people live on less than two dollars a day? Where 3 million go without clean water and one in three children dies before the age of five. If Haiti struggled so much before, then why should we have faith that we can make a difference now? This is a tragedy that reaches across all borders, all boundaries, and demands our attention, our help and our compassion as fellow human beings.

Interestingly, these questions are posed but not answered. Rather, Clooney continues to say that "This is an opportunity to help a neighbor in need, in desperate need, and to do it with swiftness, expertise, generosity and love that resides in the best of who we are". By turning towards the spirit of 'the best of who we are', the question regarding a structural problem is displaced by a call to action (rooted in a celebration of the human spirit). In this sense, and following Calhoun's approach, the 'emergency imaginary', or, more generally, the concept of disaster in international development tends to depoliticise (by disconnecting the emergency from structural factors at play) and to repoliticise (by highlighting the need for intervention).

Yet, although the international appeal of French and particularly American media contributes at least in part to the fact that the Haiti case received tremendous attention, this effect can be understood more comprehensively and deserves scrutiny outside of the purview of mere journalism and news. As humanitarian communication lends at least some of its appeal from popular culture, the role of entertainment, music, and celebrity culture should be taken into equal account. Indeed, the involvement of the Entertainment Industry Foundation is key here, especially in conjunction with MTV as a nodal point in popular culture. Even though the initial coverage of the Haiti earthquake in news reports may have in fact been limited to coverage by major news networks such as CNN, MTV's role is significant for or understanding the role of popular culture in disseminating the

story of the hardships in Haiti.[49] This entails, in short, attempting to understand the hegemony of "globally mediated American pop culture" (Kooijman 2008, 18) parallel to the dominant position of news networks such as CNN. Therefore, MTV's *Hope for Haiti Now* (2010) serves as a first case study that will be used to introduce the response to the Haiti earthquake more generally. The launch of *Hope for Haiti Now* by MTV Networks marks the pinnacle of the different relief responses and was a benchmark for the appeals launched by EAA members. In line with 'bringing back home' the emergency, the show was initiated by Haitian celebrity Wyclef Jean (along with George Clooney and MTV Networks). Wyclef Jean gained notoriety in the US as a rapper and musician as part of the band the Fugees. Due to his Haitian ancestry, Jean offered a familiar face that could bridge the gap between the site of disaster and the audience back home. According to Elizabeth McAlister, Jean "seemed to embody just one degree of separation between Haitian survivors and the celebrities working the telethon. In turn, he allowed the audience an imagined personal connection" (2012, 35).[50]

Hope For Haiti Now is a two-hour long broadcast that primarily consists of three types of segments: live news reports and interviews from Port-au-Prince; subdued musical live performances in studios in Los Angeles, New York, and London; and appeals from celebrities in direct address. While the musical entertainment and the celebrity support in the show clearly account for MTV's role as one of the main initiators of the show, the live reports from Haiti are hosted by Anderson Cooper who, being one of the main anchors at CNN, lends the show his authoritative news value (also, despite the show being produced by MTV Networks, several branches of CNN also broadcasted the show, together with a wide range of different television channels in different parts of the world). In this sense, *Hope for Haiti* Now was "a hybrid form: part variety show, part disaster journalism, and part humanitarian fundraising" (McAlister 2012, 23). This combination of entertainment (celebrities, music) and 'hard information' (reports) has been extensively discussed and critiqued in the 'infotainment debate' around the start of the 1990s (Hartley

[49] More generally, Keith Tester notes that "Nearly all of the existing debate about suffering and misery and the audience gives primacy to the genre of news. (…) But it is noticeable that, even if news can be defined as the initial spur for the moral action of the audience, as soon as that action emerges there is a more or less rapid shift of significance of the suffering and misery of others into the forms and genre of light entertainment" (2001, 115).

[50] This status is however reinterpreted in an analysis by Spring-Serenity Duvall who assesses the authority and authenticity claims in the relief efforts by both Wyclef Jean and Sean Penn. Following her description of how Jean's efforts had been discredited she argues that "a sort of celebrity colonialism is performed in which global citizenship is defined as belonging to white privileged elites such as Penn, whose responsibility it is to rescue people of the Third World, while being denied to Jean, who is excluded from global citizenship because of his subaltern status" (2015, 594). Notwithstanding, Jean played a big role in the *Hope for Haiti Now campaign* and in getting the situation in Haiti on the agenda. Part of discrediting Jean's efforts however came to be afterwards, particularly when the *New York Times*, among other sources, reported that "money went to projects that never came to fruition", "there were questionable contracts", "Yéle was lax about accounting and tax filing", while a forensic audit "found $256,580 in illegitimate benefits to Mr. Jean and other Yéle board and staff members" (D. Sontag 2012).

2001; Reinemann et al. 2012), and has also been questioned with particular regard to humanitarian communication. In the context of humanitarianism in particular, the role of entertainment frequently raises "deep suspicion" that it represents "yet another instance of the alienation of morality by the market" (Chouliaraki 2013, 122). Therefore, 'aid concerts' have recurrently been met with cynicism (ibid, 108), and the same can most certainly be said about the role of celebrities who use their symbolic capital and 'moral authority' for humanitarian ends (Goodman and Barnes 2011; Brockington 2014b; Littler 2015). However, despite frequent discussions of 'moral corruption', 'market logics', and opportunistic 'authenticity claims' of popular culture and entertainment, this logic serves as one of the backbones of emergency relief appeals. Therefore, despite the criticism that is (quite rightfully) brought to the fore, it is important to more comprehensively understand the integration of genres and styles as showcased in the combination of entertainment and information. In a similar way, though with aims different from those outlined here, Compton and Conor outline an analysis of the fusion of popular culture, celebrities, and news in *Live 8,* terming the event an 'integrated news spectacle' (2007).[51] The argument made here is that this integration of styles underpins integrative claims that are ingrained in emergency relief appeals more generally. Or, to put it another way, the aim here is not so much to comment on the blending of styles *per se*, but rather to understand how such a mixture is a statement in and of itself; or how the combination of styles signifies the larger process of integration (of styles, groups and worldviews) that emergency relief appeals more comprehensively convey.

Such integration is also facilitated by MTV in the sense that they provide live, direct and simultaneous transmission that can be accessed from a vast range of countries. Therefore, MTV Networks' pivotal role in launching the Haiti appeal can be seen in both the international appeal to popular culture and the expansive network of television channels they own. As the show's sub-heading explicates, the broadcast is *A Global Benefit for Earthquake Relief* which is mirrored in the fact that the show is distributed in more than 40 countries, making it "the most widely broadcast telethon in history" (McAlister 2012, 23). Despite the fact that the show specifically reaches out to audiences in supposedly 'modernised' or Western countries,[52] its rhetoric makes explicit appeals to global

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[51] According to them, "the Live 8 spectacle was a prime example of how popular culture is constitutive of the journalistic, political and economic fields" (2007, 39). Their approach, here and in the rest of their paper, certainly mirrors parts of the infotainment debate.

[52] Apart from the show being recorded in studios in Los Angeles, New York and London, it cannot escape our attention that the celebrities performing in the show were by vast majority known as part of the Hollywood entertainment business, or were American or English music stars. On the receiving end, African countries are notably absent from the list of countries where the show was broadcasted. Also the show has a specific Anglo-Saxon character as it is English spoken (though Spanish voiceovers where added for broadcasts distributed via for instance MTV Latin America, CNN en Español and others). It has led Elizabeth McAlister to write a compelling analysis of the soundscapes of *Hope for Haiti Now* in which "disasters survivors' own voices, laments, and songs are muted, even as images of their faces and bodies are highlighted" (2012, 24).

citizenship and the implicit 'crafting of community' under 'global humanitarianism' (DeChaine 2005). Highlighting the simultaneous broadcasting in various countries, the audience is encouraged to participate in the show by sending in SMS text messages that may be displayed on screen. In the superimposed text messages on the bottom of the screen (designed to resemble a tickertape), the public is invited to join the discussion and send a message "to Haiti and the world". The show recurrently calls upon the public as 'fellow human beings' (to stay with Clooney's words mentioned before). Simultaneously, former US President Bill Clinton makes this even more explicit by stating that "it will take all of us; governments and businesses, private citizens, from America and all around the world - coming together in the spirit of our common humanity". Such statements are underpinned and made possible because of a condensation of time (liveness, instantaneity, and collective witnessing) and space (broadcasting from mayor cities in the UK and US, being widely distributed). In light of this, *Hope for Haiti Now* echoes a number of observations and arguments made in existing literature on large international relief campaigns, such as *Live Aid*, *Live 8* and the *Make Poverty History* campaign that "the creation of a cosmopolitan public, is regarded as a direct consequence of the integrative function of media events" (Chouliaraki 2013, 109; see also Biccum 2007; Compton and Comor 2007; Nash 2008).

~ *Hope for Haiti Now*

During *Hope for Haiti Now*, a few incoming phone calls between donors and celebrities are broadcasted. As one donor remarks: "I am glad we are all coming together to help out in this way at this time." What 'this way' precisely entails is unclear, as many threads of togetherness are being weaved together in the show. Due to its historical embeddedness in American fundraising shows, one particular aspect will be emphasized here: religion. As Paul Longmore explains, telethons can be understood as religious rites of American citizenship. He outlines that in this context, US citizens demonstrate "to themselves that they still belong to a moral community, that they have not succumbed to materialism, that they are givers who fulfill their obligations to their neighbors" (1997, 135). Although unity is expressed in various ways, religious discourse thus provides an inroad to assess this 'coming together' in a moral community, highlighting spiritual notions of togetherness in relation to some of the most persistent moral frameworks underpinning humanitarianism. Indeed, *Hope for Haiti Now* is underpinned by an appeal to devotion, faith, and religion. Metaphorically, the role of religion is used to refer to both the concept faith (particularly, the belief that aid will end suffering and that things will be mended) and as a force that can both divide and unite people (particularly as religion strongly connotes charity, compassion, and solidarity). Thus, religion and religious discourse in the campaign can be subdivided in three categories. First, there are numerous references to the spiritual practice of healing, in which religion provides strength and *solace* (either from within or through external help); second, the role of religion in *solidarity* and charity is frequently emphasized; and third, the role of religious *unity in diversity* is highlighted in a way that

stresses the coming together of different cultures, faiths, and worldviews. The latter of these, tying in with the former two, conveys exactly the appeal to common humanity as mentioned by Clinton. Shortly zooming in on how *Hope for Haiti Now* uses religious discourse to convey the larger framework of common humanity enables a more close-up understanding of its dynamics.

First, the healing capacities religion might provide in the process are underscored in Alicia Keys' opening song, "Send Me an Angel", which among the many other religious references in the show stresses the need for relief. In line with this, songs such as "Hallelujah", "The Rivers of Babylon", "Halo", and "Like a Prayer" strongly connote not only religion but also the need for solace and redemption. The nurturing of spirits that is highlighted in these songs (either in strictly religious sense or more metaphorically) provides one channel through which *Hope for Haiti Now* can elevate the appeal from the cruder material needs (such as food, shelter and medical help) to a more holistic realm of humanity. The concepts of relief and the healing of wounds are expressed in songs and lyrics, but they are also visible in one of Anderson Cooper's reports. In his reflections on what is happening in the streets of Port-au-Prince, he reports, in voice-over: "In a park now home to survivors a mother bathes her baby girl. A small gesture, a small sign, a new life continues in spite of it all. On a street corner people gather, to sing and dance, professing their faith. They have not lost that. Their churches have crumbled, their spirits still soar". By juxtaposing churches and spirits, and in contrasting bathing a baby with "it all" (referring to the hardship on the ground), perseverance is attached to notions of faith. The near-baptism that befalls the baby (not only expressed in words, but also in shots of the baby and her mother bathing her) addresses not just relief, but also the restoration of relief to the very essence of what is assumed to be human life *and* spirit. This is both explicitly reified by Cooper himself ("a small sign, a new life"), while also the strength of such a recurring trope of mother and baby in humanitarianism (Zarzycka 2016, *xiii*) renders the situation both extraordinary and inevitable at the same time. Such notions of family life and faith provide solace on what is presumed to be the most basic level of human life *and* spirit.

By extending such spirits to the audience back home, the notion of prayer is used to tie religious practice and solidarity together. Wyclef Jean, for instance, notes that the material devastation is so incomprehensible that also spiritual dignity is jeopardized. Indeed, this means that solidarity should be extended to prayers: "At the cemetery there were not enough holes in the ground to bury mothers, fathers, husbands and wives, with dignity and grace. We need to pray for them, so that these souls rest in peace." Thus, material (or: financial) relief runs parallel to a spiritual notion of solidarity (this reflects the two action-oriented options already distinguished by Boltanski, between 'paying and speaking'; 1999, 17–19). Therefore, while solace is situated only at the site of emergency and at the end of the unfortunate other, prayer is attached to both the fortunate spectator *and* the suffering other. While Bill Clinton thanks the *Hope for Haiti Now* audience "for your support and your prayers", Ben Stiller encourages the audience to respond to the

prayers in Haiti: "In Haiti they have always prayed, and despite so many hardships, people have been of true faith in the power greater than themselves. Your phone-call, your pledge of any amount, can literally be an answer to those prayers". In this way, prayer serves as a particular form of communication that symbolises the connection between the fortunate spectator and the unfortunate other who come together in spirit. According to Boltanski, such connection can in a religious sense be traced back to common humanity as "compassion is supported by (…) the union of the baptised (and, by extension, all human beings) in the mystical body of Christ" (*ibid*, 6-7). It is in this sense that *Hope for Haiti Now* mirrors the religious embeddedness of notions of solidarity, which is underscored by George Clooney stating that "at the core of every religion is the belief that we care for one another, we take care of each other, especially in times of need".

However, Clooney's remark is particularly telling because he points to solidarity being at the core of *every* religion. Additionally, and this is quite remarkable given the numerous religious references throughout the show, no symbols or icons referring to any particular faith are included. The absence of symbols is apparent when observing the setting of the musical performances and celebrity appearances. Darkened lighting and a sombre environment symbolise the precarious situation while images of Haitians in low saturation are displayed in the background. The setting of the telephone panel is black, and the title of *Hope for Haiti Now* figures prominently in white letters – which falls in line with the logo of the show. Additionally, the subdued nature of the show is emphasised by the subtle camera movements. Yet, the word 'light' is occasionally used as one religious allusion that is deemed to be neutral. In addition, amid the dimly lit set, the only decorations on stage are the numerous tiny light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Although the concepts of light and darkness strongly allude to the realm of religion, it is not particularly necessary to find any reference to spirituality in those lights to recognise that the show both maintains its neutral stance (with regard to religion and beyond) and tries to deliver a powerful and compelling message (either spiritual or not). The coming together of different religions is, therefore, one aspect of conveying notions of neutrality and integration, as also boxing legend Muhammad Ali professes during the show. Ali's remarks on charity and religion during the programme carry even more weight given that his public persona has been significantly shaped by his decision to convert to Islam in 1964, which at the time generated a great deal of controversy: "There are many names for the charity that resides in the hearts of all human beings. In my faith, charity is called Zakāt. Zakāt is one of the pillars of my faith. By any name, charity can bring the people of our planet together". In moving from 'many names' to 'any name', Ali specifically outlines how different faiths come together in the face of charity. This very process is reaffirmed by Stevie Wonder who, before singing "Bridge over Troubled Water" (one may note the metaphor of the bridge bringing different worlds together), performs a short excerpt from "A Time to Love". Only performing two short couplets of the song, he sings: "We make time to debate religion / Passing bills and building prisons / For building fortunes and passing judgements / When will there be a time to love". Here, the rather explicit call to

suspend debate over religion actually applies to all kinds of debate, in favour of love (and here: charity).

The aforementioned is not meant to imply that secular discourses have no place in *Hope for Haiti Now* or that religion determines the show as it is. The role of religion is much more modest, as secular stories are present too and these stories sometimes connote similar aspects of the disaster. Metaphors related to human life (medical, bodily, biological), metaphors of journeys (long roads, obstacles, travelling alone or together), or family (both Haitian nuclear families as well as the 'family of men') could have served similar purposes of the approach taken here. Yet, assessing religion as an important discursive carrier among others highlights a form of holism that is important to emergency relief campaigns. It runs parallel to the telephone panel's combined star power, present in vast numbers from a range of different backgrounds – both with regard to age, ethnicity, and religion as well as position (politicians and entertainers, from film, music, and sports). These celebrities are showcased as they are seated together in what seem to be endless rows of telephone desks; pictured in long and slows pans that show neither the beginning nor the end of the rows. Additionally, the impressive range of superstars performs in a setting that deviates from what one might typically associate with the entertainment industry. The subtle but elegant setting draws attention to the unusual environment for the stars, replacing spotlights with the lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling. In this sense, as Joe Littler understands the more general process of celebrities getting involved in benevolence, they "raise their profile above the zone of the crudely commercial into the sanctified, quasi-religious realm of altruism and charity" (2008, 239). Rather than discussing the alleged opportunism that celebrities have been recurrently accused of, however, the moral authority of the combined star power and the religious unity strongly emphasise the integrative power of the emergency relief show.

The timidity of the *Hope for Haiti Now* campaign (as it replaces show with serenity, spotlights with lightbulbs, and argument with agreement) refrains from competition and distinction. The two-hour long show's absence of commercial breaks is significant, as is the absence of any logos, catchphrases, or pleas from humanitarian organisations. Even the *Hope for Haiti Now* logo itself is made of very basic elements, with the campaign's name figuring in plain white font on a black background. Tying in with the setting of the show, the logo conveys placidity and grace. In line with this, the emergency itself is to be presented in a coherent manner to convey unity, and so is the act of providing relief. As opposed to presenting various agencies, actors, and institutions with different aiding tasks and strategies, *Hope for Haiti Now* presents 'hope' – with hope meaning *any* kind of help. While the emergency is presented as being multifaceted, requiring a range of necessary relief acts (saving people from under the rubble, caring for the injured, preventing diseases from spreading, rebuilding infrastructure, schools and hospitals, etc.), the various approaches, choices, and organisations involved in this complexity are omitted in the narrative. In fact, all of this is grouped under the denominator of help, or indeed 'hope'.

Although the show is certainly transparent regarding the different NGOs providing help (the seven fund-receiving NGOs are listed at the very start of the campaign[53]), they are rarely mentioned and certainly not explicitly promoted.

Conclusions

Disaster relief is not just the response to calamitous events. Rather, at least partially, it is the other way around: what is thought to be a disaster in the first place is shaped by the (mediated) response to them. This means that disaster relief campaigns determine the very meaning of the word and concept of 'disaster' by deciding which calamitous situations are chosen for coverage and are reported upon. This perspective on disaster goes so far as to suggest that the campaigns devoted to disasters are *constitutive* of their meaning. Indeed, to put it in Simon Cottle's terms: "disasters today are not only communicated but also constituted within […] communication flows" (Cottle 2014b, 4). The decision to address specific situations or events over others and the way in which these events are reported upon thus shapes the understanding of disaster as a broad category. While this quite straightforwardly follows from the constructivist approach outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, this point is even more pressing in the case of the appeals alliances under scrutiny here. It is not only the reporting per se, but the very act of elevating a particular calamity to their stage in the first place is what gives meaning to the notion of disaster. That is to say, the choices that precede the appeals curate our understanding of disaster and its exceptionality.

By placing an emphasis on such exceptionality, disaster relief campaigns differentiate their mode of operation from the kinds of long-term development appeals discussed in the upcoming chapters. This means that disaster relief is an anomaly to the current imperative of competition. As the rise of corporate branding has taken centre stage in relation to humanitarianism (Hankinson 2005; Stride and Lee 2007; Vestergaard 2010), its communicative practices have become characterised by "the ongoing attempt to create distinction and difference" (Orgad 2013, 298). In other words, the competitive context in which NGOs operate generally leads to a diverse set of messages, while in cases of disaster relief this is temporarily put aside. In short, disaster relief in some sense defies contemporary odds of dispersion and disintegration associated with the post-humanitarian condition.

Such defiance requires work – as disasters do not induce integration by their very nature (if any nature exists in the first place). Mark Anderson even posits that "disasters result in fierce competition over which interpretations hold sway over the collective imagination" (Anderson 2011, 2). Indeed, it is only through institutional and cultural effort that integration is sustained and that collective imagination is closed off in a comprehensible, relatively coherent narrative. Of course, disaster relief campaigns can be defined by the singularity of their cause and are loosely demarcated regarding area,

[53] These are the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, United Nations World Food Programme, Oxfam America, Partners In Health, Red Cross, UNICEF and Wyclef Jean's Yéle Haiti Foundation.

duration, and origin. Yet, despite the fact that the circumstances on the ground do indeed favour a focused and demarcated understanding of disaster, these aspects are all the more neatly established in their representation and can be seen as being produced in their reporting, rather than as a priori matters of truth. This does not imply denying the reality of an earthquake, flood, or conflict, but it does mean acknowledging the subsequent timeframe set for the disaster to be considered relevant, the area designated and visualised as the site of emergency, and the weighing of different causes (in which the disaster itself, of course, has a privileged role) that result in suffering. While disasters thus settle matters and situations that are hardly negligible, their understanding as a coherent whole is created in reporting them.

Disaster relief platforms, such as the members of the Emergency Appeals Alliance, carry out the kind of work required for such integration. They neutralise and appease competition not only between different disaster relief NGOs but also between various media outlets. As a result, due to their bottle-neck position in an hourglass-like set-up, the platforms tend to monopolise national narratives around disasters and thereby function as a one-stop-shop for potential donors. As one CEO put it: "People don't want to choose – that is our most important selling point". Although the platforms' institutional maturation only took place relatively recently, the work needed to create associations around humanitarian media events has some historical precedents. Suzan Franks already noted that such attempts to centralise took "a large part of the decision away from the donor; donors were required only to give, and not to decide precisely to what or to whom to give. In each of these media extravaganzas the public was essentially giving to an umbrella body, such as the Band Aid Trust or later Comic Relief" (Franks 2013, 80). However, while disaster relief has already been discussed extensively in terms of enchantment, the precise modes of organisation behind this deserve more attention. In their study of *Live Aid* as an "integrated news spectacle", Compton and Comor highlight research agenda since "although it may be true that extraordinary media events can foster a liminal social space for communal reflection (Cottle 2006; Dayan & Katz 1992), we must not reify or idealize them. Instead, they should be referred back to the historical power-laden contexts in which they are produced, distributed, exchanged, consumed, and, of course, contested by disparate groups of social actors" (2007, 38). Therefore, this chapter focussed on comprehensive processes of integration.

This process of integration has been described in four steps. The first of these takes place when no particular disaster is apparent, when no appeal is running, and when life is in a state of "relative stability, normality, 'non-disaster'" (Kastenbaum 1974, 66). In these times, the platforms build networks and maintain relations that allow them to be positioned in the centre as soon as the status quo is disrupted. This means that the "mediated centre" they create is by no means a coincidence but rather the result of hard, deliberate work. Second, through a gatekeeping process, some disasters are selected as those moments of emergency that need a one-off, extraordinary response. While the

platforms are by no means independent from media, audiences, and the situation on the ground, their gatekeeping function enables them to contribute to how disasters are associated with the mediated centre that they have built. Subsequently, the integrative moment is highlighted through a careful management of time and space, where the hub-like function of the platform is represented and emphasised to sustain the 'myth' of the mediated centre. Here, the platforms utilise their bottle-neck position of being omnipresent and unavoidable. This centre-position is, lastly, expressed in reference to unity and neutrality. The unity is expressed in the omnipresence of the platforms during an appeal, where everyone is included and addressed, while neutrality is implied in the process as the only viable route towards such unity. The depoliticizing role of disaster relief platforms is primarily based on that last ideal of neutrality.

The depoliticising effects of disaster relief campaigns are, again, not without precedent. As Mark Fisher put it, such "ideological blackmail (...) has been in place since the original Live Aid concerts in 1985 [and] has insisted that 'caring individuals' could end famine directly, without the need for any kind of political solution or systemic reorganization" (Fisher 2009, 15). As could be observed in the *Hope for Haiti Now!* case, such depoliticisation is deeply embedded in the construction of unity. The holistic discourse expressed in the show indeed builds on an integration of genres, styles, celebrities, and social actors under the umbrella of (in this case highlighted) religion. The quasi-religious show is indicative of a higher goal, one that transcends (political) difference. An environment is created where political struggle would be impertinent and where critique would be out of place.

Whereas these celebrations of common humanity in the face of exceptional adversity might make it look like the unity automatically results from the "natural" characteristics of disaster, the analysis of the disaster relief platforms aimed to demonstrate that such mystification is misplaced. The "mediated centre" discussed by Couldry is indeed a myth in its inherent appearance, whereas hard work is put in place to temporarily unite different actors under one umbrella organisation; to speak with one voice, provide a one-stop-shop, and deliver a coherent account of the emergency at hand. Besides media institutions, the main actors brought together are NGOs, whose most common interactions are competitive. While this chapter discussed how the disaster relief platforms temporarily halted such competition, the next chapter will discuss how such competition is managed in the case of long-term development appeals. That is, managed as opposed to suspended.

CHAPTER 3: LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT – REFLECTIONS

"As an organization with experience in development cooperation and frequently contacts with the reality of the global South, it is you who must inform the public without prejudices" (Lajdová 2014, 10). FORS, the Czech development NGO confederation, states in its 'Communication Compass' that its member organisations should critically reflect on their communications. The Compass provides guidance to communications professionals in the Czech Republic as they draft texts and produce audio-visual materials for development NGOs. According to the subtitle, the Compass offers "tips for good and effective PR", highlighting the relation between ethics ("good") and instrumentality ("effective") – a strained relation that has plagued discussions on humanitarian communications for some decades. This chapter, the first of two chapters on long-term development, will address how NGO confederations provide a platform for these discussions to play out, with documents like the FORS Communication Compass offering insight into the main themes, considerations, and tensions at hand. As under a post-humanitarian context development discourse is profusely self-reflexive, these considerations surface quickly, with the NGO confederations playing a key role in managing the tensions that arise from them.

The confederations will be studied as reflexive platforms because they are key players in the search for a new (visual) vocabulary for development NGOs, one that centres 'human dignity' as an alternative to the old (but persistent) 'victimisation discourse' of 'negative campaigning'. Arguably, the quest for human dignity in the representation of vulnerable others is one of the most fiercely debated aspects of humanitarian communication. Ever since critiques on the victimisation discourse in humanitarian communication were first issued in the late 1970s, the notion of dignity has been at the forefront of what became known as the "imagery debate" (Chouliaraki 2013, 57–64; Dogra 2013, 5). In an effort to engage in this debate, the reflexive endeavours of the NGO confederations are mapped by examining their numerous 'codes of conduct' (hereafter simply called codes) on communication. Sixteen of these documents have been studied to assess how NGO confederations reflect on their communications and propose (new) standards for the representation of long-term development.

The question is: what do the platforms actually reflect on? To this, the answer is a messy one. First and foremost this is the case because, even though all the codes studied are derived from the same document drafted by the European CONCORD (more on this later), the various national codes of conduct have varying opinions about what exactly are the objectives of the codes in the first place. As a result, the documents differ in how critically they evaluate their own positions and how progressively they aim to react to critiques. However, the codes frequently centralise the communication's recipient, such as the audience or potential donors. Rather than emphasising the perspective of the represented subjects, the codes discuss the representations themselves as they are oriented towards their audiences. Because of this, the confederations primarily reflect on how the

sector is perceived and how to maintain or reinvent their self-image. For instance, the FORS Compass urges its members to "let the people from the supported communities in the global South or local partners talk in your communication inputs. It will move your organization towards objectivity and at the same time using particular voices making your materials more interesting for the media" (Lajdová 2014, 43). Rather than attempting to amplify voices from marginalised communities as an ethical or political effort to fundamentally shift power, the Compass thus seeks to position organisations (as "objective") in relation to public visibility (through the media).

In order to understand the orientation towards a public image, the notion of a "humanitarian identity" (Barnett and Weiss 2008; Manzo 2008) will be employed. To illustrate, in the Compass it is for instance made clear that development NGOs (the members of FORS) are expected to "contribute to building the brand of 'International Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic'" (Lajdová 2014, 45). To put it another way, the NGOs are expected to take care of the public image of the development sector as a whole and should therefore look after the sector's humanitarian identity. The humanitarian identity is constructed in the sector's self-image but is also shaped by outside critiques and the discourse of humanitarianism and international development more generally. It is an identity adopted by individuals and organisations working in international development, where the ethics of development work are attached to a self-image or a brand, or where they are discussed between organisations or among their employees. For this reason, an explicit choice is made to study codes of conduct, as these function to both establish as shared baseline in communication perspectives for NGOs and to acknowledge and foster competition between NGOs in the fundraising market. This is crucial to understanding the difference between platforms in disaster relief and long-term development, where one of the codes studied here also states that in comparison to the appeals in long-term development, "pictorial representation of disasters has its own dynamic" (Appel et al. 2012, 4). Rather than suspending difference and competition, in the case of disaster relief, the codes provide a humanitarian identity and a common sector-wide narrative to subsequently sustain and channel market-forces, competition and divergence. As disaster relief platforms aim for (temporary) togetherness in the face of an emergency; their function is to suspend competition for a short time span while stepping into this (self-produced) vacuum and filling it with a notion of unity. Conversely, NGO confederations try to enhance and conduct the efforts of their members collectively, while firmly keeping the competition of the sector intact throughout.

As the construction of a humanitarian identity will be unpacked, it will become clear that 'ethical' and 'instrumental' arguments are difficult to disentangle in this debate. At the heart of this lie two separate scepticisms as addressed by Anne Vestergaard: "that of humanitarian action as colonialist and patronizing, and that of audiences being powerless and fatigued" (Vestergaard 2014, 523). It will be argued that these two

scepticisms stand for two sides of humanitarian communication (vulnerable others and their audiences) and that the codes struggle to fundamentally shift the emphasis from the latter (the audience) to the former (those represented). As will become clear, these two critiques have become entangled in ways that debilitate organizations in their capacities of critically assessing their own position. The overlap between both is historically informed by the parallel rise of critical assessments of representations in long-term development and the emergence of concerns over waning support and legitimacy in the sector. More concretely, the codes of conduct illustrate how "negative campaigns" that emphasise malnourishment and extreme bodily suffering are perceived as undesirable from both the perspective of dignified representations of vulnerability and in terms of fundraising and the legitimacy of the development sector. To put it another way, the overlap between and amalgamation of ethics and instrumentality arise out of a historical situation that allows the codes of conduct to be oriented towards "theorisations in which instrumental and ethical considerations necessarily run parallel" (Oomen and Martens 2022, 5).

The distinction between ethical and pragmatic considerations in humanitarianism has been brought up before. Craig Calhoun (2008) refers to Max Weber's (1978)[54] distinction between 'value rationality' and 'instrumental rationality' to point to the tension between pure ethics and instrumental pragmatics in humanitarian action. According to Calhoun, the humanitarian sector mainly defines itself in accordance with pure "virtues of civil society", while it simultaneously remains firmly tied to the everyday practicalities of market and state dynamics. Here, the humanitarian identity becomes part of a struggle to uphold what Barnett and Weiss called the "unity and purity that is tied to its presumed universality" (2008, 5) while also striking a balance between this and the operations-related aspects of their work. This means that the codes of conduct account for a minefield of colliding interests, ways of working, and contradictory discourses, with the tension between *moral* arguments and *pragmatic* arguments in shaping the face of international development being most prominent. This tension is felt within organisations and particularly in the operations of communication and fundraising.

In their study on this tension, Nolan and Mikami interviewed seven practitioners in the field of humanitarian communication, finding that the "assumed opposition between the 'practical' and the 'ethical' tends to position 'humanitarian ethics' as an ahistorical ideal that stands apart from, and acts as a check on, instrumental action" (2013, 53). Put differently, Nolan and Mikami observe the tendency to understand the ethical aspects of working in humanitarian communication as fixed and a-historic (firmly establishing the humanitarian identity), while instrumentalism is seen as a more fluctuating force that has the potential to destabilise this. In line with Nolan and Mikami's work, however, it will be argued here that the two aspects of humanitarianism and humanitarian communication are mutually informed and impossible to separate. As a result, ethical considerations are

[54] To be more complete, Calhoun actually refers back to Weber building on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2012). Weber's distinction between *Zweckrational* (instrumental rationality) and *Wertrational* (value rationality) indeed seems to resemble aspects of Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis*, *techne* and *episteme*.

just as much historically rooted and contextually informed as the pragmatics. The parallel tendencies discussed in relation to the imagery debate and compassion fatigue are also reflected in and reaffirmed by this line of thinking. Although the first appears to be primarily informed by ethics (assessing the dignified representations of vulnerable others) and the second more pragmatically motivated (highlighting the problem of donor fatigue), it is difficult to distinguish between the two because they both attracted attention at around the same time. Nolan and Mikami argue for more historically grounded analyses to lay bare the "complex interrelationship between ethical and instrumental concerns" (2013, 53). The study of the codes of conduct explores this approach further to highlight how this is embedded strongly in institutions – or, in the reflexive platforms of NGO confederations.

According to the FORS Compass, a humanitarian identity is informed by both "a framework of values common to many organizations" as well as by "a brand, which all actors in the field of development cooperation in the Czech Republic ought to respect" (Lajdová 2014, 13). The Compass itself is, however, also developed as an expansion of the European "Code of Conduct on Images and Messages" issued by the CONCORD platform in 2008. Following the publication of this document, a range of different codes, reports, and handbooks on communication were created by various European NGO confederations; these documents will be highlighted here. The confederations represent and align NGOs working in development, mainly by defending their members' interests, conducting their efforts, and representing the sector in political and societal debate. Arguably, the different codes of conduct that will be discussed here contribute to the changing communicative practices of development NGOs, but more importantly, they *reflect* (rather than direct) the changing discourse of development that centres around questions of human dignity. These documents, Manzo notes, "show the extent to which these NGOs express concerns about themes such as representation, development practice, and development education" (2008, 651). Although CONCORD's president claims that the codes' "main weakness" of the codes lies "in its implementation and enforcement" (Kilcullen 2011), and while it is true that they are not always adhered to,[55] they channel and echo the goals that have shaped the sector of international development.

Context: critique, fatigue, and accountability

In the previous chapter, the institutionalisation of disaster relief platforms was read as a response to post-humanitarian disintegration – as the integrative force of the platform

[55] The effectiveness and implementation of the code in the different European countries has been evaluated in the EU funded DEEEP project by CONCORD (Tripepi 2011) in which the dissemination and implementation of the CONCORD code has been monitored. In the report, the different national members of CONCORD have been asked whether they were aware of the existence of the code, whether it had been published on their website and whether they're actively involved in the dissemination of its principles. Prior to this report, the DEEEP project itself was also actively involved in the dissemination of the code throughout Europe as it financed the translation of the code in ten languages (*ibid*, 1).

was executed on an organisational level and was visually expressed in the campaigns. This chapter focusses on the more explicitly voiced critiques and debates that accompany the post-humanitarian situation. The chapter explores how critique on development (discourse) is addressed, how the imperative of accountability is implemented, and how communication is reinvented. Let me first introduce some of the main themes by means of an example: the Girl Effect. The Girl Effect campaign is indicative of how NGOs self-reflexively address and attempt to shed off 'old' ideas about development and communication. In doing so, the campaign highlights the themes of 'compassion fatigue', the 'imagery debate' and the 'development project'.

The Girl Effect (that will be touched upon further in the next chapter) is an independent NGO and mainly consists of an online campaign with the same name.[56] One of its leading videos is entirely text-based and narrates the main thesis of the campaign which is summed up in its slogan: "invest in a girl and she will do the rest". The video consists of carefully designed and animated words on screen, with visually appealing fonts, colours and movement, while a score of piano music dictates the rhythm and pace of the narrative. The video shortly and succinctly introduces the idea that "the world is a mess" in its opening statement. In a high-paced accumulation, it details about what constitutes this mess ("Poverty. AIDS. Hunger. War."), concluding the enumeration of misery with the discouraging rhetorical question "so, what else is new?". Here, the video reaches out to the spectator, bonding over the fact that we all know the narratives about suffering all too well. What else is new? This short statement, and more generally the campaign at large, emphasises a situation in which "We know, we know we know and everybody else knows we know" about the suffering of others (Tester 2001, 4). In this sense, the Girl Effect is indicative of what Vestergaard conceptualises as "a meta-discourse, which thematizes its audiences' response to appeals, presumed feelings of inefficacy, inadequacy, and indignity when faced with suffering that is outside of their immediate realm of action" (Vestergaard 2014, 522).[57] It addresses, in short, what came to be known as 'compassion fatigue' amongst its audience members – the idea that an

[56] The Girl Effect was initiated by The Nike Foundation in collaboration with the NOVO Foundation, the United Nations Foundation and the Coalition for Adolescent Girls. Besides, the campaign is supported by the International Center for Research on Women, the Population Council, CARE, the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, the Center for Global Development, Plan and the Girl Hub.

[57] A similar case is mentioned by Vestergaard (Vestergaard 2014, 520). She points to a 1996 Amnesty brochure that is says "'*We have some pictures you don't want to see…*' and '*some pictures you ought to see*'" (Vestergaard 2014, 520). According to Vestergaard, this example points to "the tension that characterizes the humanitarian discourse of the past 15-20 years; the tension between audiences' reluctance to respond to distant suffering which widely goes under the name of compassion fatigue on the one hand, and the moral imperative that humanitarian organizations represent". Importantly, the case does not only highlight the tension itself but also shows that the campaigns explicitly and in direct address reflect on the tension; thereby showing that NGOs are aware about the tension and their position in it. It, in Vestergaard's words "takes this tension as its point for departure and tries to offer the audience a solution to the dilemma it places them in" (*ibid*).

overflow of imagery showcasing misery "cause people to turn away" in fatigue or cynicism (Moeller 1999, 35).

The text-based video goes even further when at some point it presents the leading character of the campaign by putting the word "Girl" up on the screen. The audience is asked to empathetically align itself with her, which is followed by some extra encouragement: "No. Go ahead. Really imagine her" (once again highlighting the possibility of compassion fatigue, with the "no" highlighting that some might fail to imagine the girl in first account). This imagination is helped with the word "Girl" on the screen, but also with three times the word "flies" flying around it, symbolically 'bothering' the (word) girl. Here referencing iconic and much critiqued pictures of emaciated, African children with flies around their eyes as "ideal victims" (Höijer 2004), the campaign acknowledges the debate around the morality of representation – that came to be termed the 'imagery debate' (Dogra 2013, 5). In this sense, the Girl Effect goes beyond simply highlighting the presumed debilitating effects of the showcasing of suffering: it also parodies (and maybe critiques) such representations. The fact that the video is solely text-based (leaving the design and piano music aside) emphasises this critique as the use of the word "flies" is in fact unnecessary – if it were not to make a point on traditional imagery in development campaigns. The video purposefully 're-enacts' a stereotype image without fully reproducing it, thereby directly referencing the running debates on the ethics of representing vulnerability.

The referencing of the style of development campaigns in the *Girl Effect*, is, however, also turned into a more fundamental critique of development. This becomes most explicit in the moment where the video presents girls as the "unexpected solution" for the misery presented earlier. This is the video's most dramatic scene, where the piano tune switches from minor to major chords, and where problems are solved rather than accumulated. In the very moment of transition, where the video announces the unexpected solution, the fast-paced piano music shortly pauses as a means of suspense, with the words "(dramatic pause   )" appearing on screen. By ironically explicating the style of the video, the dramatisation becomes part of what Chouliaraki calls the reflexive styles of appealing, which makes the campaigns the "very object of our contemplation and reflection" (Chouliaraki 2013, 65). Such contemplation extends to the "solution" presented in the campaign. Prior to introducing a "girl" as the magic bullet for development thinking the video enumerates some possible solutions that are explicitly discarded. "It's not the Internet", "It's not science", "It's not the government", "It's not money". What these options have in common is that they connote top-down, socially engineered solutions that refer to an impersonal rationality that is usually associated with Western modernity – particularly when contrasted with image of 'a girl'. The Girl Effect does therefore not only reference a feeling of compassion fatigue in its audience or the stylistic construction of its own imagery, it also references the discourse and practice of development itself. What it implicitly (and as we will see in the next chapter, selectively) critiques, in short, is the 'modernisation paradigm' that shaped traditional development

discourse and still heavily influences its more contemporary accounts of development. Particularly this last reflexive aspect of the Girl Effect will be discussed in the case of Kiva in the next chapter and underscores the ambivalent struggle over how 'development' is to be understood and furthered.

From this short example follow three focus points through which the Girl Effect reflects on (the history of) development and humanitarian communication: compassion fatigue, the imagery debate, and the development project as a whole. The short historical overview that will contextualise these tendencies aims to clarify how these three focus points should be understood in combination. The fact that they are effectively and willingly combined in the video indicates this: the different aspects to reflexivity are effortlessly merged into a coherent narrative in which the various references are mutually informed. Compassion fatigue and the imagery debate will be discussed first, as both were introduced around the late 1980s. Following this, and mainly from the 2000s onwards, more broadly adopted public critiques were met with a call to reflection and accountability. After discussing both tendencies, the emergence and adoption of a range of codes of conduct in the development sector will be addressed – as these codes are some of the most concrete manifestations of the introspection that is taking place. As they parallel both timeframes, the early adoption of such codes will be discussed shortly. After this, more contemporary codes of conduct will be introduced as the main case study for this chapter.

~ The 'imagery debate' and 'compassion fatigue'

Historically speaking, the notion of compassion fatigue on the one hand and the debate around the ethics of representation on the other rose to prominence in the development sector in parallel fashion. It will be argued here, and particularly in the next section about the Codes of Conduct, that the parallel rise of the imagery debate and the notion of compassion fatigue is no coincidence but rather signifies their entanglement. More specifically, the argument here is that in practice the two are mutually informed in spite of the fact that their foundations might seem to lie elsewhere: in ethical considerations (over representing vulnerability, in the imagery debate) and in instrumental considerations (over how to effectively reach out to the public, in the case of compassion fatigue). The first step in examining the connections between the two concepts is to highlight how the two 'problems' for the development sector emerged at the same time and were addressed institutionally in similar fashion. I start with the imagery debate.

It was not only in disaster relief that the Ethiopian famine (and the coverage it received through Live Aid) figured as a watershed moment. The event was pivotal in long-term development as well as it heralded the beginning of a debate over what kinds of representations could be considered ethical. Following these events, "the question of imagery was discussed among development practitioners in the late 1980s and 1990s" with "passion and persistence" (Lidchi 1999, 88). The Ethiopian famine, so to say,

triggered what Nandita Dogra calls the "imagery debate" (Dogra 2013, 5). Although the seeds for such a debate had been planted earlier, the famine marked a turning point in how vulnerability and development were represented – and how it came to be reflected upon. "Drawing largely upon Jørgen Lissner's earlier criticisms of images of starving children during the 1970s, academics and development practitioners argued that negative images of Africa had reproduced colonial stereotypes of a 'dark continent ' of misery and hunger" (*ibid*). Such critiques have been made repeatedly since, as 'victim oriented appeals' (Cohen 2001) have continued to be the most common approach of fundraising, only to gradually lose popularity in more recent years.

A landmark qualification for such representations was Halttunen's description of humanitarian imagery as a "pornography of pain" (1995) – a mode of addressing suffering that could be traced back to the humanitarian sensibility of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (*ibid*, 304). This critique was thus directed at the spectacle of suffering where, as Baudrillard put it, "[w]e are the consumers of the ever delightful spectacle of poverty and catastrophe, and of the moving spectacle of our own efforts to alleviate it" (1994, 67). The visual spectacle of suffering bodies took centre stage in the critiques that followed. In particular, it was noted that the showcasing of some suffering or 'bare life' dehumanised the sufferer because such representations stripped the vulnerable other of any reference to civilisation, agency, or indeed humanity; leaving nothing but an animal-like form of bare life. For this, Giorgio Agamben's (1998, 1) distinction between 'bare' and 'civilised' life was directive – where he explains difference between what the Greeks called *zoē* (any kind of 'living', whether animal, man, or God) and *bios* (which refers to civilized life).

In light of the critique of visual spectacle, others more specifically addressed the role of representation, cultural identity, and stereotypes. Here, it was argued that representations of suffering others commonly extend existing notions of Otherness of the Global South, particularly of the African continent (Mudimbe 1988; Campbell and Power 2010). In his writings on the "Scopic Regime of Africa" and the "Iconography of Famine", David Campbell addresses these practices of Othering by outlining how "In the European imagination, 'Africa' (itself a mythical unity) has been produced as a site of cultural, moral, and spatial difference, populated by 'barbarians', 'heathens', 'primitives', 'savages', and the generally underdeveloped" (Campbell 2003, 69). According to Campbell and others, such qualifications were already created in colonial discourse and have consequently been furthered in development appeals. Such representations are typically criticised for the way "[d]ifference and distance, shown through binary positioning, takes many forms in INGOs' messages" (Dogra 2013, 26). As a consequence, the immorality of the spectacle of suffering was extended to the realm of politics of representation. From a British perspective, for example, the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) published a prominent research report signalling that "development agencies and the media have been complicit in promoting an unbalanced picture of third world doom and disaster" (VSO 2002, 3). As a result, VSO states, audiences hold "an essentially one-dimensional view of

developing countries" (*ibid*). The report, titled "The Live Aid Legacy", outlines the one-dimensional view as being characterised by "starving children with flies around their eyes" and victims that are "seen as less human" (*ibid*).

Apart from such stereotypes, the report also calls attention to the "false sense of superiority and inferiority" (*ibid*, 13) that emanates from the images. As such, and beyond sole critiques of spectacle and stereotypes, the imagery debate provoked questions about the power imbalance in the representations *and* practices of development. As is commonly the case in practices of Othering, the representations are problematic precisely because they represent, reiterate, and reinforce structural power imbalances (Said 1978; Mudimbe 1988; Mazrui 2005). The field of humanitarian communication was in this sense no exception, where critiques were mainly directed at how humanitarian imagery positioned the 'fortunate spectator'. The subject positions allocated in the imagery, it was argued, proposed "a relationship whereby the figure of the spectator is fully sovereign in her/his agency over the sufferer (...) whereas the sufferer remains passive, unaware, quasi-human" (Chouliaraki 2013, 58). The binary positioning thus informs both representations and power relations, as Campbell notes that humanitarian images "Result in unequal relations that structure the relationship of self and other, us and them, as superior/inferior, civilized/barbaric, developed/underdeveloped" (Campbell 2011, 8).

Briefly put, the spectacle, stereotypes, and power imbalance in traditional development campaigns are the focus of criticisms in the imagery debate. Although this shows that the imagery debate is multifaceted, the critiques have taken the discussion on the representation of suffering in a coherent direction. This direction is to highlight the human dignity and agency that should guide the messages of development NGOs – it means that the messages have to more compellingly adhere to the fundamental tenet of common humanity upon which humanitarian communication is based. In this regard, the debate surrounding imagery in development campaigns reveals the struggle that Chouliaraki refers to as one of the paradoxes of humanitarian communication, that "whilst it speaks the language of common humanity, the spectacle of vulnerability simultaneously evokes the language of power" (2013, 29). As the analysis of how the debate played out in institutional documents will highlight, the aim to represent human dignity was strongly emphasised (and in some cases highly successful), while the aim to restructure the language of power was mainly sidelined as some stereotypes remain firmly in place and structural economic and institutional reforms are still largely uncontested.

As previously mentioned, the imagery debate was accompanied by more functional or strategic considerations. Rather than qualitative reflections on the ethics of imagery, considerations of compassion fatigue dealt with the quantitative question of how many representations of suffering Western publics could handle before becoming numb. The main argument for compassion fatigue basically states that the public's ability to absorb messages and images about suffering has been severely taxed. First, some sort of 'aid fatigue' was ascribed to state actors and institutional donors, as World Bank president

Tom Clausen noted in 1983: "The U.S. continues to suffer from real "aid fatigue" and there is no easy remedy for that sickness in sight" (1983). Over the following decade, attention started to centralise audiences and smaller private donors. To illustrate, the *New York Times* reported that "Unicef Reports Donor Fatigue" in 1990 (Lewis 1990), while the *Financial Times* headlined that "Aid fatigue strikes Britain" in 1991 (Pike 1991). Academic sources soon followed, with Burnell explaining "aid fatigue" mainly in relation to cultural and political tendencies, much like the newspaper articles. Particularly amidst the decline of socialist and evangelical bases for charity, Burnell concludes that "aid agencies cannot afford to be complacent" (Burnell 1993, 69). In all these sources, the notion of aid fatigue was mainly attributed to institutions, rather than to the public in general.

Soon though, these concerns shifted and centralised media representations, culminating in Susan Moeller's seminal book *Compassion Fatigue* (1999). The book primarily serves as a critique of US media outlets and their propensity to use "repetitive chronologies, sensationalized language and imagery and Americanized metaphors and references" (1999, 2) when speaking to audiences. Here, the similarities to the imagery debate become obvious, as Moeller observes that "photographs which accompany stories on international affairs—especially from Africa, Asia and the Middle East—commonly feature mayhem and pathos", while "ad campaigns and humanitarian appeals" reinforce such images (*ibid*, 35). While the stereotyped imagery of the Global South is indeed highlighted in Moeller's book (as was the case in the imagery debate), the argument of compassion fatigue is taken in a different direction as it focuses on the fortunate spectator to draw the conclusion that "[t]hreatening and painful images cause people to turn away" (*ibid*). This line of reasoning has been extend and from this point onwards giving the term it's now dominant meaning, where compassion fatigue refers to a state of mind in which recipients of humanitarian imagery having become "so used to the spectacle of dreadful events, misery or suffering that we stop noticing them (…) being left exhausted and tired by those reports and ceasing to think that anything at all can be done to help" (Tester 2001, 13).

Although the theory of compassion fatigue has continued to be debated in academia, its impact on the sector cannot be overstated. To start with the former, Johannes von Engelhardt notes that "lack of empirical foundation has left the Compassion Fatigue thesis particularly vulnerable to a substantial amount of academic criticism in the two decades since its publication" (Von Engelhardt 2018, 17).[58] For this, Engelhardt mainly refers to Keith Tester, Folker Hanusch, and Stanley Cohen who, respectively, argue that "moral horizons of the audience" are developed to a significant

[58] Mainly, Von Engelhardt's critique is directed at the more general tendency in studies of humanitarian communication, "to make claims about *audiences*, based on the empirical study of *representation*" (2018, 22). He responds to Moeller's *Compassion Fatigue* (1992), Chouliaraki's *Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006) and *The Ironic Spectator* (2013) and more broadly to general tendencies in the study of humanitarian communication to outline how many of the research done tends to study [h]ow audiences make sense of and respond to representations of suffering, without actually studying those audiences" (Von Engelhardt 2018, 21).

extent independently of the media (Tester 2001, 75); question whether distant suffering has ever structurally elicited compassion to start with (Hanusch 2010, 123); and outright dismiss compassion fatigue as an "urban myth" for which there is "not the slightest evidence" (Cohen 2001, 191). Arguably, in the academic study of humanitarian communication, evidence of the existence of compassion fatigue is thin – especially when it comes to the specific causes of the fatigue.

While the validity of the compassion fatigue thesis remains contested, it has undoubtedly taken hold in the sector, where since the 1990s NGOs have worried about the effectiveness of their fundraising efforts because of it. The rise and widespread use of the term 'compassion fatigue' (and related terms) itself is indicative of the perceived disinterest of people in humanitarianism and development aid. Although many organisations addressed these issues internally, it also left a clear mark on sector-wide discussions and introspection, which can be seen in the codes of conduct (that will be addressed more elaborately shortly). For example, BOND (the UK NGO confederation) cites engagement as its central concern in its Code of Conduct, which states that "the basic argument of this paper is that there is a problem in terms of the UK public's level of engagement" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 5). Similarly, Slovenian confederation SLOGA notes that "the constant display of suffering, catastrophes, pain and tragedies pose the risk that the public will fall into a state of disinterest, as people become emotionally immune to all subsequent campaigns based on the depiction of negative images (…) Therefore, it might be necessary to consider changing campaign strategies" (Skinner 2010, 6).[59] For Partos, the Dutch NGO confederation, their code of conduct is even said to be an "essential instrument" for preserving public trust in international development cooperation (Partos 2012, 3).

The parallel rise of the imagery debate and the worries about compassion fatigue is characterized by overlapping concerns. In both cases, imagery of one-dimensional suffering is targeted and a lack of agency (in the case of the imagery debate) and perspective (in the case of compassion fatigue) are indicated as the main drivers of critique and scepticism. This is the case because compassion fatigue particularly highlights the debilitating effects of the portrayal of extreme suffering and misery, while critique of negative stereotypes, in which vulnerable others hardly signify anything beyond their suffering, is evoked by the same representation of hardship. While arguments regarding the representation of vulnerable others (conceived to concern ethics) are usually separated from considerations over compassion fatigue and the need for NGOs to counter this from the perspective of fundraising (the instrumental aim), the two came to be bound up together – which, as we will see, becomes clearly visible in the codes of conduct. In

[59] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "neprestano prikazovanje podob trpljenja, katastrof, bolečine in tragedije ustvarjajo tveganje, da javnost zapade v stanje nezanimanja, saj ljudje postanejo čustveno imuni na vse nadaljnje kampanje, ki temeljijo na prikazovanju negativnih podob (…) bi bilo morebiti potrebno razmisliti o spremembah strategij kampanj".

response, a narrative of perspective and change is proposed. Such a narrative could support the idea of linearity and progress that the word "development" itself connotes and the ideal of economic growth that became associated with it (Rist 2008), while also it answers to the main worries and critiques of the debates outlined above.

~ The development project under pressure: public critiques and the imperative to accountability
Although the imagery debate and concerns over compassion fatigue first surfaced in the 1990s, they were increasingly accompanied by more general critiques that not only addressed representations of development but also the very practice of development itself. While at first Gilbert Rist described the notion of development to be "justified beyond dispute" (2008, 1), it later came to be nudged past its aura of inviolability. He observes that around the turn of the century, and more specifically after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, "euphoria has been somewhat checked" regarding development's ideal of what he calls 'happy globalisation'. While critiques have long been dismissed and appeared powerless in their attempts to question the development paradigm, different critiques regarding a lack of transparency, equity and success have proliferated (Andrews 2009). Obviously, the accuracy of such claims varies from case to case, but development institutions like NGOs, their (inter)national confederations, think tanks, and other groups have undoubtedly taken notice of the increased criticisms.

These critiques, that were more publicly voiced, have prompted NGOs and the sector to become increasingly "engaged in urgent, thoughtful self-critique of their goals, stances, and practices" (Orgad and Seu 2014, 24). The codes of conduct that are centralised in the next paragraph can be considered a direct result of this, and a direct result of a tendency towards accountability that began to permeate the sector in the 2000s. Whether they are guidelines, policy documents, white papers, or 'best practices', the documents' existence demonstrate how introspection and accountability have become an integral part of (representing) development. Generally, accountability reflects "the general intensified scrutiny of NGO operations and practices" (Orgad 2017, 93), and, as Janice Gross Stein posits, we can witness the emergence of a "contested discourse of accountability". According to her, it:

> "is inconceivable that, fifty years ago, humanitarian organizations (…) would spend any time at all considering 'outputs,' 'outcomes,' and 'benchmarking.' Today, leaders within the humanitarian community are intimately familiar with codes of conduct, humanitarian charters, minimal standards for the delivery of relief, an active learning network gathering and sharing the lessons learned from humanitarian operations, outcome mapping, evaluation methodology, and 'professional' accreditation"
>
> (Stein 2008, 124)

According to the literature, the increased importance of 'accountability' (and its 'contested discourse') does not have one single origin. Obviously, the first factor contributing to NGOs being evaluated more thoroughly is their quite remarkable growth (in number and size; Edwards and Hulme 1995, 3). Jane Nelson notes that "as civil society organizations gain influence and extend their global reach, their own accountability has obviously become an emerging issue" (J. Nelson 2008, 171). Along with their growth, Anne Vestergaard observes that NGO's receiving negative publicity contributed to what she calls the 'age of suspicion' (2014, 509). Vestergaard explains that "due to numerous scandals in the non-profit sector in the 1990s … NGOs have faced growing demands for accountability and efficiency in their performance. The capacity of organizations to account for their *raison d'être* and performance is becoming ever more vital in attracting, and retaining support" (2010, 81). Additionally and more generally, this culture of evaluation is embedded in the wider culture of accountability "as globalisation is reassessed for its social impact, societies will seek to justify their investments with more solid evidence of the impact of these investments on the public good" (Boelen and Woollard 2009, 891). As a more recent factor in the emergence of the contested discourse of accountability, according to Mirca Madianou and colleagues, the rise of digital technologies has influenced the extent to which accountability is rolled out in humanitarianism (Madianou et al. 2016).

In a nutshell, the discourse of accountability has a broad set of roots (the growth of NGOs and their impact; the age of suspicion following scandals; an assessment of globalisation as such; the rise of digital media and its culture of transparency). However, literature has consistently argued that the concurrent context of neoliberalism underpins its implications. According to Cottle and Nolan the increased scrutiny and accountability within humanitarianism "finds its mandate in recent shifts in political culture where tenets of neo-liberalism, market rationality and the rhetoric of accountable governance all now condition different spheres of social enterprise and activity" (Cottle and Nolan 2007, 873). Notably, accountability ascribes to forms of communication that were prevalent in the private sector and have gradually been extended to the public one, becoming part of the wider spectrum of "new public management" (Chouinard 2013). This leads Stein to conclude that the "growth of humanitarian organizations and the demand for accountability cannot be separated from the withdrawal of states in an era of globalization" (Stein 2008, 127).

Together with the imagery debate and the notion of compassion fatigue, this shift towards accountability is essential to understanding why so many codes of conduct for communication have been issued by NGOs and NGO confederations, and why they are increasingly being implemented. Particularly, the multifaceted context that gave rise to the accountability discourse is important to explain how ethical responses to social impact became linked with instrumental considerations about the sector's future.

~ The implementation of introspective documents

When in 1989 the General Assembly of European NGOs settled on its "Code of Conduct on Images and Messages Relating to the Third World" it was one of the first of its kind. The code primarily states that "People's ability *to take responsibility for themselves* must be highlighted" (K. Wilson 2010, 303). It is important to keep in mind that this responsibility (which is emphasised in the codes of conduct studied in the coming paragraphs) is an explicit illustration of the neoliberal context in which this code and those that followed were written. The belief in an ideal of "helping people help themselves" (Ellerman 2005) answers to two very different agendas. First, the emphasis on "people's ability" answers to the critique that victimising appeals deprive 'unfortunate others' of their agency. Here, agency is viewed through a lens of human dignity and the right to self-determination. Second, the emphasis on "responsibility for themselves" illustrates how attempts to restructure development discourse also reflect neoliberal discourse in its emphasis on individual responsibility for well-being. Though the latter is further explored in the next chapter through an exploration of a discourse of "empowerment", a proper understanding of the codes is difficult without noting that the codes' focus on agency is informed by a neoliberal discourse about individuality, responsibility, and self-sustainability (Harvey 2005). As we will see more generally, the codes cannot be read in isolation from a range of contextual factors, overlapping considerations, and competing understandings of the sector and its "humanitarian identity".

Codes like the one drafted by the General Assembly of European NGOs have gradually become more common since the 1990s and are drafted both by individual organizations[60] and in cooperative endeavours. Six years later, a widely shared code was published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC 1995). Their code of conduct covered relief work more generally, but accounted for communications as well. One of the code's ten points (or: 'principles') explicitly addresses the role of communication and campaigning: "In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects" (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC 1995, 5). Yet, while explicit attention to communication is comparatively scarce (only a brief paragraph is dedicated to the principle of recognising disaster victims as dignified humans), the document clearly accounts for a body of principles that in its entirety is coherent – signifying the role of discourse in both external communication *and* the practice of development work and fundraising. In this sense, such codes of conduct serve

[60] Dogra names a few individual organizations that drafted codes for their own campaigns: "Christian Aid outlined its views on images in its educational leaflet titled "Images of Development, Links between Racism, Poverty and Injustice" in 1988 (Lidchi 1999; cited in Dogra 2013). Save the Children Fund published "Focus on Images" in 1991 and Oxfam released "Oxfam 50: Our World in Photographs" in 1992" (Dogra 2013, 6–7).

as an important intermediary between several aspects of development discourse. For instance, it is stated that "the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted" with regard to campaigning., Similar intentions apply to the relief itself, where "beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme". Indeed, the ability and responsibility of the 'unfortunate others' to help themselves is continually emphasised – both in the realm of representation and with respect to development work as such.

Despite the fact that this report was specifically designed to outline principles for disaster relief, codes of conduct similar to these have proliferated in what has come to be known as 'development education' – the branch of development communication that is concerned with raising citizens' "awareness and critical understanding of the interdependent world" (DEAR 2013). The aims to establish this kind of development communication and the codes of conduct that provided directions for this have mainly been initiated and written by umbrella organisations that seek to represent the majority of the development sector in their respective countries. Building on the aims of the 1989 General Assembly of European NGOs, the proliferation of development education initiatives culminated in the publication of "Code of Conduct on Images and Messages" in 2006. This code, published by CONCORD (the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development), aims "to provide a framework on which organisations can draw when designing and implementing their public communications strategy" (2). This CONCORD Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (henceforth "the CONCORD code", for the sake of brevity) and the network of documents and actors assembled around it will in the following section be taken up as the case study of a what I propose as a "reflexive platform". This platform can be understood as a direct response to the general "crisis in caring" (Seu and Orgad 2017) that was outlined above. The network assembled around this document should be mapped briefly before considering it in more depth.

As an organisation, CONCORD[61] is best understood as a European member organisation comprised of national NGO confederations (who in turn are most commonly member organisations themselves). It should thus be considered an umbrella organisation of umbrella organisations. In 2009, a few years after the CONCORD Code was drafted in 2006, a three-year project was launched to promote the implementation of the code and to further the adoption of its principles. The code was first translated into ten languages as part of this project, DEEEP, which was primarily funded by the European Union. This made the code more widely accessible to the various European members. A range of activities were also planned as part of the DEEEP project. For

[61] At the time of writing, CONCORD is home to 28 European national NGO confederations. Other members include other NGO networks, as well as big international NGOs that are subscribed as members on themselves, such as there are CARE, Caritas, Oxfam, PLAN, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision. See: https://concordeurope.org/who-we-are/our-members/.

instance, workshops and seminars on how to communicate ethically were held in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, and Portugal (Tripepi 2011, 30–32). In addition, online meetings for the sharing of best practices were organized and two instruction videos were produced in Ireland and Poland (Dóchas 2016; Bułacik 2016). The rollout, however, primarily involved the creation of various national conduct codes that were tailored to national contexts. In the majority of these documents, the European CONCORD Code of 2006 is the standard reference. This typically means that the main principles are duplicated in the national policy documents, followed by further explanations, examples, or discussions. From these materials, a corpus of sixteen different policy documents of NGO confederations in eleven different European countries has been studied.[62]

The CONCORD Code is brief and concise, with eleven bullet-points making up the majority of its content. Three points emphasise the 'paramount principles' on which the Code is based:

- Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- Belief in the equality of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

(Concord 2006, 1)

Subsequently, these three points are translated into eight practical ground rules, though due to their brevity they remain somewhat vague. All of these point to the necessity of "truthful representations", "context", and "public understanding of (…) realities and complexities", as well as to the importance of avoiding images that "stereotype, sensationalize or discriminate". Additionally, they discuss the significance of ethics in the production process of images, addressing the need for "full understanding, participation and permission" one the side of participants, highlighting that it is preferable for participants to "communicate their stories themselves" (*ibid*).

The reflexive platform: NGO confederations and the humanitarian identity

The codes of conduct are scarcely binding and do not represent absolute changes in the modes of representing development aid. This means that they cannot be read as uncontested principles that commonly shape the campaigns and imagery produced by NGOs. Rather, they can be understood as documents in which the development sector attempts to understand its own terms, values, and discourses, and as testimonies of self-definition and self-understanding. Hence, the codes of conduct are testimony of a sector

[62] The different organizations are Globale Verantwortung (Austria), Coordinadora (Spain), Bond (United Kingdom), CISU (Denmark) Dóchas (Ireland), FORS (Czech Republic), Partos (The Netherlands), Venro (Germany), Vereniging voor Ethiek in de Fondsenwerving (Belgium), SLOGA (Slovenia), Grupa Zagranica (Poland). Alongside the documents drafted by these CONCORD members, also the two instruction videos (shared on YouTube from Ireland and Poland) and several policy documents by CONCORD and the EU have been studied.

that defines itself and constructs a self-image and identity. An understanding of these documents in this way is not new, as Kate Manzo outlines that NGO codes are "means through which NGOs produce themselves as humanitarian. [...] they are integral to a larger discursive apparatus through which humanitarian identity in general is constituted, revised, and reaffirmed" (Manzo 2008, 634). The codes of conduct thus provide us with snapshots of the process of developing such a "humanitarian identity" – they are documents that (temporarily) solidify the ongoing quest for a collective humanitarian self-understanding. Essentially, the documents reflect the construction of a consistent, collective identity that illustrates an "explicit call for the sector to adopt a unified, consistent framing of global suffering and poverty representations" (Orgad 2013, 305).

Beyond the realm of communication, the notion of a humanitarian identity is further explored where Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss argue that "[t]he debate over the humanitarian identity reflects a search to recapture the unity and purity that is tied to its presumed universality" (Barnett and Weiss 2008, 5). CONCORDs reflections on the implementation of its code illustrate this. Their report on the "best practices and challenges" (Tripepi 2011) that resulted from the code explicitly naturalises the presumed universality of development work and hence the code itself. The report states that "as human dignity, needs and responsibilities of people have been reflected in our development work since its beginning, introducing the Code and its principles was more a natural process rather than a dramatic change" (*ibid*, 10). Indeed, when reading the codes of conduct, it is paramount that the collective "humanitarian identity" is connected to common humanity more generally. Dóchas (Ireland), for instance, explicitly encourages its members to try and "foster a sense of our interconnected common humanity" (Dóchas 2014, 8). In contrast, CISU (Denmark) highlights the benefits of "communication [that] activates universalistic values", as they believe that this will lead the audience to be "more inclined to find that development work is important" (Larsen 2015, 14).

This, however, highlights a key ambivalence in the self-reflexive endeavours of the codes of conduct – namely between a collective account of what the sector stands for and the competitive "market" of (fundraising for) development work that the platforms sustain. For one, the need for unified and consistent framing indicates a mode of collectivity that is highlighted above. This collectivity is sought through the exploration of a certain ethical bandwidth to which the different organisations in the sector adhere. Indeed, in Belgium and the Netherlands, respectively, the codes address and emphasise a "collectively shared responsibility" (VvEF 2017, 3) and "collectively held values" (Partos 2012, 3). In the UK, BOND emphasises that "[t]he development sector will need to come together if we are to find a way to break the current lock-in of public engagement" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 9). And similarly, the guidelines for humanitarian campaigns by FORS (Czech Republic) dismiss negative images of extreme suffering or poverty by stating that with the use of such images:

> "your organization assumes the responsibility not only for damaging the image of the global South, but also for misleading the Czech public or other target groups in the long term. Thus, harming the reputation of development cooperation of the Czech Republic"
>
> (Lajdová 2014, 10).

The guideline emphasises collective action in reference to a concern akin to the 'tragedy of the commons', wherein individual NGOs are urged to refrain from discrediting the sector at large. FORS contends that as a result, NGOs should feel a sense of joint responsibility for the image of the Global South and for the legitimacy of all organisations alike. To achieve this, the code of conduct outlines the "basic rules for the mutual respect of organizations ethics and the promotion of the brand 'International Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic'", turning the sector into a brand itself (*ibid*, 14). Therefore, it is not surprising that Shani Orgad concludes at the end of her seventeen interviews with British NGO communication officials that they indeed reject the tendency of some colleagues to still adhere to 'negative imagery', rating it as "backwards" (2013, 305–9); accounting for the recurring worry that the negative imagery of some NGOs discredits the sector at large. As "there are various fora in which organizations' communications are scrutinized and openly criticized" (*ibid*, 309), the communication officials are concerned about their peers' judgements, pointing to an integrated development cooperation sector that regulates itself using a combination of ethical and pragmatic arguments.[63]

The worry of a tragedy of the commons scenario does, however, highlight the other side of the ambivalence, as it is difficult to overstate the decisive role of competition among individual NGOs in their fundraising efforts (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Vestergaard 2010; Seu, Flanagan, and Orgad 2015). Even though the codes of conduct are explicitly intended to be taken as collective considerations, they frequently highlight the sector's diversity while also making clear that they are flexible and should not be viewed as one-size-fits-all solutions. In their report "Reframing the Message", the Danish CISU remarks, for instance, that its 285 member organisations "can tell the story about development work in 285 ways coming face to face with the Danes" (Larsen 2015, 3). By repeating the number "285" twice, CISU not only highlights a range of different perspectives, but also

[63] These fora can for instance be found in Norway (SAIH), the Netherlands (IDleaks) and the UK (the Progressive Development Forum). Going into the UK situation a bit more, Orgad describes the Progressive Development Forum as "a UK group that seeks to reframe the debate away from aid, charity and philanthropy towards global justice and the structural causes of poverty". This organization, according to her "has called for the NGO sector to 'cease to be so British and "polite", and instead … [to] enter into open criticism of NGOs and to challenge those that are beyond the pale in their distortion of the agenda' (Tran, 2012)" (Orgad 2013). As such, an organization using negative imagery "increasingly runs the risk of public criticism and shaming" (Von Engelhardt 2018, 41).

underscores the alleged uniqueness of the various organisations, celebrating the ways in which Danish citizens "are out there among the Danes" (*ibid*). The "diffusion of corporate norms and values" are, according to Vestergaard (2010, 80), part of the competitive markets where NGOs compete for funds and legitimacy. These are reckoned with in the codes where the autonomy of the different organisations is safeguarded through a comforting tone and where it is stressed that the organisations themselves know best. The autonomy of the NGOs with regard to branding, fundraising, and organisational identity is recurrently underscored and explicitly respected. For example, FORS asserts that when applying the code, "each organization has to take care of itself" (Lajdová 2014, 13), transferring responsibility towards the NGOs themselves. Similarly, SLOGA (Slovenia) goes as far as to encourage organisations to "[e]valuate if the Code would be useful to your organization" in the first place (Skinner 2010, 11),[64] while Globale Verantwortung makes clear that "There is no 'Code police'!" (Appel et al. 2012, 9).[65]

Instead, and more explicitly highlighting the ambiguity of the code, Globale Verantwortung states that "this Code of Conduct sets out a framework by which organizations will orient themselves" (Appel et al. 2012, 3). However, as it is later stated, it is "usually not quite clear how a guiding principle should exactly be implemented" (*ibid*, 5).[66] As a result, the confederations distance themselves from a kind of moral authority. Here, it is emphasised that they do "not provide answers" (BOND; Darnton and Kirk 2011, 9), in part because "there are no right and wrong answers" (Globale Verantwortung; Appel et al. 2012, 3)[67] as there "is no single recipe for good communication about development issues" (CISU; Larsen 2015, 20). As such, the codes are generally relativist, lacking a strongly implied ethical framework. BOND mirrors this approach as they state that "no organisation or group of organisations should set themselves up as the authority on which frames others should use" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 9).

The extent to which the codes are binding varies, and frequently even a single code can have ambivalent meanings. Arguably, this is not a paradox, but rather a key characteristic of the codes, as they are in place specifically to protect both these collective and competitive aspects *at the same time.* The codes of conduct principally serve to provide a collectively upheld bandwidth for ethical communication (though, crucially, these principles are rarely actively enforced), while leaving the open market of fundraising untouched. To put it another way, the codes work to establish a level playing field so that

[64] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "Precenite, ali bi bil Kodeks uporaben za vašo organizacijo".

[65] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "Eine 'Code Polizei' gibt es nicht!".

[66] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "ist es meist nicht ganz so klar, wie genau ein Leitprinzip umzusetzen ist".

[67] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten".

competition can be maintained. Indeed, albeit in a way that appears seemingly contradictory, the NGO confederations propose a form of collectivity that facilitates competition in their codes of conduct. This means that the reflexive platforms that NGO confederations provide operate differently from the disaster relief platforms discussed in the previous chapter. While disaster relief platforms mainly served to suspend competition between individual organisations by uniting them under one 'brand', the NGO confederations aim to provide rules by which the game (of competition) can be played. In this sense, the codes of conduct should in that sense not be interpreted as a suspension of competition but rather as a common rule book designed for competition to thrive. Thus, the NGO confederations function differently as a platform: their self-reflexive process supports collective identity formation, and the resulting codes of conduct aim to level the playing field for competition. As a result, the codes of conduct come to provide an amalgamation of a range of different stakes, considerations, and arguments. In what follows, the role of *ethical* and *pragmatic* arguments will be scrutinised. This will serve as a way to both understand how different considerations circulate the platform and to understand how, in response to the critiques outlined in the previous section, they construct a common humanitarian identity and, consequently, a common humanity.

~ Between ethics and "institutional survival"

The concurrent emergence of the 'imagery debate' and the notion of 'compassion fatigue' signals an intertwined concern for primarily negative imagery in which ethical considerations over representation (in the case of the imagery debate) and instrumental considerations over public support and fundraising effectiveness (in the case of compassion fatigue) coexist. From both perspectives, a call for more hopeful narratives was issued, focusing primarily on the agency of the beneficiaries of aid.

Involving agency entails delving into an ethical argument about representing human dignity, but this argument cannot be disentangled from its more instrumental considerations. Beyond providing a short insight into the numerous parallel developments that fostered the implementation the codes of conduct studied here, the reconstruction of the implementation of the codes of conduct above servers principally to deconstruct the idea that the codes solely follow from (and therefore mirror) ethical considerations. Rather, the ethical claims made in the codes align with the aim to counter compassion fatigue ('winning back' the public with a changed mode of representing vulnerability), address to the influx of criticism, and meet the accountability demand (leading to introspective reports). This is not to say that ethical considerations are unimportant; rather, it is to say that ethical arguments are tailored to more pragmatic, programmatic, and instrumentalised considerations as well. As Henrietta Lidchi notes, organisations started "to reassess their responsibility in representational terms, since they came to the unsettling realisation that popularising the right images might ensure their institutional survival" (1999, 92–93). In this observation, 'responsibility' is not clearly separated from

'institutional survival', underscoring that the two are intricately linked and difficult to distinguish from one another. Indeed, though they are primarily focused on the imagery debate and the challenge of finding dignity in the representation of suffering, the codes of conduct are not just one autonomous (and ethically motivated) line of thinking. Instead, they draw attention to a new standard of common humanity, determined by a struggle for legitimacy in the development sector itself. As an example, Globale Verantwortung makes clear that "the institutional self-interest has to be in balance with the responsibility one has towards the portrayed and the partners in the South" (Appel et al. 2012, 4).[68] This is exemplified in the Belgian ethical code, drafted by VvEF. Here, it is stated that:

> "message[s] should not, neither in text nor in illustrations, undermine human dignity. The possible use of images showing human suffering may not harm the feelings of donors and should be limited to ascertained and verifiable facts. Also, they should be respectful of recipients of aid"
>
> (VvEF 2009, 4)[69]

Here, it seems hard to distinguish whose dignity is actually in jeopardy in this depiction of human suffering, since these instructions appear to prioritise the feelings of donors – at least in the order in which it is phrased. Therefore, this paragraph seeks to demystify the claim to 'human dignity' as an entry point for understanding the discourse of common humanity in the codes of conduct. It will be stressed that while claims to human dignity seem to be grounded solely in ethical considerations, its fate is equally influenced by more pragmatic and context-specific factors.

Quite regularly, the dualism between moral and pragmatic arguments is reflected in the introductory statements that accompany most of the documents. For instance, FORS, the Czech international development confederation, outlines that NGOs are part of a broader context, which principally entails two things: "a framework of values common to many organizations", and a "brand (…) which all actors in the field of development cooperation in the Czech Republic ought to respect (…) and subsequently benefit from" (Lajdová 2014, 13). Similarly, the Dutch Partos states that their code of conduct is motivated by a "wish to shape their organizations in accordance to shared values", which explains the code's value-oriented basis. However, Partos also minds the more practical side of their work, stating that "everything written in this Code (…) is formulated with

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[68] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "Das institutionelle Eigeninteresse soll folglich mit der Verantwortung, die man gegenüber den Abgebildeten und den PartnerInnen im Süden hat, in Balance sein".

[69] My translation from Dutch. Original: "De boodschap mag, zowel in tekst als illustraties, geen aantijgingen bevatten tegen de menselijke waardigheid. Het eventueel gebruik van beelden van menselijk leed mag de gevoelens van de schenkers niet kwetsen en moet zich beperken tot het illustreren van vastgestelde en controleerbare feiten. Zij moeten tevens respectvol blijven met betrekking tot de begunstigden van de hulp".

concern to effective international development cooperation" (Partos 2012, 3).[70] Indeed, to be *effective* means to generally obtain funds, which (despite the general concern over compassion fatigue) is taken to generally rely on simplified imagery. This tension is present in nearly all the codes, where imagery that is deemed to be unethical is also a "quick and easy" way to obtain funding.

Nevertheless, this duality of effective pragmatics and ethics of representation is not a simple continuum along a single axis. When looking at the codes, it can strike the reader that many different arguments and principles are proposed to achieve various ends. This is intriguing because, while initially deriving from the same document (the CONCORD Code), the various codes under investigation quite clearly interpret the guiding principles differently. Evidently, they differ not only in what they take from the code, but also in their explanations of the various guidelines and their benefits or aims. The various interpretations of the code are hard to comprehend using a single model, but for analytical purposes, two distinct axes on which the different national codes diverge can shed some light on the matter.

What first catches the eye is that the interpretations vary in whether they progressively take up the code, pointing to the need for systemic change, or whether they more conservatively highlight the competitive advantages of maintaining the status quo. Globale Verantwortung, for instance, progressively calls for "courage to reinterpret existing imagery", explicitly addressing the need to abolish the traditional "white, colonial view" in humanitarian imagery (Appel et al. 2012, 3).[71] Moreover, the Austrian platform makes clear that the principles of the code "must underlie the entire public image", but not only that, they should also be translated "into internal policies and procedures" (*ibid*, 1).[72] Such preparedness to (at least intent to) radically review communication practices exists on one end of the spectrum, but even in this document, it is stressed that "institutional self-interest" and the "responsibility one has towards the portrayed and the partners in the South" must be "in balance" (*ibid*). On the other end of the spectrum, the Czech platform FORS largely adheres to the status quo in their Communication Compass, advising, for example, to adapt to practices that prevail in media and journalism. This is not without issues, the compass highlights, noting that "the media are not designed to break stereotypes" (Lajdová 2014, 32). The reader is thus advised to "avoid stereotypical interpretation as you can be sure that if not a journalist, then an editor would use this information" (*ibid*). Despite these cautionary words, FORS

[70] My translation from Dutch. Original: "willen zij hun organisaties inrichten naar gezamenlijk benoemde waarden. Voor alles wat in deze Code staat beschreven geldt dat het is geformuleerd vanuit het belang voor effectieve ontwikkelingssamenwerking".

[71] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "Dies bedeutet Mut zur Neuinterpretation der existierenden Bildersprachen (…) Der 'weiße, koloniale Blick' ist ein solcher, tradierter Blick".

[72] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "müssen dem gesamten öffentlichen Auftritt zugrunde liegen. Die Unterzeichnenden sind diesen Prinzipien verpflichtet und werden sie in internen Strategien und Verfahren umsetzen".

emphasises the benefits of adhering to the status quo of procedures in media and journalism. For instance, this is why the compass states that, in regard to field interviews, "the media tends to prefer when you offer an exclusive interview with an on-site Czech citizen (such as organization representative) rather than with a foreigner" (*ibid*, 41). Here, the aim of letting people tell their own stories (a fundamental component of the CONCORD Code that is incorporated into the FORS compass) is sacrificed in this instance. These two examples represent the very ends of a continuum in response to the question of whether the new rules actually imply extensive changes in communicative practices or not.

Another continuum can be found, this one relating to the question of whether the implementation of new imagery standards should be regarded as a burden or as a way to win over the public. In the case of BOND (UK), change is suggested as a solution. The values presented in their "Finding Frames" report are formulated in response to the waning engagement with global poverty among the UK public. The central claim in the opening section that defines "the problem" is that "the UK public is stuck in terms of how it engages with global poverty", while also the quality of such engagement is labelled as "low" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 6). The report, according to BOND, defines a strategy that steers clear of consumerism and spectacle, which defined many earlier campaigns. The report claims that in these campaigns, the social justice that was being rallied for was "drowned out by the noise of celebrities, white wristbands and pop concerts" (*ibid*). Therefore, the recommendations section of "Finding Frames" advises charity shops to "distance themselves from consumer culture" and NGOs to use celebrities only "with extreme care in campaigns" (10). While it is acknowledged that, for instance, the *Make Poverty History* campaign, which relied heavily on consumer and celebrity culture, was a "spectacular success", the move away from such campaigns is not presented as (potentially) detrimental to the (financial) success of NGOs. Instead, the report showcases new standards in humanitarian communication as a new opportunity to win over (or win back) the UK public, and thus presents the report's guiding principles as a solution to the problem of low engagement. As such the report emphasises "the grave consequences if we do not act" (ibid, 11). On the other end of the spectrum, it is also highlighted that organisations tend to see new sets of values as a challenge or problem in their attempts to obtain funds. The Slovenian platform SLOGA, for instance, notes that "humanitarian actions are dependent on the use of a particular image in obtaining funds, *but* there is a concern of ethics" (Skinner 2010, 6; emphasis mine).[73] SLOGA more elaborately and more explicitly puts in a section on the dilemma "between the ethical use of images and the effective acquisition of resources": "[m]any humanitarian organizations find themselves in the dilemma, because on one hand they have to take care of the efficient acquisition of funds, and on the other hand they want to raise awareness about

[73] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "Številne humanitarne akcije so pri pridobivanju sredstev odvisne od uporabe določene podobe, a vendar obstaja skrb o etičnosti".

development issues with various development education programs" (Skinner 2010, 14).[74] This dilemma, according to SLOGA, might even leave NGOs to deal with potential conflicts that may arise within organizations "between the departments for the acquisition of funds and the development education department" (Skinner 2010, 9).[75] This concern is not unfounded, as it has been witnessed throughout the humanitarian sector. Most compellingly, this is outlined by Shani Orgad who witnesses a clear distinction between fundraising/marketing departments on the one hand, and communications/advocacy departments on the other (Orgad 2013, 299).

Combining the two continuums, we see that the notion of (the need for) change and the anticipated effects of such change also determine how the documents position themselves in the moral-instrumental complex that is outlined above. It explains that it is both debatable to what *extend* development discourse should be reconsidered, but also to what *end* this is done in the first place and how this aligns with the "institutional survival" of the NGOs and the sector. This also explains the cautious (or even timid) and reassuring (or comforting) tone of voice oriented towards smooth and harmonious changes used in most of the codes – rather than towards uncomforting interrogations of the power relations that underlie development discourse. It is in this context that BOND (UK) in the space of just sentences states that "rebalancing the dominant values in society is a formidable task" while at the same time it outlining that "transformational change can be achieved simply by reinforcing the positive values which people already hold" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 9). The ambivalence of how drastically the report's newly proposed frames depart from "existing" or "dominant" imagery is emblematic for the more general consideration of different ethical and practical stakes and arguments in the codes. In this process of balancing different considerations, moral arguments and more practical concerns not only coexist but also become difficult to disentangle, demonstrating that one cannot maintain the idea that ethics are being 'corrupted' or 'highjacked' by strategic choices (in the sense that ethics came first and were than led astray by practicalities, self-interest or competition within the sector). Rather they are part of very same process that sustains the ideal of a humanitarian identity; highlighting the fact that while humanitarianism is often equated with its ethics while not being solely determined by them.

Notwithstanding the clear manifestation (and explicit recognition) of instrumentalist considerations in the codes, it remains clear that the humanitarian identity rests on a self-image of uncompromisable ethics that shapes what 'humanitarianism' is.

[74] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "Številne humanitarne organizacije se znajdejo v precepu, saj morajo na eni strani skrbeti za učinkovito pridobivanje sredstev, po drugi strani pa želijo ozaveščati o razvojnih vprašanjih z različnimi programi razvojnega izobraževanja".

[75] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "Znotraj ene same organizacije se namreč lahko med oddelkom za pridobivanje sredstev in oddelkom za razvojno izobraževanje pojavi konflikt o uporabi podob".

CISU, for instance, elaborately explores a framework of "human values" in the first chapter of their report *Reframing the Message*, and declares that for NGOs "Values are your true currency – for you and your audience" (Larsen 2015, 10). For this, the report enumerates a range of different value-laden clusters, where it highlights the "universalism" cluster as the one that primarily drives the sector – and as the one to which it should appeal in communication. Another example can be found in the Partos code, that explicitly states that the entire text reflects the "guiding principles that are underwritten by the Partos member as the basis for their activities" (Partos 2012, 3).[76] In a similar appeal to the ethical tenets that unite the sector and its individual organisations, Coordinadora (Spain) outlines that it sees NGOs "as an expression of the solidarity existing in society" (Coordinadora 2014, 8). The codes therefore perpetuate the ideal of what Nolan and Mikami call a "humanitarian ethics": a self-image within the humanitarian sector or community that constructs an ethical framework "as an ahistorical ideal that stands apart from, and acts as a check on, instrumental action" (2013, 53).

It should be highlighted that such an ahistorical understanding of the role of ethics is faulty. The codes of conduct demonstrate the opposite: they are a direct consequence of the historical context in which they came into being and they provide insight into what characterises contemporary development discourse. When attempting to separate ethics and instrumentality, one quickly runs into difficulties. The use of such a distinction will all too easily lead to a normative discourse in which ethics are 'good' and strategy is 'bad', while most descriptions along these lines will fall short because it is difficult or even impossible to reduce the subject at hand to either the denominator 'instrumentalist' or 'ethical'. As the codes show, they *conduct* considerations over a range of topics that deal with both the practical realities of fundraising and communication in development, and with value-laden discussions on humanitarianism and its communicative practices. This demonstrates how ethical considerations are not solid and unchangeable, but context-dependent and reflective of institutional changes, concerns, and responses to external critiques. In this case, the ethical arguments provided in the guidelines and codes (or 'value rationality') closely parallel, and cannot be understood without, more pragmatic considerations (or 'instrumental rationality). This is not to say that the attempt to communicate 'ethically' is futile or insincere, but rather to suggest that the search for a humanitarian ethics goes beyond idealism and into the institutional platforms of NGO confederations.

Yet, while the strict division of ethics is flawed, it is also informative. The propensity to highlight certain types of uncompromisable ethics *obscures* the more instrumental arguments that are equally important in the process, but it also *emphasizes* the aspiration to (re)establish a humanitarian identity in the face of concerns about compassion fatigue and institutional credibility. As a consequence, the codes of conduct and the NGO confederations that published the documents provided a vehicle for active

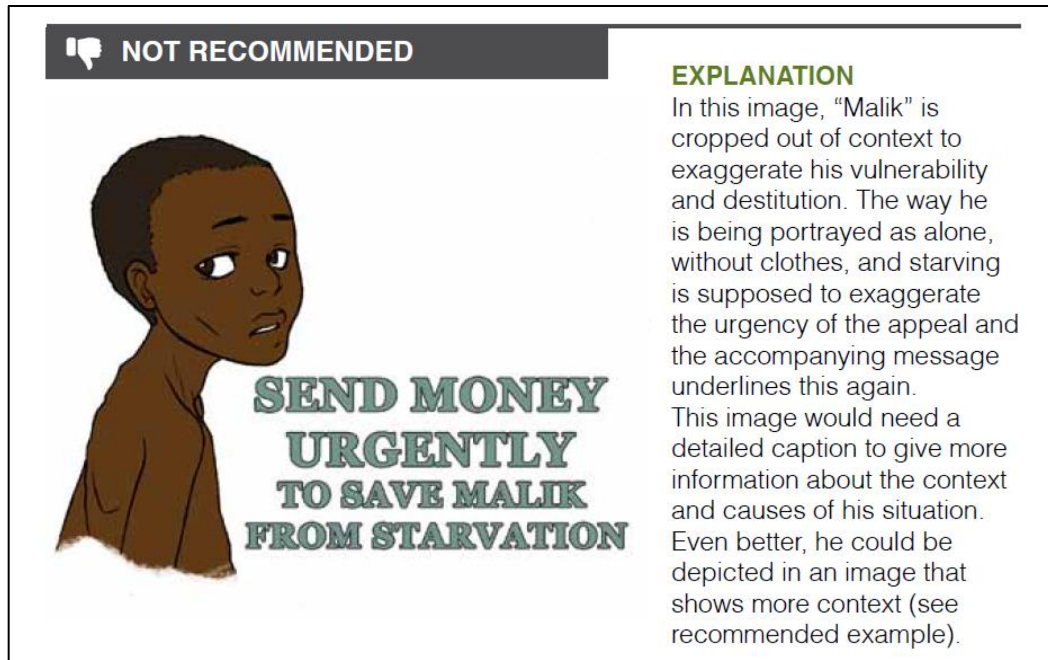
[76] My translation from Dutch. Original: "De tekst geeft algemeen geldende waarden weer die door Partos leden worden onderschreven als basis voor het handelen van de lidorganisaties".

self-reflection and a means for self-realisation for the sector(s). They can thus be understood as platforms for introspection. As platforms, they function to hold together a broad range of principles, including those relating to sector-wide collectivity and individual differentiation, the role of (allegedly fatigued) audiences and the representations of vulnerable others, and the ethics and pragmatics of everyday work in humanitarian communication. As such, the platforms uphold a complex conjuncture of organisational, practical, economical, *and* moral claims.

~ The regimes of dignity and truth
Whereas the codes of conduct differ in how ethics and instrumentality are considered, the guidelines present some principles that can be thought of as 'regimes' that govern the (debate about) imagery in humanitarian communication. While not *per se* informed by a 'pure' or uncompromisable ethics, there certainly are some value-laden principles that inform the debate of what humanitarian communication should look like. Two regimes stand out as nearly all the codes touch upon and discuss them in depth: the *dignity* of the people represented and the notion of *truth* in reporting. In the different codes, however, the ways in which these two regimes are either aligned or strained structurally differs, as is evident in reference to what is called "deliberate positivism" (Dogra 2013, 58): the tendency to represent happy, smiling children rather than images of malnutrition and suffering in the name of dignity. While some codes merely promote positivism as a means to both respect the dignity of their subjects (as per the ethical argument discussed above) and as a way to combat scepticism and fatigue on the side of the spectator (as the instrumental argument goes), others point to the dangers of bias inherent in such reasoning.

If we start with the former, it is important to note that the notion of dignity is defined in reference to a sometimes implied and sometimes explicated legacy of undignified representations in humanitarian communication. It is without doubt that the notion of 'dignity' is a dominant principle the codes of conduct, as evidenced by the Coordinadora code of conduct, which calls for "[a]bsolute respect (...) for the dignity of persons" (2014, 19). In this aim, 'old' representations of poverty and development (as referred to in the imagery debate discussed earlier) looms large over the discourse presented in the documents. These kinds of 'negative' imagery are generally viewed as undesirable, and as such they provide a starting point for rethinking communication. However, they are occasionally acknowledged as effective fundraisers (and as a result, in some cases not actively dismissed). As a result, it is paramount that this old style of telling stories is discouraged and policed in the documents – for, as we have seen, various reasons. While the European CONCORD code, which inspired most of the national codes, is still somewhat ambiguous about what types of images it precisely discourages or encourages, numerous visual guides, including the ones below by Dochas (Ireland) and FORS (Czech

Republic), and videos, produced by PAH (Poland) and CISU (Denmark), actually visualise concretely what kinds of images are accepted or rejected:



Example of an undesired exaggeration of vulnerability, taken from the "Illustrative Guide to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages" (Dóchas 2014)

Example of undesired use of celebrity culture and 'white saviourism', taken from the "Communication Compass for Development NGOs" (Lajdová 2014)

As described in the short outline of the imagery debate above, the main focus of these and other examples provided by the codes, the focus lies with the problematics of the spectacle of bare life ("Save Malik from starvation"), stereotypes ("stereotypical picture") and the power-imbalances (particularly emphasized in the ADRA picture). These themes are quite common within the debates and are not striking as such, but it is notable that by using them, many codes of conducts are essentially negatively defined in the sense that they depart from unwanted imagery. As a result, the setup of the codes highlights how the discussions about humanitarian communication are historically informed and bear the burden of a heavily critiqued model of representation and a recurrently failed practice of development. This means that the 'dignity' that is proposed in the codes is, as was outlined above, not just the result of an abstract body of moral considerations, but more a discursive product of its time. The notion of 'dignity' and the ideal of 'human dignity' are specific, historically situated understandings of the common human that underpins the practice of development.

The tendency toward deliberate positivism develops from this background. In some of the codes, dignity is simply found by avoiding negative imagery and instead providing more upbeat accounts of positive change. For instance, in response to the image shown above, FORS advises its members to tell the audience "that the countries of the global South are not only suffering people, but a variety of environments and situations can be found, and that many positive changes have taken place. These were often achieved through development cooperation" (Lajdová 2014, 10). Similarly, in Finding Frames, BOND elaborately "sets out some alternative 'positive' frames for development" that should counter negative representations of vulnerability – outlining a range of words and phrases that can be substituted for more positively understood wording. In other accounts, advice comes down to an emphasis of (individual) responsibility that should pave the way for a brighter future. For instance, Coordinadora states that "the ability of people to build and work will be highlighted their own proposals and alternatives" (2014, 19). Similarly, CISU aims to come forward "with some constructive and solution-oriented stories and pictures" in order to focus "more on the potentials present in developing countries and among their populations" (Larsen 2015, 5). These accounts mainly borrow from the CONCORD code and its emphasis on "people's ability to take responsibility for themselves". Only in some cases, where people's perspectives and agency are presented alongside the circumstances that make them vulnerable, does the understanding of human dignity and agency include the role of (in)justice and structural inequality.

The question is however if the positivism implied by the term 'dignity' is viewed as a more truthful representation (in that it circumvents stereotypes) or a less truthful representation (in the sense that such positivism is explicitly sought after). This highlights not only the role of truthfulness in the codes but also the discourse surrounding the legacy of earlier representations and the 'harshness' of reality. According to the FORS

communication compass, the debate going on within and outside this (and other) codes is indeed about "how to name the realities of today's world" (*ibid*, 6). Using strikingly similar terms, SLOGA highlights that "the reality of the modern world" actually does elicit negative images and distress which "therefore cannot and must not be ignored" (Skinner 2010, 7).[77] Considering "today's" and "the modern" world, a cultural understanding of what reality is comes into play. In short, an act of confronting reality actually means facing reality as being harsh – this is especially true, it is argued, in the humanitarian field. These obligations towards 'reality' are reflected in the CONCORD code itself, as the principles on which the code was founded should be followed as long as these are "practical and reasonable within the need to reflect reality" (2006, 1). As such, the different national codes highlight some basic journalistic principles, as they outline that campaigning "should be limited to ascertained and verifiable facts" (VvEF 2009, 4)[78] and that NGOs should uphold the journalistic practice of "the right to reply, to prevent one-sided reporting" (Partos 2012, 7).[79]

As such, any programmatic and prescribed change in ways of communication would be suspect. Indeed, such suspicion is recognised; for instance, it is stated in BOND's report that "[s]ome of those who are resistant to the proposed programme of change may object to these ideas on the grounds of mind manipulation" (Darnton and Kirk 2011, 9). Rather than programmatic change, according to Globale Verantwortung, "it's about visualizing not only the purpose of our work, but also telling something about how to get there" (Appel et al. 2012).[80] Particularly, the act of actively and programmatically renewing communicative practices is recognised as potentially antagonistic to the ideal of 'reality' – the reality then being the 'harsh' reality that used to be common. As a result, SLOGA concludes that "the images of poverty and humanitarian distress are negative and therefore cannot and must not be ignored. This would be contrary to the spirit of this Code, the purpose of which is to show the reality of human life" (Skinner 2010, 7).[81] In a similar way, the confederation thus tries to strike a balance between the "dignity" and the "reality" of human life. In short, the NGO confederations struggle with questions of what, according to them, ought to be shown (the more positive images that represent dignity), but they also struggle with the obligations towards reality and how these realities should be represented.

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[77] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "Realnost sodobnega sveta je, da so podobe revščine in humanitarne stiske negativne in jih zato ne moremo in ne smemo prezreti".

[78] My translation from Dutch. Original: "moet zich beperken tot het illustreren van vastgestelde en controleerbare feiten".

[79] My translation from Dutch. Original: "Het lid past eveneens hoor en wederhoor toe om eenzijdigheid in de berichtgeving te voorkomen".

[80] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "Es geht vielmehr darum, nicht nur das Ziel unserer Arbeit zu visualisieren, sondern auch etwas über den Weg dorthin auszusagen".

[81] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "podobe revščine in humanitarne stiske negativne in jih zato ne moremo in ne smemo prezreti. To bi bilo v nasprotju z duhom tega Kodeksa, katerega namen je prikazati realnost človeškega življenja".

This means that the codes of conduct mirror debates that take place all over the humanitarian sector; debates that, in Nandita Dogra's words, "swing from 'it is wrong to show such (negative) images' to 'it is important to show reality and starvation *is* real'" (2013, 67). This distinction is as persistent as it is problematic. It suggests that the colonialist stereotypes for which development appeals have been criticized are harmful because of their harshness or negativity, rather than because they are reductionist in reaffirming colonial discourses about underdeveloped 'others'. As a result, this line of reasoning lends itself for a quick fix, the "simple swap" of images of poverty for those of smiling, happy children. While the use of positive stereotypes to counteract negative ones has been frequently criticised from the perspective of cultural studies (Shohat and Stam 1994, 199; Chouliaraki 2013, 61–64; Dogra 2013, 67), the equation of dignity and positivism remains almost unnoticed. Some of the codes do explicitly address this problem, as Dóchas notes that "the tendency to directly replace the image of the 'poor unhappy person' with the 'smiling happy child' does an equal disservice to the context of many situations" (2014, 14). This means, that simply 'swapping' images will not provide a sufficient solution, as Globale Verantwortung notes that diverging from negative imagery "does not only require a reversal of image policies, e.g. to choose the representation of a smiling instead of a starving child"(Appel et al. 2012, 3).[82]

The codes therefore differ in their assessments of the alignment between dignity and reality, and as a result, in their estimations of how to strive for both. While deliberate positivism is generally supported, this tendency is also disputed in some cases. This is not primarily because of the stereotypes associated with such representations, but more often in reference to truth, reality, and its harshness. Here, the codes grapple with questions surrounding representation as it is recurrently stated that one might occasionally want to represent dignity or agency even though the 'reality' on the ground does not give reason for any kind of positive outlook (with the latter being perceived as the condition for dignified representations). As a consequence, the codes display binary constellations in which dignity is predominantly equated with positive imagery, which is then contrasted with the 'truth' of negative imagery.

Yet, rather than understanding dignity in terms of "negative" or "positive" campaigns (a dualism already problematised by Chouliaraki; 2013), the rather minimalist understanding of dignified representations in development discourse lacks an anchor point that answers to the most fundamental (an mostly forgotten) question in the imagery debate: the assessment of power. This points to a regime that is largely absent from the codes of conduct, one that has been scarcely discussed here as a result of its notable absence, which is the notion of justice (rather than of positivism) as a source for dignity and dignified representations. A call for justice, also in representation, should therefore address the redistribution of power in the "relationship of self and other" (Campbell

[82] Translation from German by Reinier Vriend. Original: "handelt es sich nicht nur um eine Umkehrung der Bildpolitiken z.B. die Darstellung eines lächelnden statt eines hungernden Kindes zu wählen".

2011, 8). Instead of looking for alternative ways to represent the other, the codes could aim for a shift in perspective where considerations deal less with how audiences experience the communication, and more with how representations work to redress the power relations that made their communications problematic in the first place. As for now, most of the codes are occupied with institutional survival, which places the audience's perspective at the centre of their considerations. As Nandita Dogra rightfully asks for whom "the messages have to be positive" in the first place (Dogra 2013, 144), considerations regarding representation can be redirected more fundamentally to the subjects who it actually is about. Yet, one of the most persistent aspects of the codes of conduct studied here, is the centrality of the donor – or, as FORS explains: "When you are writing to your supporters, make them to be the heroes" (Lajdová 2014, 24).

Conclusions

NGO confederations have taken a leading role in conducting humanitarian communication in response to criticisms of the politics of representation and concerns about compassion fatigue. This has resulted in a wide range of guidelines for individual organisations. As the parallel rise of the imagery debate and the notions of compassion fatigue already indicated, a broad number of stakes and considerations collide and paint a coherent yet tense picture of a "humanitarian ethics" (Nolan and Mikami 2013). In response to a mode of representation that is under pressure, such humanitarian ethics and the explicit reflections on them are used not just to reinvent humanitarian communication as such, but also as a way of sustaining the humanitarian identity. As platforms for introspection, the NGO confederations not only drafted such proposals, but also made them subject of internal discussions, workshops, and international cooperation.

In an exploration of the conjuncture where these different activities, considerations, and stakes collide, three tensions have been identified: (1) between building a collective, sector-wide identity and (a competitive market of) individual organisations; (2) between ethics and instrumentality; and (3) between the positive connotations of dignity and the more negative associations of what constitutes a 'harsh reality'. It should be noted that none of them can be understood well in isolation. This is evident, for instance, in the common belief that while dehumanising representations that deprive subjects of their agency yield good fundraising returns for individual organisations, they harm the sector's long-term interests, support base, and legitimacy. While from an academic perspective the idea has been largely unfounded, the concern of compassion fatigue raises questions on both sector-wide interests amidst internal competition and on how instrumental concerns are lined up with ethical considerations. Similarly, the quick and easy fix of "deliberate positivism" which is sometimes presented as a viable solution to both compassion fatigue and the critiques regarding dehumanising representations, is in turn problematised by the aim to fairly represent "reality", no matter how harsh or confronting. Overall, the codes address a range of problems that are being weighted, rebalanced, and sometimes turned upside down. Importantly, however, the

codes avoid confronting fundamental issues of how institutional self-interest may stand in the way of longer-lasting solutions in favour of fruitlessly attempting to align the various stakes. In other words, introspection is now primarily used to defend the dynamics of the sector, even if they propose a shift in imagery. If as they do so, the codes fail to structurally reconsider their position – not asking questions like the following ones. If it turns out that fundraising appeals structurally result in problematic representations, what does that tell us about the practice of fundraising in general? And if campaigns produced by communication departments in Western head offices of most NGOs turn out to result in narratives insensitive to those who are being represented, should it not make sense to have more campaigns produced by (or at least in cooperation with) the communities they are about? If Western audiences can be reached out to most "effectively" through campaigns that do not always pass the test of ethical representation, should the central position of these audiences not be reconsidered? And, as a result of these questions, should representations not be regarded as an end in itself, rather than as a means to the ends of raising funds, marketise the organization, or strengthen the public image? Answering these questions might sound far away from the perspective of the NGOs, as jobs and institutional survival are at stake, but they are also the power-laden questions that drive the some of the only nominally politicised questions that only scratch the surface of the debate at hand. In essence, as also Chouliaraki and Vestergaard conclude, "institutional reflexivity of the sector needs to go beyond marketing strategies and corporate 'best practices' and to reflect on the broader epistemological assumptions and historical legacies of humanitarianism" (2021, 3–4).

Particularly, the role of ethical and instrumental reflections is carefully balanced in the codes, frequently within the very same sentence when NGOs are urged to take both ethical representations and their own interests into account. This also results in diverging strategies regarding the way forward (within and between national codes), with some advocating a cautious approach and others focusing on a more structural change in representational strategies. As a result, various arguments (that are frequently emphasised in tandem) can be distributed in the scheme below:

	Ethics	**Instrumentalism**
Progressive	**Dignity** as the 'new' representational regime	Positivism as an answer to **compassion fatigue**
Conservative	Negative images figuring as 'the hard **truth**'	'Old' **fundraising** techniques as the most effective ones

The different tensions and arguments might lead one to conclude that the reflective platforms of NGO confederations put forth a strange (and sometimes contradictory) mixture of ideals and guidelines. Indeed, while the picture is mixed, this does not suffice in trying to understand where the codes of conduct are coming from. The codes, it is argued here, answer to a specific set of questions in a specific historical moment. They try to reply to critique on the level of the imagery debate, concerns about compassion fatigue, and the more fundamental challenges to the legitimacy and discourse of development. As a result, they also try to answer the question of how to build a humanitarian identity in the face of such challenges. Lastly, they aim to answer the question of how to represent human dignity in the face of the reality of human suffering and the common human experience. As such, the NGO confederations show that while these tensions exist, balancing them out and reflecting on them can still be considered an effort in the creation of common humanity.

This is especially important in relation to the humanitarian sector's unwavering faith in an ahistorical, pure ethics, which is a difficult ideal to uphold when carefully examining the codes of conduct. As Nolan and Mikami (2013) call for a more historically grounded analysis of how humanitarian ethics come to be understood at particular moments in time, it is important to note that the understanding of dignity as presented in the codes of conduct is tailored to a neoliberal understanding of what human dignity means – focusing mainly on agency and individual responsibility. Whereas this section focused on how such dignity was embedded in the multiple considerations put forth in the code, the form this takes in humanitarian campaigns is analysed in the following sections of this dissertation.

In response to the "contested discourse of accountability" (Vestergaard 2014), the role of NGO confederations became paramount. While these confederations had a particular focus on defining and defending the stakes of the sector at large, the calls for transparency and accountability opened a space for these platforms to reflect on and conduct humanitarian practice and communication. In this case, its role in mediating between individual organisations and sector-wide stakes and identity formation is important. With particular respect to communication, the platforms could function to guard long-term interests of the sector (such as combating cynicism and compassion fatigue) while also enabling individual organisations to build their own brand profiles and uphold their own considerations. As a result, the platform's codes of conduct are relatively open-ended and allow for debate explicitly and implicitly. As SLOGA (Slovenia) puts it: "the battle of images has not yet been won" (Skinner 2010, 9).[83]

Yet, critiques do not just address imagery and representation. On a more fundamental level, critiques are also directed at the economic models and the political organisation of long-term development. Additionally, the industry responds to these more concrete criticisms through its communication channels by implicitly or overtly suggesting

[83] Translation from Slovenian by Aljosa Marinkovic. Original: "bitka o podobah še zdavnaj ni dobljena".

changes to development practices. As will be discussed in the following chapter, where these reflections are scrutinised, the above-mentioned tendency to propose alterations while also depoliticising the development discourse is furthered in the utopian platform of Kiva.

Colourful pictures of exotic landscapes and handcrafted products underline the dynamism of an image slideshow that headlines the website of Kiva, an online platform for microlending.[84] In pairs of two, photos with captions point out some of the basic principles of the platform. "With as little as $25, you can help people around the world create opportunity for themselves, their families and their communities", is stated on one photo. In this simple statement, the big and the small are effectively contrasted. Creating opportunities for people around the world (a big statement) can according to Kiva be accomplished by lending "as little as $25" (a small sign).[85] The captions of another set of images similarly claim that "lifting one" "lifts many". The accompanying photos portray an Indian woman, on one picture posing by herself, while the other shows her with five other women. Also here, the small (the one) is shown in contrast *and* correspondence with the big (the many). These statements, due to their straightforward simplicity, highlight how the apparent contrast between small actions and big effects can be overcome. The seeming contradictions are used to demonstrate how the big and the small can be effectively paired up (facilitated by grouping the photos in sets of two) and are not as contradictory as they initially appear. The breaking down of distinctions between the big and the small is shown in the pictures themselves: labour, enterprise, and trade. Pictures of materials and commodities (yarn, pottery, coffee, and shoes), people manufacturing and selling goods (spinning ceramics, making coffee, behind the cash desk), as well as aerial views of agricultural land (rice fields and eucalyptus plants) showcase simplehearted fabrication processes, 'authentic' products, and small-scale business. The photos and their captions underline that it is the factor of enterprise that makes all the difference – despite the fact that they are small businesses.

Beyond the big and the small, the entrepreneurial spirit of Kiva is also credited with dissolving another apparent contradiction: that between the 'fortunate spectator' and 'unfortunate other'. One pair of photographs introduces us to a 'lender' (Veronica, from Ghana) and a 'borrower' (Victor, from San Fransisco) who are shown side by side.[86] Yet,

[84] As all websites, Kiva.org is subject to recurrent modifications. The homepage of Kiva that is discussed in this example was in place until spring 2018 and can be checked through http://web.archive.org/web/*/kiva.org. Later versions of Kiva's website have also been used and consulted.

[85] For an excellent analysis of "the intimacy and promise of smallness" of Kiva, see Shameem Black's "Microloans and Micronarratives: Sentiment for a Small World" (2009, 273).

[86] Here, the website actively counters the opposition between 'Africa' (in this case Ghana) being the recipient financial support from 'the West' (in this case the United States). Portraying a black, Ghanaian woman lending money to a White, American man obviously negates ethicized and gendered assumptions of those advantaged and disadvantaged in today's global economy. According to Inderpal Grewal, US recipients of loans have been included since 2009 (2014, 76). She notes that this actually led to "some dissatisfaction among Kiva donors who wanted the organization to focus on international issues where

these pictures are preceded by a similar double portrait showing Pamela (from Kenya) and Shana (from Oakland). Only one thing is strikingly different: the captions – 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneur'. To put it another way, whether one is a borrower or a lender, both find common ground in doing business. By preserving the 'entrepreneurial spirit' of the recipients of the loans and by highlighting the financial wit of those who in the end get their loans repaid, the market provides an imagined 'level playing field' that traditional aid cannot. Here, the entrepreneurial spirit of microfinance replaces the charitable spirit of aid; the aim of relieving the lot of the poor is maintained, but pity is replaced by the pragmatism of the market. It is telling that another photo caption states that 'dreams are universal' while 'opportunities are not' (another contrast) reframing the ideal of enterprise in terms of the universality of 'dreams'. Here, it is suggested that only opportunity stands in the way of finding a common human ground in people as entrepreneurs.

Among other things, the appeal of small-scale enterprises (these being 'human-sized'), combined with the opportunity the dream big (or even 'universal') have made microlending[87] the "poster-child for 'millennial development'" (Carr et al. 2016, 145). Microlending, though allegedly challenging the traditional notion of aid, has perhaps become "the most popular 'sacred cow' in the international development field" (Bateman 2010, 5), not in the least because it seems to be the ultimate and final conclusion towards new solutions in the field of international development. Therefore, this chapter aims to understand how and why "the 'fix' of microcredit seems universal" (Carr et al. 2016, 154). It based on an assessment of Kiva's visuals, text, interface, and activity flows through a "walkthrough analysis", which is a type of analysis that enables a mapping of a platform's "intended purpose, embedded cultural meanings and implied ideal users and uses" (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018).[88]

It will be argued here that Kiva presents itself as a return to a 'humane' standard in development practice and discourse. As we have seen in the prior chapter, development NGOs pursue a restoration of human dignity in their representations of vulnerable others in response to accusations of dehumanising others through imagery. As such, the role of NGO confederation platforms was to explicitly reflect on the role of representation. The argument will now be developed further and move past representation as an object of

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they felt the need was more dire and where small sums might go further, reflecting the belief that distant others are more open to change than proximate others" (*ibid*).

[87] This practice is also called micro-financing, micro-credit, micro-funding, to name just a few alternative terms. I will stick to the term micro-lending to refer to the general practice of providing small loans to people who otherwise do or might not have access to financial services.

[88] Originally, the approach is introduced for the sake of studying software applications: apps. As "relatively closed technical systems" (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018, 881), apps call for a mode of analysis that allows the researcher to systematically explore techno-cultural environments. Although the Kiva platform is only available as an app for mobile devices in the US, the walkthrough method can very well be applied as its interface functions in very similar autonomous ways and as a platform that can be studied in the phases "registration and entry, everyday use and discontinuation of use" (*ibid*).

contemplation as such. In this chapter, the implied restoration of humane standards focuses on discourses of economics, social organisation, and power, on which Kiva reflects. In presenting itself as a platform that goes "beyond charity" and thereby claims to "rethink" development, Kiva positions itself as a utopian platform where "the human" can thrive.

This indicates that, similarly to how the analysis of NGO confederations highlighted a move from dehumanising imagery and toward dignified representations, Kiva signifies a move away from the 'modernisation paradigm' of development by presenting a discourse of platformed 'empowerment' instead.[89] This is to say that, as was briefly touched upon above, Kiva promotes values like entrepreneurship, sociability, and a human face and scale in contrast to ideas of bureaucracy, top-down development schemes, and impersonal market forces. It is not for nothing that in the video celebrating Kiva's tenth anniversary, the microlending process is visualised on a map, where it is stated that "all of this change is being made, one person, one loan at a time".

For this story to be told, Kiva strongly emphasises its function as a platform. Connotations about what platforms are and how they function (Gillespie 2010; Van Dijck 2013), lie at the core of Kiva's organisational identity, as it presents itself as organically organised, non-hierarchical, and highly sociable. Kiva thus appropriates the supposed qualities of social networking sites, much like how social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter "absorb utopian Web 2.0 connotations" (Van Dijck 2013, 11) of participation, user-centeredness, and community. In doing so, the connotations of Web 2.0 are used to highlight the notion of empowerment. Kiva therefore aligns itself with social platforms that position themselves as "online facilitators or enhancers of *human* networks—webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value" (*ibid*; italics in original). In this chapter, it will be argued that Kiva's purported revolutionary potential and utopianism lies in two core characteristics: (1) the 'techno-optimism' of networked digital media, and (2) an idealisation of 'connected capital' and the marketplace. Networked digital media and markets are both presented as platforms that provide a level playing field where information and money flow and on which connectedness can thrive. Together, these two constitute what can be called a "grand narrative of harmonious social change" (Dey and Steyaert 2010, 88), in which the idea of 'development' is radically transformed while at the same time undergoing a seamlessly easy transition.

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[89] Empowerment, as Calvès notes, is often "used in combination with other fashionable terms, such as 'community', 'civil society', and 'agency'" (2009, 736), and related terms such as these could very well have been chosen to illustrate contemporary development discourse. It could very well have been called "agency-based" or "community-driven". For now, however, the concept of empowerment is preferred over other terms because signifies both the ideal of bottom-up change, where actors in the Global South are attributed a form of "power", while at the same time "empowerment" came to emphasize the role of external actors (development agencies) in the process of empowerment. For an in-depth analysis of how power between "empowered" peoples and communities and development actors came to be configured in the empowerment discourse, see Kwok-Fu Wong's "Empowerment as a panacea for poverty - old wine in new bottles? Reflections on the World Bank's conception of power" (2003).

To get to this point of harmonious change, this chapter will first examine the historical context of contemporary development discourse. This context is characterised by a "discourse of empowerment" that serves as a backdrop for Kiva to thrive. The first section of this chapter provides a historical overview of how the modernisation paradigm (mainly associated with institutions like the IMF and the World Bank) made way for the empowerment discourse in both policy and popular representations of development. This empowerment discourse answers to the call for new representations as discussed in the previous chapter, but it also uncovers a broader discontentment with the rigidity of institutional development discourse under what has come to be known as the Washington consensus. It will be outlined that the rejection of the top-down institutionalised discourse of the Washington consensus resulted in calls for development "with a human face", based on micro-economic interventions. Subsequently, this empowerment discourse will be illustrated in a study of four development campaigns that highlight the plight of children, particularly girls. For this, campaigns by "Educate Girls", "PLAN International", and "Africaid" have been studied alongside the "Girl Effect". It will be argued that girls can (and do) represent principles that are essential to the notion of empowerment in long-term development campaigns. However, their role is ambiguous. The image of girls is both subject to the paternalism associated with dominant understandings of childhood *while similarly* the girls can be represented as vigilant agents of change and growth. In this sense, and by feminising and infantilising the Global South more generally (Dogra 2013, 63), the campaigns both adhere to 'old' standards in which the vulnerable other can only rely on intervention by development workers and the 'newer' standards in which sheer suffering is replaced with agency and (potential) self-reliance. Therefore, it will be argued that the notion of empowerment, as it was once proposed as a challenge to existing power structures, has been severely watered down.

In what follows, it will be argued that the development discourse co-opts the revolutionary potential of "empowerment" as a self-directed programme that originates (and is owned by) marginalised groups and individuals (Collins 2000). This co-optation involves a move towards an approach to empowerment that is externally induced by development agencies and actors that trigger social change. The idealisation of these actors of social change is stretched to its limits in Kiva's approach to platformed development. Here, the distinction between self-directed empowerment and externally induced empowerment collapse as Kiva presents itself as an apolitical intermediary for human sociability and opportunity. As a result, Kiva's return to development with a human face through platformed development mainly entails the further depoliticisation of the notion of empowerment.

Context: from modernization to the empowerment discourse

Before we turn to the popular appropriations of the word and ideal of empowerment, it should be highlighted that the shift towards empowerment is part of a development approach that goes beyond popular representation and can be situated in the domain of

(economic) policy. This approach involves a move away from the "modernisation paradigm" towards what came to be called the "Washington Consensus" in the 1980s. Around the turn of the century, the Washington Consensus came to be succeeded by the paradigm of the "Post-Washington Consensus". The changes in both shifts were economic and discursive and its exponents can be found policy guidelines of the World Bank, that have been extensively studied, for instance by Ben Fine (2001; 2009) and Kwok-Fu Wong (2003). According to Fine, the modernisation paradigm had been the main framework of reference for the World Bank. This paradigm, which was discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, originated in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. It implied top-down state interventionism and social engineering (Fine 2001, 132) and, according to postcolonial scholars, a neo-colonial approach to have former colonies develop to the mirror image of the West (Escobar 1995; Hobart 2002; Rist 2008). Yet, while the latter has remained in place, the role of social engineering started to shift as soon as neoliberal approaches to economics came to be dominant in the West in the 1980s. As a result, the Washington consensus emerged, proposing economic measures like fiscal discipline, tax reforms, trade liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation as the primary development strategy for the World Bank and IMF. The Washington Consensus, in Fine's words, "can be understood as a severe reaction against the rationale for [...] extensive interventionism. Its broad starting point is that markets work well if left to themselves" (Fine 2001, 134).

Although market-driven development has not been effectively displaced since, the Washington consensus experienced a backlash rather soon, peaking halfway through the 1990s (Fine 2001, 138). According to Joseph Stiglitz, Chief Economist at the World Bank from 1997 to 2000, a post-Washington Consensus was emerging "by the early years of the millennium" as "confidence in the Washington Consensus was fraying" (Stiglitz 2007, 17). Even though it has proven difficult to renounce the top-down ethnocentrism of the modernity paradigm, and to undo the market-rationality of the Washington consensus, two related modifications made under the post-Washington consensus are vital to understanding contemporary humanitarian communication. This is to say that although 'post-Washington' is widely understood as only a marginal change of course in economic policy, development presents itself with a different face – a "human face", to be more precise. Therefore, it is especially instructive to understand the context of the post-Washington consensus in order to comprehend the turn towards the ideal of "empowerment" in development discourse and its conspicuous (though only partial) rejection of the modernity paradigm.

The first aspect of the post-Washington consensus deals with a rejection of the idea that state and market are diametrically opposed entities, and that the employment of one works at the expense of the other. As such, the post-Washington approach emphasises "that the two are complements and can work together" (Fine 2001, 139) to combat "market imperfections" in developing economies. Because of this, the post-Washington consensus emphasises tailor-made, small-scale interventions and solutions

focused on the "social capital" of particular groups (Wong 2003, 314). Hence, "networks", "communities", "social institutions", and "cooperation for mutual benefit" are emphasised as a way of recognising the social (rather than the economic) aspects of development (*ibid*). The smaller-scale solutions proposed in the post-Washington consensus solutions are thus centred on economic finetuning in an effort to de-emphasise the top-down state interventionism of the modernity paradigm and the market-reign of the Washington consensus. Accordingly, the need to finetune markets (with a particular case made for repairing flaws of developing economies that "fail" to be competitive) is acknowledged, while political solutions that address power imbalances are being side-lined (Fine 2009; Wong 2003). Thus, development discourse came to be dominated by what Chouliaraki calls "the neoliberal economics of the (post-)Washington[90] Consensus, which favours micro-economic, rather than macro- or structural economic, approaches to development" (2013, 8).

The second and related amendment under the post-Washington consensus can be found in the critical response to the harsh structural adjustment policies (as loan conditions) issued by the IMF and World Bank. In reference to these structural adjustments, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director Richard Dolly presented "Adjustments with a human face" at the World Conference of the Society for International Development in 1985 (Jolly 2012 [1985]). The approach was later elaborated on in publications by UNICEF with the same title, where it is stated that while the IMF and World Bank attempted to develop economies through financial, economic, and fiscal means, they "neglected human dimensions" (*ibid*, 182). In response, the document suggested that rather than using macroeconomic planned engineering, development policy should take into account a wider range of social dimensions and lived realities. Later, in 2012, Jolly wrote that in response to the document "the Bretton Woods Institutions [The World Bank and the IMF] made some changes to their policies, though far less than were necessary" (Jolly 2012, 172). Yet, while policies might not have changed sufficiently, the ideal of development "with a human face" has taken centre stage in humanitarian communication. With the discussions of dignified representations of agency discussed in the previous chapter, "human face" should sound familiar. This chapter takes this point one step further however by addressing the more general scepticism that has befallen development as an economic and political project. Whereas the prior chapter examined institutional self-reflexivity concerning representation, this chapter scrutinises representational reflections on economics. To put it another way, the previous chapter covered how the sector responds to critiques of the language of development, whereas the current chapter explores critiques on development at large, its economic trajectory, and its mode of organisation.

[90] The use of parentheses for the "post" in post-Washington are here telling, as many scholars have argued that "the differences between the Washington consensus and the post- Washington consensus have been overblown and, in particular, that they share much the same conception of development and attachment to neoliberalism" (Fine and Saad-Filho 2014).

The changes in policy discourse are broadly paralleled in popular discourse. This is accounted for in the girl-related campaigns that are shortly studied here as an illustration of the popular uptake of the empowerment discourse. This means that as the policy discourse of the post-Washington consensus shifted away from the modernisation paradigm, so did the popular representations of long-term development; conveyed in appeals and other campaigns by development NGOs. Here, empowerment is used to encompass a range of foundational ideals, such as granting agency to people in vulnerable situations (as discussed in the previous chapter), community enhancement (as also follows from the post-Washington consensus), and the necessity of bottom-up change as opposed to state- or market-led impositions.

Historically, the empowerment discourse is exemplified in the figure of the girl in several ways. First, it should be noted that the term "empowerment" has its roots in the activism of black feminist thought on marginalised communities in the US (Solomon 1976; Collins 2000). In addition, the introduction of the term in the domain of international development in the late 1980s can, according to Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès, be credited to the "feminist movement in the Global South" (Calvès 2009, 738). Even though the later appropriation of the term significantly altered its political meaning (and stripped it from its self-directed character), it is no coincidence that empowerment came to be associated with girls in particular. Second, the popularisation of the figure of the girl in the early 2000s coincided with the popular uptake of the term empowerment. For this reason, the *Girl Effect* has been highlighted as a landmark campaign that incentivised women and girl-oriented programmes and appeals position girls as empowered changemakers. Indeed, it is argued that since the launch of the campaign in 2008, "the girl effects logic has become the most prominent rationality for thinking about global girlhoods today" (Bent and Switzer 2016, 123).

~ *The Girl Effect*

The upcoming section will discuss how empowerment came to mean "to-be-empowered" (by development agencies) and how the figure of the deserving and resilient girl facilitates this empowerment discourse. In this approach, the figure of the girl functions as a link between 'old' and 'new' representations of long-term development – in line with the modes of representation proclaimed in the codes of conduct examined in the previous chapter. On the one hand, the figure of the girl responds to the call for new, dignified representations because it signifies agency in reference to opportunity, growth, and empowerment (Banet-Weiser 2018, 105–9). On the other hand, girls reiterate existing development discourses. This means that infantilisation and feminisation of the non-West in development are consistent features of humanitarian communication (that can be traced back throughout its entire history and to its colonial roots)[91] as they traditionally

[91] Also here, in line with other aspects of humanitarian communication, the focus on women, children and especially girls predates the era of (popular) development appeals and campaigns and can be traced back

emphasise feelings of innocence and a need for guidance (Manzo 2008, 635–36; Dogra 2013, 39). This dual role of the figure of the girl, representing both a break and a continuation of the tone of development campaigns and appeals, is not strenuous or ambivalent; rather, it fits both the legacy of paternalism *and* the imperative of change.[92]

However, an exploration of such campaigns is certainly neither new nor unique. The scope of literature on the infantilisation and feminisation of the Global South (logically coming together in the figure of young women and girls) is noteworthy. The purpose of this shorter paragraph is therefore *not* to elaborately explore how children's images, and especially those of girls, represent the Global South along "axes of 'need', vulnerability, universal appeal, 'hope' and, above all, infantilization" (Dogra 2013, 33), as this has been done in a vast range of thorough and compelling studies (Manzo 2008; Dogra 2013; Grosser and van der Gaag 2013; Switzer 2013; Hickel 2014; Calkin 2015; Caron and Margolin 2015; Chant 2016; Bent and Switzer 2016; Banet-Weiser 2018). In these studies, representations of girls in development campaigns are critically examined to deconstruct the "development fable of adolescent female exceptionalism" (Switzer 2013, 349–50), "girl-centred campaigns as the latest development fantasy" (Caron and Margolin 2015, 883), and the emerging "girl powering of development" in a "cocktail of celebratory girlafestos" (Koffman, Orgad, and Gill 2015). These authors primarily criticise the stereotypical and neocolonial distinctions between the West and 'unfortunate others', as well as the emphasis on neoliberal economics, which makes a strong 'business case' for investing in (young) women for development purposes. This is also the case with the Girl Effect, which is one of the various cases in the above-mentioned publications. Sarah Banet-Weiser, for instance, discusses the campaign as an example of contemporary international development discourse "where the girl is positioned as the prominent agent of social change, as heretofore unrecognized competent individuals" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 28).

Here, I would like to take these critiques a step further by highlighting how the revolutionary, bottom-up rhetoric that is essential to girl-centred campaigns in an effort to contextualise Kiva as a utopian platform. The first observation to be made departs from Banet-Weiser's assessment of girls as signifiers for social change, with an emphasis on them being heretofore unrecognised.[93] This point, as was already discussed in the

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to colonial discourse. Kate Manzo notes that "[o]f special relevance here are the shifting parallels between the iconography of childhood and the colonial iconography of savagery. Whereas associations of childhood with universal human rights are relatively recent, tropes of *innocence*, *dependence* and *protection* have a far longer lineage in colonial ideology (including the child-centrism of missionary iconography) and development theory" (Manzo 2008, 635–36).

[92] This double function of the girl is more thoroughly studied by Anita Harris in her book *Future Girl*, where she puts forward a discourse around young women and girls that highlights two roles that define girls at the very same time: the "can-do girl" and the "at-risk girl" (Harris 2003).

[93] It should be noted that though Banet-Weiser's observation that girls are represented as only newly recognized is accurate, a short look at policy and development discourse renders such representations disputable. Whereas children have been central to development discourse since it's invention, special

introduction to this chapter, does not just serve to introduce a supposedly novel approach to development but also serves as a way for development NGOs to critique the legacy of the 'modernisation paradigm' in the sector. In many ways, (the celebration of now reckoning with) the figure of the girl is explicitly contrasted with planned, top-down projects of modernisation. Building on this, the second observation departs from Sylvia Chant's critique of the relationship between narratives of girls as agents of social change and neoliberal perceptions of individuality (Chant 2016). In line with the rejection of the modernisation paradigm, such individuality can be seen not just as a sign of neoliberalist discourse, but also as a representation of the imperative for human-sized kinds of development. This means that in these representations, hierarchical, socially engineered development is about to make way for the ideal of organically organised change. Girls, in short, are represented as agents of change who are here to overturn the system and replace it with what can be called a non-system: not one with alternative hierarchies, managerialism, or "grand narratives", but one with individual change-makers and 'human-sized' projects.

As the national NGO confederations functioned as platforms to define common humanity in reference to human dignity and aimed for sector-wide reflections on how to adequately image this, the campaigns examined here point to the importance of scale to accommodate such dignity. The scale, that is, should be attainable and accessible – under the post-Washington consensus it should present itself with a human face. In this light, children, especially girls, are said to hold "'universal' appeal" (Dogra 2013, 33) and can "represent humanity as a whole" (Manzo 2008, 642).

In order to study how this rationality has been used to distinguish humanitarian campaigns from its predecessors, webpages and videos from "Educate Girls", "PLAN International" and "Africaid" have been examined alongside the "Girl Effect".[94] Although the stories and aims of the different campaigns are different, their narratives show striking similarities. Likewise, in many (also very traditional) cases of humanitarian imagery, rural areas, basic school buildings, and town hall meetings are shown in the

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emphasis was put on the fate and potential (in terms of development) of women and children in some leading policy initiatives that can hardly be called recent. The Women in Development movement that peaked in the 1970s (Caron and Margolin 2015, 882), had been formally recognized and spearheaded by the UN General Assembly in their *International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade* (1980). Fifteen years after that, the United Nations publication of *the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) followed, which was 20 years after celebrated as "the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights" (UN Women 2015). In 2020, the "strategic objectives for girls" in the Beijing Declaration were used to measure advancements against (Lindt 2020).

[94] From Educate Girls, the YouTube channel with 90 videos has been studied. Many of these are short and have been watched only a few times. Therefore, the five videos that have been circulated more widely (measured by the number of views; those with more than 12.000 views) have been studied in more depth. From Africaid, the Binti Shupavu -project has been studied, that is aimed at "increasing graduation rates for vulnerable girls".

photos and videos to address sobriety and locality. The central characters in the stories are NGO staff, teachers, and empowered girls as the main protagonists – while parents are mostly and notably absent.[95] Colour (bright) and music (piano and xylophone scores) are used to emphasise an optimistic tone more generally. Even though the most traditional spectacle of misery is discarded, some signifiers of deprivation and stagnation (such as the persistent focus on rurality, which is highlighted in imagery of landscapes and manual labour) are still present. Additionally, the imagery attests the analyses mentioned above, in which "girl power" is demonstrated in narratives of social change. In these appeals, the protagonists are introduced with the boldness and flair associated with such 'girl power'. "The world could use a good kick in the pants" is stated in capitals on the landing page of the Girl Effect website. Here, the ability to shake things up is expressed in reference to a form of physical action that is supposedly exercised with young women (representing empowerment and change) while being directed at older men (representing the status quo).

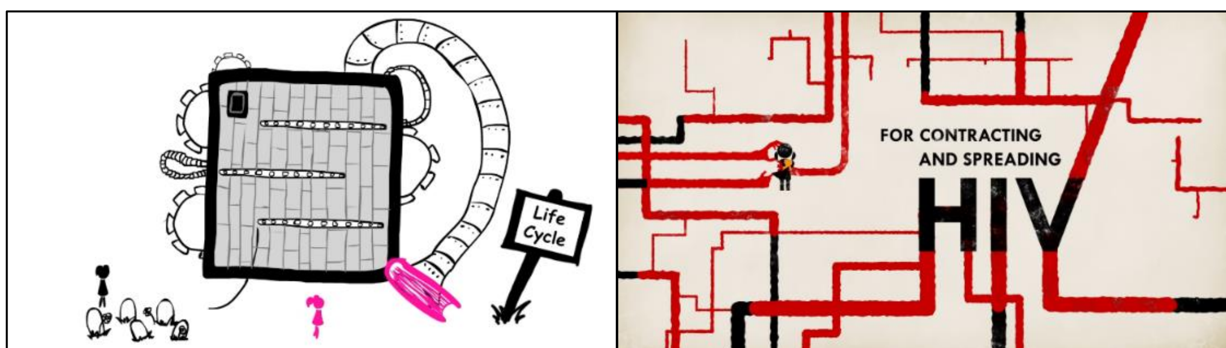
Starting from this point, two patterns of reflexivity emerge when examining the different campaigns. The two patterns express an inclination to turn upside down some of the negative connotations attached to the modernity paradigm and the discourses problematised in the codes of conduct. The first is that campaigns and videos highlight a (vicious) lifecycle of poverty, in which "empowered" girls are the most promising actors to break that cycle. Second, girls are portrayed as ambassadors for community engagement, responsibility, and, in this way, a bottom-up approach to development in which individuals and small, human-sized projects lift entire societies or nations. As a result, the discovery of girls as important but "heretofore unrecognized" actors is presented as scalable and self-enhancing – with the catch phrase "invest in a girl, and she will do the rest" from the Girl Effect being emblematic. Together, these qualities are attached to the image of the girl in an introspective move that allows NGOs and the sector to critique its own history and discourse while presenting novel solutions that contrast the rigid, top-down, and socially engineered image of the modernity paradigm. Consequently, solutions presented through the image of girls are presented as self-evident and surprising, as well as natural but easily overlooked.

[95] When represented in the videos, parents are recurrently portrayed as a barrier to children's enrolment in education, as is the case in for instance the video "Monica Gets a Second Chance", by Educate Girls. Here, the Educate Girls representative outlines that "[m]ost villagers have never been to school. They believe that if they survived without an education, then so can their children". The video continues by showcasing how the Educate Girls representatives go door-to-door and organise community meetings to emphasize the importance of going to school. Another representative of the organization then tells that she is glad to have "this chance to motivate parents to educate girls". The theme of motivating parents recurs in other videos by Educate Girls.

~ Empowerment and agency

The lifecycle narrative is expressed most clearly in three videos, including one each from PLAN ("Transform Her Future", "Because I'm a Girl"), Educate Girls ("Educating a girl can have a multifold impact"), and The Girl Effect ("The Clock is Ticking"). The videos are so remarkably similar that it is important to emphasise that they can loosely be described as a "genre" (or format, or style, depending on definition) in new representations of development work. One can for instance compare the girl-related videos to very similar-looking videos on children more generally to get a clearer view of the patterns of the campaigns reviewed here: "Making the First 1,000 days count" and "Children are the Future" (World Vision International, 2011 and 2018) and "Have You Heard Alice's Story" (War Child, 2013). All these videos are characterised by animated or stop-motion visuals, are narrated through written text (without voice-over or people talking), and a recognisable piano or xylophone score seamlessly adapt the musical mood to the various scenarios presented. The most distinctive feature of the videos, however, is the narrative style in which a two-scenario set-up is presented.

The two-scenario set-up is straightforward in its narrative structure. The videos tell two stories in parallel: one in which a girl is trapped in an "awful cycle" of poverty, and one in which she has a possibility to thrive. The two scenarios tell stories that illustrate how the cycle of poverty is not just undesirable but also indicative of the status quo and integral to traditional regimes of representation. In this scenario, the girl, who serves as the protagonist of the story, is not only disempowered by the circumstances but also by her not-yet acknowledged agency – either by her immediate environment, the audience, the development sector, herself, or the world at large. In sum, the first scenario, emphasises how perceptions and representations are a major factor in the lack of agency generally attributed to girls. The videos represent this problem by rendering girls as cogs in a machine, sometimes literally. In "Transform Her Future" and "The Clock is Ticking", the first scenario depicts the girls as being trapped in a self-perpetuating machine of poverty and neglect. As potential mothers, the girls are thus represented as cogs in the reproductive machine of life and death – where their role is crucial but short-lived, and characterised by negligence, abuse, and a lack of agency.



In both "Transform Her Future" (PLAN; left) and "The Clock is Ticking" (The Girl Effect; right) girls are envisioned as being trapped inside self-perpetuating machines of poverty and neglect.

The second scenario, in contrast, highlights the ideal of empowerment of girls by adopting the empowerment discourse and making girls the primary carriers of this ideal. The fact that the approach has gained prominence and is now at the center of development discourse cannot be separated from the imagery debates and its critiques of the lack of agency attributed to those who receive support from development projects. This is clearly reflected in the videos as well, as the second scenario is presented as an alternative life cycle for the girls in question, but also as an alternative way of framing and thinking about development more generally.

Thus, the two-scenario setup is not only a way to attest to the impact made by development projects or to emphasise how change can be brought to the lives of girls (in the sense that the setup simply mirrors the before-and-after strategy in regular advertising). Rather, or additionally, the setup is a way of reflecting on the role of agency in development work and its representations. In these reflections, girls are positioned as outsiders to the system, and as underdogs whose agency and worth has been neglected in development projects and local populations alike. As such, the reimagination of the figure of the girl is central in the videos. The phrase that "Your voice has the power to change these limiting mindsets" is used in the Educate Girls video to point to the importance of imagination. The videos thus use imagination ("No. Go ahead. Really imagine her") to alternate between the two scenarios, where girls envision or dream about certain futures ("She dreams of being a scientist one day"). Moving back and forth in time, these potential futures are placed side by side: "Let's rewind to her as 12"; "Monica gets a second chance"; "her life could look something like this". By imagining two trajectories through life, the videos depict a duality of representations, between the old and the new, and between status quo and change. As such, they offer a telling example of how a narrative structure can be used to overcome a tension in present-day appeals, where the urgency of the present-day situation is balanced out with the positivism deemed necessary in more dignified representations. Briefly stated, the Girl Effect invites us "to rethink what it means to look at a girl".

~ Community and change

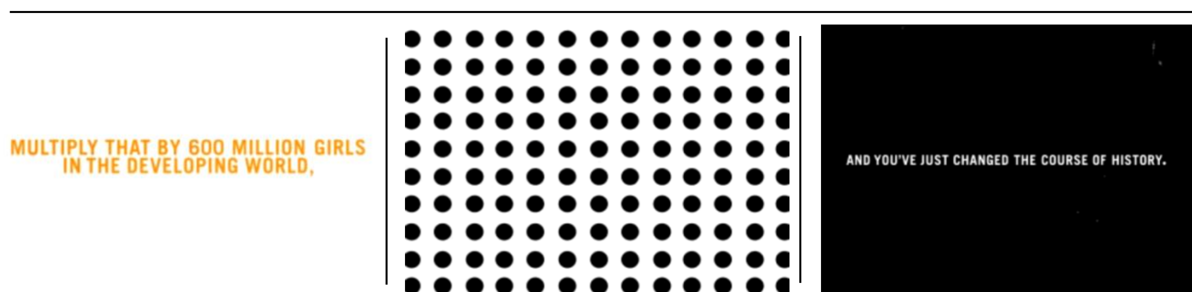
The maternal role attributed to girls in the videos is stressed in the campaigns under scrutiny here. Accordingly, girls are generally presented as caring, community-enhancing, and future-oriented. The reproductive power of girls is most clearly reflected in the Girl Effect's logo, which emphasizes exactly the role of girls to create lasting change – not just for themselves, but also for their children and their communities. PLAN International for instance introduces girls by letting them choose future careers ("a doctor", "a teacher") to have one of them conclude that she wants to "be someone who gives, not wants, to help people in the world". Similarly, AfricAid introduces Lucy, whose "entire community benefits" when she "has the

opportunity to continue her education". According to AfricAid, this is because girls "secure better jobs, raise healthier families, and create lasting positive change in their communities". In the campaigns, such "better jobs" and "healthier families" are implicitly measured against two signifiers of the status quo: local men (signifying a masculine status-quo) and traditional development approaches (or the modernity paradigm).

The celebration of girls as community-oriented and responsible can be contrasted with stereotypes of black men, or more generally men from the Global South, that are present in humanitarian discourse. According to Deborah Mindy, humanitarian aid is shaped by a "rhetoric of care that casts men as 'virile' and 'violent', the source of rampant heterosexual HIV transmission, and women as powerless victims in need of rescue" (Mindry 2010, 555). It is in opposition to such masculinity that girls are rendered both the underdog and the promise of a better future for everyone. The connection made between problematic masculinities and the particular local contexts are mostly implicit, minimalist and maybe even accidental, while in other cases local customs are explicitly blamed for the marginalisation of girls. In "I Dare You to See I'm the Answer", the implication is subtle. It is stated that girls are said to reinvest 90% of her income into her family, "compared to 35% for a boy". In the images accompanying the statement, no countries, regions, or places are named – but the Global South is implied through imagery. The landscapes (rusty-red laterite soil, associated with Africa), buildings (reed huts), action (head-carrying, farming) and skin tones of the actors (brown and Black), do call to mind a "scopic regime of Africa" (Campbell and Power 2010) and the developing world more generally. In "Educating a girl can have a multifold impact" a similar link, based on associations rather than explicit references denotes the Global South. Through pictures, a girl named Prachi who "loves going to school" is introduced. She appears scared, as it is stated that "many voices threaten her dream", preventing her from attending school. While the entire video is based on English-written text, the text balloons representing the voices that threaten her dreams stand out as they are the only text written in Hindi, thereby rendering these voices as a particularly local problem. More explicit references can be found in Educate Girls, which highlights how parents of girls ostensibly need to be persuaded of the importance of education for girls. In all of their videos, they explicitly state in reference to India that "In general, education is not considered important here". This is explicated through word and image. In one story, a girl learns to ride a motorcycle (a mode of transport commonly associated with masculinity, but also one associated with freedom) to get to school and is teased for it, while in another, a girl surprises sceptic older men by showing what she has learned in school. The statement "The mindset of parents in the village is that educating girls is useless" sums up this situation.

As such, the marginalisation of girls is emphasised as a problem inherent in the Global South. However, this is sometimes connected to development interventions and the top-down nature of its legacy. The "I Dare You to See I'm the Answer" video (which highlighted the percentages of income that benefit families) states that "yet 99,4% of international aid money is not directed to her" – that is to say to girls. This is interesting,

given the vast overrepresentation of girls in development campaigns (Dogra 2013, 31). Therefore, the video (once again) self-reflexively proposes a "radical" break with conventional humanitarian communication (while at the same time looking and sounding eerily like it): "I dare you to look at me without pity, fatigue, dismissal. I dare you to look at me as more than a poster for your cause". The criticism issued here explicitly references the imagery debate surrounding pity and fatigue, but it also blames humanitarian communication for its opportunism in using girls for posters. In "daring" the audience to see the girl not as a poster but as a solution, her role in community engagement is highlighted. The individualised girl is then made part of larger statistics that show how girls benefit entire communities. According to these statistics, when girls go to school "the population's HIV rate goes down", girls have "2,2 fewer children", "malnutrition decreases 43%", or "the countries economy grows 3%". Therefore, the audience is invited (or dared) to see "only a statistic". Based on such statistics, the campaigns present a focus on girls as a naturally self-enhancing, healthily reproductive development strategy based on the belief that "the most powerful force of change on the planet is a girl". The campaigns speak of "catalysts for change", a "multifold impact", a "ripple effect", "an army of thousands", or simply of *n*, the statistical symbol relating to the number of individuals or subjects sampled:



In "The girl effect" an individual story in which a girl thrives and lifts her community is said to be replicable to 600 million girls in the developing world. "[Y]ou've just changed the course of history"

In this direction of reasoning, the programmatic approach of "structural adjustments" is subverted, where it goes from the individual to a multifold impact. In discussing microlending (soon to be discussed here as well), Elloit Prasse-Freeman emphasises that this line of thinking results in an "anti-ideology" that "eschews grand claims about 'development' and instead endorses a small-is-beautiful approach, in which the individual client becomes the cipher through which the entire world of impoverished people is perceived: saving her (and it is usually a her, with the associated connotations of feminized victimization) becomes saving the world" (2017, 78). Ultimately, the trickle-down economics that underscored the modernisation paradigm are inverted, in what can be described as trickle-up economics where community-led, 'organic' change is understood as the utopian future of development.

In what follows, it is argued that Kiva mirrors and advances this utopian discourse. The link between an approach that revolves around girls and Kiva is in the first case an obvious one since microlending in general, and also Kiva particularly, have centralized women and girls from the start. A good example of how microlending builds on the relationship between women and community-led empowerment comes from Muhammad Yunus, who could be regarded as the person who pioneered the microlending approach: "poor women see further and are willing to work harder to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. They pay more attention, prepare their children to live better lives, and are more consistent in their performance than men. (...) When a destitute father earns extra income, he focuses more attention on himself" (Yunus 2003, 63). The ideal of women who "lift themselves" out of poverty is reflected on Kiva, with a section specifically dedicated to women who can be helped "investing in the health of their communities and families" – with statement reading "loans to women change the world" or "Change one woman's life, lift an entire community!". The focus on women and girls is therefore shared between regular appeals by NGOs, and microlending and Kiva and also is the appeal to their multifold, community-led impact and revolutionary unlocking of existing potential. Beyond the particular focus on girls and women, it will be discussed below how the empowerment discourse that underpins the girl-related campaigns elevates its "revolutionary" and utopian rhetoric to a new level by emphasising networked media and the marketplace as platforms.

The Utopian Platform: Microlending on Kiva

"Beyond Charity, rethinking how we give" is the promise in Kiva's headlining video on the about-page of the platform. With this statement inherently the question comes up what kind of alternative Kiva proposes, and from what kind of ideological position. The alternative, it will be argued, is deeply rooted in a platformed logic of development, in which particularly digital media and the market (and by extension, Kiva itself) are presented as expressions of this logic. Kiva suggests that these platforms function as intermediaries for exchange, sociality, and empowerment, where goods, creativity, and ideas flow freely and organically. By constructing an image of human-sized sociability, the platform presents itself as an alternative to the modernisation paradigm and the Washington consensus. The analysis detailed below points out however, that the idealisation of platforms primarily depoliticises development. This means that, despite the fact that Kiva positions itself as a revolutionary alternative to development (and in particular to the modernisation paradigm and the Washington consensus), its "power-neutral" rhetoric can more accurately be seen as a variation of existing practices and representations of the development discourse.

When Kiva was established in 2005, it could build on a history of microfinance of about 25 years. Although microfinance initiatives have existed before, the founding of Mohammad Yunus' Grameen Bank in 1976 can be regarded as a breakthrough. The idea that access to small financial services for vulnerable people or in disadvantaged regions

has the potential to revolutionise international development was increasingly appreciated from that point on – as evidenced by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Yunus. His book *Banker to the Poor*, published in 1999, became a *New York Times Bestseller* and marked an important step in the development of microlending as a widely adopted practice in developmental work. Dey and Steyaert (2010) and Carr and colleagues (2016), in their overviews of academic literature on microlending, draw attention to the fact that current academic literature mirrors popular and institutional discourse in uncritically celebrating microlending as the new panacea in development. [96] However, critical accounts of microfinance have been published, particularly in the 2010s, when "enthusiasm for microfinance began to wane" (Bateman and Maclean 2017, 3) – at least in expert and academic circles. These studies emphasise the neoliberal character of microfinance (Karim 2008; Bateman 2010; Prentice 2017), highlight problematic cases or "crises" in microfinance projects and how they upend socio-cultural customs (Guérin, Labie, and Servet 2015), and discuss the problems of debt more generally (Hulme 2000; Guérin, Morvant-Roux, and Villarreal 2018).

Research based on discourse analysis has been particularly critical of microcredit, and a number of studies have discussed Kiva from this angle as well. These studies focus on Kiva's visual appearance and marketing (Gajjala et al. 2011; Yartey 2013; 2017; Bajde 2017), its neoliberal approach (Grewal 2014; Schwittay 2014; Carr et al. 2016), its gendered representations of development (Black 2009; Moodie 2013), the competition between projects posted on the platform (Ly and Mason 2012), and on the intercultural connectedness it appears to establish (McKinnon et al. 2013).[97] In different capacities, these studies reflect on how Kiva represents "Internet mediated microfinance" (Gajjala et al. 2011, 880) and "microfinance through web 2.0 communication" (Yartey 2013, 63), and how the transactions through the platform are "staged as transparent, efficacious peer-to-peer charitable lending" (Bajde 2017, 87). Yet, in none of these studies, the apparent role of platformisation takes centre stage, even though references to its functioning and discourse are made. Therefore, the two aspects of Kiva will be spotlighted in their platformed representations: markets and digital technologies.

Here, platformed development is studied in light of its proposed promise to bring something new to the field of development. The cover of *Banker to the Poor,* for instance, emphasises that Yunus "traces the intellectual and spiritual journey that led him to fundamentally rethink the economic relationship between rich and poor" throughout the book. This "rethinking" (both on Yunus' book-cover and in Kiva's self-representation) is

[96] For the institutional discourse, both studies refer mainly to the World Bank, while Carr and his colleagues especially distinguish the World Bank-sponsored Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP). Also they highlight the importance of the Washington Consensus (Carr et al. 2016, 147).

[97] Not surprisingly, the critiques befalling Kiva, roughly run parallel to more general critical assessments of microfinance. In a short literature review Anke Schwittay names critiques that run parallel in academic publications on microlending and Kiva, such as "connections to neoliberalism", "complex gender dynamics" and introduction of the poor to the regime of "finance capital" (2014: 508).

part of a long trend of "persistent emphasis on novelty and change by development organisations" (Dogra 2013, 145). This is particularly true in reference to the critiques that have affected the development sector, which in turn has created an imperative of change. In his study of development policy, Gilbert Rist therefore notes that "each theory or declaration makes a claim to be original (or novel), to pass itself off as the solution at last discovered to the 'problems of development'. When we look more closely, however, we see that the apparent innovations are merely variations on a single theme which allow the various actors to assert their legitimacy within the field of 'development'" (Rist 2008, 5).

In Kiva, the emphasis on novelty is captured in the creation of an environment for platformed development. The walk-through analysis used for the analysis of this environment consists of two methodological steps that are taken from Light, Burgess and Duguay (2018). First, the "environment of expected use" (*ibid*, 889) is investigated, which entails an analysis of texts not integral to the technical functioning of the platform. These texts are promotional, juridical, and economic and thus greatly shape the way in which the platform is supposed to be used. Promotional texts address and instruct targeted users and manage their expectations; terms of use or service set the conditions and limitations of use; and the operating model (and economic underpinning of this model) explicates the rationale behind the existence of the platform. Second, the "technical walkthrough" (*ibid*, 891) focuses on how the platform (textually and otherwise) functions. The interface, functions, features, textual content, and symbolic representation are the main ways to interrogate the platform, which is typically done by going through the registration, entry, use, and closure phases.

Usually, a walk-through analysis is utilized to render the possible relations between a platform and its users (in a classic structure-agency setup, where individual users might employ tactics to evade certain strategies of preferred use). Here, the focus is slightly different because the power relations between user and platform are less of interest while the power dynamics in development and the way these are obscured in Kiva's self-representation are the main points of discussion. This that the figure of the user is not of interest as such, but still, it disposition is of pivotal importance. In this analysis, the user is studied as a subject position, as it is interpellated and included in the development project. In essence, it is of interest how Kiva presents platformed development as a utopian, organic, and human-sized kind of development in which the user is interpellated precisely as one such human individual. Therefore, the "environment of expected use", as addressed by Light and his colleagues, is of central importance – not in the sense that the user is *limited or facilitated* in certain ways, but in the sense that the user is *constructed* as part of the discourse of platformed development.

~ Kiva's appeal to media technology: networked connectivity

"Kiva is a 501(c)3 U.S. non-profit fuelled by passionate people. Founded in 2005, and based in San Francisco, with offices in Bangkok, Nairobi, Portland and staff around the globe". The about-headline of Kiva is an interesting mix of legal jargon (a "501(c)3 US non-profit" is tax-exempted), contact information about where the organisation is based, and references to the kind of global network of "passionate people" it aims to be. Further contact-information singles out two offices that can be contacted: the "Nairobi Field Office" and the "Kiva Headquarters". There is a clear distinction between the two: Nairobi is "the field" (a term that is now contested in development discourse for its exoticising connotations), while the headquarters are located in San Fransisco, the city known as the home of digital technology and social media in Silicon Valley. Links to the tech industry are indeed tenuous, as Kiva hired well-known tech entrepreneurs like Premal Shah of PayPal and Reid Hofman of LinkedIn not long after its founding.

More generally, and more importantly, Kiva builds on the widespread status of social media platforms as facilitators of social connectedness. As has been detailed in Jose van Dijck's concise history of social media, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have thoroughly relied on earlier web-technology and particularly Web 2.0 and its appeal to connectedness and what came to be called participatory culture. This "buzzword" according to Van Dijck "connoted the Web's potential to nurture connections, build communities, and advance democracy. Many platforms embraced this rekindled spirit when they started to make the Web 'more social'" (Van Dijck 2013, 4). These values stand in direct correspondence with the empowerment discourse in development – with the return to community-building and sociability at its core. On Kiva, the seemingly direct and unmediated link between lender and borrower takes centre stage in its interface and daily use because the platform is mainly designed to search, browse, and read borrower profiles. Kiva's community page, for instance, states that "Kiva is about connecting people through lending to alleviate poverty", while the about page remarks that "loans aren't just about money—they're a way to create connection".

Yet, while Kiva is comparable with many mainstream social media platforms in that it builds on an appeal to connectedness, one key difference cannot go unnoticed. For Kiva, the function of building and emphasising sociability is not, as with most common social media platforms, to monetise such social interaction through data aggregation, the creation of advertising markets, or the promotion of (and profit from) a gig economy.[98] In other words, whereas social media platforms are commonly in the business of selling the result of social interaction to third parties, Kiva is not. Mainly, Kiva's operational

[98] This is not to say that Kiva fully abstains from sharing data with any third party in return for support or funding. First, Kiva shares relevant data with "Field Partners", when this is relevant for facilitating the loans. Second, the privacy policy of the platform also states that "Aggregated or pseudonymized data that does not directly identify you may be shared with third parties for educational, informational or promotional purposes in furtherance of Kiva's mission". Arguably, however, both practices of data sharing are not central to the ways in which Kiva makes money.

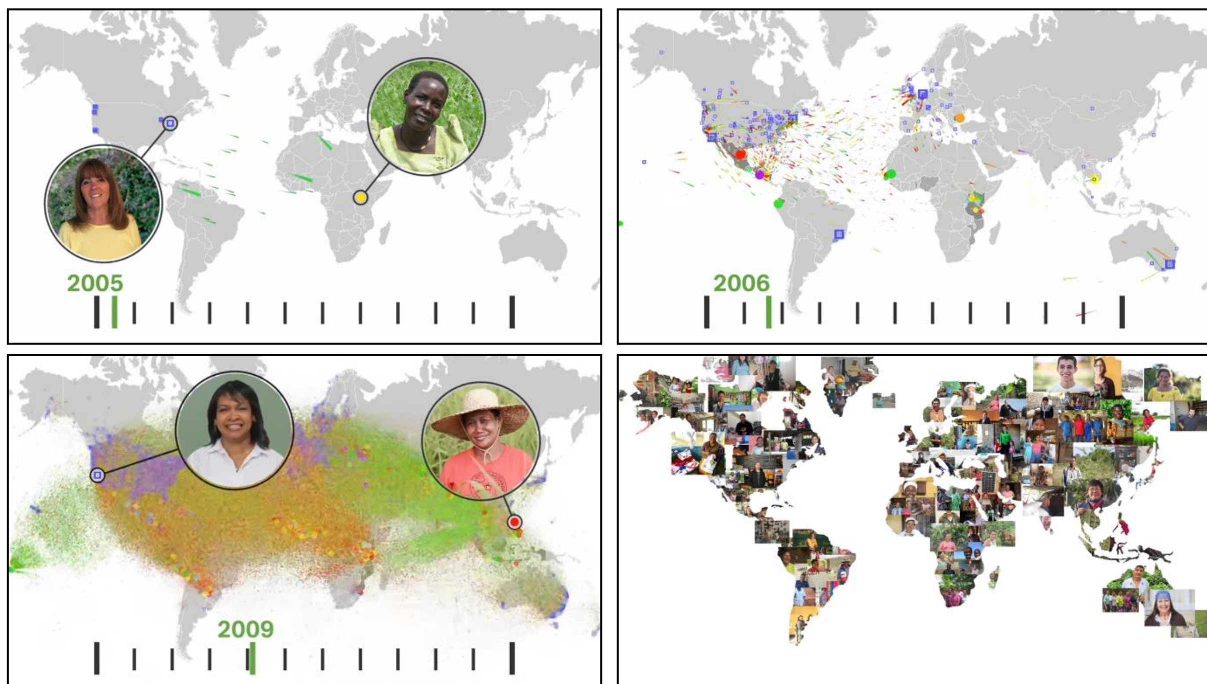
costs are covered mainly through donations, and more generally the platform deviates in its non-commercial set-up. Kiva's non-profit character logically extends on the character of the development sector but it also fits the early history of social media platforms that were based on a "spirit of 'nonmarket peer-production'" in the early 2000s (Van Dijck 2013, 15). While the emphasis on connectedness can thus be explained reasonably well when looking at how Kiva's self-presentation aligns with how social media platforms market themselves, the monetisation of such connectedness remains largely absent. Rather, the quality and character of connectedness on Kiva is more generally a statement: a conspicuous argument about a new and power-neutral form of development. This is in line with the connotations of networked technologies that provide "uniform and utopian connectivity" (Zook et al. 2004, 155) and the appeal of platforms that, according to Tarleton Gillespie, connote "open, neutral, egalitarian and progressive support for activity" (2010, 352).

This claim to neutrality can be found in the explanations and presentations of what Kiva refers to as the "journey of a Kiva loan". This journey is explained on Kiva's landing page and on a separate page devoted to "How Kiva works". In both instances, schematic overviews of the loaning process present short and direct lines between lender and borrower; where no third parties intervene, interest is absent and loans are the result of seemingly unmediated match-making through Kiva. Beyond self-representation, the journey of a loan is also woven into Kiva's interface and functionalities, where the implication of direct loans obscure the role of Kiva's "field partners" – the actual financial mediators that facilitate and conduct the loaning process. In order to interpret the role of these field partners and give meaning to (the absence of) their representation, it is useful to turn to an important conceptual aspect of studying functions in a walk-through analysis: the difference between 'mediators' and 'intermediaries'. According to Ben Light and his colleagues, mediators are transformative (they actively shape the processes they accommodate), while intermediaries are taken to be neutral (they passively pass the meanings or actions they facilitate). Following Bruno Latour, from whom the distinction is derived (2005, 37–42), mediators are often mistaken as intermediaries. While social interaction action is simply understood as a result of how "the social" functions, it is actually construed in an endless number of mediators that *construct* sociality. This is similar to how Kiva presents itself. The platform and the workings of its microloans are portrayed as a neutral environment that simply facilitates connectedness, where human connections simply do the work. By extension, Kiva presents the entire paradigm of "development" (in its new and "revolutionary" conception) as a mere by-product of humanity.

For users, the "journey of a Kiva loan" starts with an impression of what the platform aims to do and how users can participate in it. It starts, that is to say, with the environment of expected use that addresses the "target user base and scenarios of use" (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018) envisioned by Kiva. Kiva relies on its website and about pages to target potential users, but it also reaches out to them online via YouTube.

Here, the platform is presented, primarily through the stories of individual borrowers, but occasionally through videos that more generally reflect Kiva's profile and objectives. These latter videos are frequently part of a bigger outreach campaigns that celebrate milestones, such as the "Fuel Her Future" campaign (at the mark of funding $1 billion loans; a campaign launched together with the Pepsico Foundation) or the "Power of Numbers" campaign (at the fifteenth anniversary of the platform).

Over the years, Kiva has remained largely consistent in its campaigns, with a range of elements that recurrently figure in their campaigns. These are interesting because they position potential Kiva users as world citizens (through the frequent use of maps and globes), as technologically savvy (indicated by images of laptops and recurrent sound effects of mouse clicks and notifications) and as individuals in a network (by the use of pictures of lenders and borrowers and the use of lines or other means to emphasise interconnectedness). One of Kiva's leading promotional videos, which is also featured on the website, invites users to become part of "a connected global family" and thus directly addresses and positions them as potential Kiva users. The video, titled "Be the spark that changes the world", makes ample use of the aforementioned audio-visual elements, where the use of "sparks" stand out in particular to emphasise the global connectedness that is envisioned. The video outlines the history of the website to highlight the increasing number of loans being made, and includes a timeline that begins in 2005 when the first Kiva loans were funded.



Four stills from "Be the spark that changes the world. The stills showcase a world map, the movement of different microloans through colored "sparks" and a range of photos from borrowers and lenders.

In the video, three interdependent characterisations of Kiva are introduced – all of which emphasise the neutrality of the platform. Kiva's *accessibility* is underlined when the video starts by stating that, through Kiva, anyone can change the world "No matter who you are, or where you're from". By extension, loans are presented as *direct* and unmediated, as the video explains that "each of these [...] sparks of light represent a $25 loan from" alongside mentioning names from borrowers and lenders whose pictures appear on the map. The light sparks' trajectories, speed, and colours reveal an interconnected system of loans, without further conduct or third parties involved. As the video progresses, "Kiva ignites into a global phenomenon". The word "ignite" is used to connote an eruption or spontaneous combustion – not something that is rigorously planned, but something that simply appears when the time is right. From this moment on, the sparks in the video multiply, making it impossible to dissect any individual loan while simultaneously making them part of an *organic* multitude. The map is now covered in a dynamic density of sparks that resembles a flock of birds, suggesting an unplanned, fluid form of social change that is maintained by "1.4 million people like you". Through the video, Kiva users are thus positioned as part of an accessible, direct, and organic form of connectedness.

In the video, Kiva refers to itself as a global and local "phenomenon", which roughly corresponds with the word "movement"; a term that is also regularly used in Kiva's self-descriptions. Through such dissociative wording, Kiva renders itself as a transparent, mere intermediary with the users at its core. Thus, while Kiva celebrates its own "impact" and "groundbreaking loan programs", it also removes itself from the picture. This is emphasised not only in its success stories and audio-visual metaphors, but also in its governance structure. In the walk-through of the platform, this means to move from the phase where users are introduced to the platform through its marketing and promotion, to the phase of subscription and usage, where first users accept the Terms of Use. In the FAQs on the website and Kiva's Terms of Use, users can learn that the platform's aims to separate Kiva's finances and the loans that are funded through the platform. In the FAQ, it is stated that "Kiva never takes a fee from lenders. 100% of funds lent on Kiva go to funding loans". In practice, this implies a separation of the running or operational costs associated with running Kiva as a platform and the financial transactions that the lending practices entail. Although some default settings and Terms of Use make claims of a strict separation between the two dubious,[99] Kiva indeed manages both aspects of the platform

[99] In some ways, funds may be redirected in order to benefit the operational costs of Kiva as an organization. First, "Kiva reserves the right to retain (a) interest on funds while such funds are held in a User Funds Account and (b) any foreign exchange gains collected in connection with Loan repayments, and to use such interest and gains in support of Kiva's general operating expenses". Second, the default "Auto-Lend" option in each Kiva-profile also involves a default donation to Kiva with each loan. This is to say that, unless the Auto-Lend function is disabled, any user who holds a sufficient amount of credit in his or her Kiva-account automatically lends this money to a borrower, and that unless the donation-option is disabled, the small donation to Kiva that is requested upon each loan, is automatically triggered under the Auto-Lend function.

in separation, distancing Kiva as an organisation from the "phenomenon" or "movement" itself.

A similar kind of unbundling can be witnessed when it comes to "Field Partners". These field partners can best be understood as banks, which screen potential borrowers, administer and provide loans, repayments, and interests. In Kiva's Terms of Use Agreement, these partners are introduced as follows: "The majority of Loans on the Website are administered by existing domestic and international organizations (each, a 'Field Partner' and, collectively, 'Field Partners') that work in underbanked or low-income communities and generally have a stated mission to reduce poverty by providing affordable working capital, services or supplies to underbanked or low-income borrowers" (Kiva 2017). Despite being essential to Kiva's operation, these partners are frequently left out of stories about users of Kiva making direct loans to borrowers. This is first evident in reference to the name given to these organisations, where "field" refers to activity on the ground, in close contact with borrowers and their communities, and "partners" implies a non-hierarchical structure rather than an administrative organisation. Additionally, in videos like the one addressed above and other campaigns, the role of field partners is obscured – primarily by omitting this step in the process. This is mainly visible in a range of flow charts produced by Kiva over the years. These visualizations of the lending process vary slightly in terms of visual appearance but are consistent in the four steps they represent: "choose a borrower", "make a loan", "get repaid", "repeat". In the somewhat different "journey of a Kiva loan", these steps are a bit more elaborate, which also mentions the application and approval processes for borrowers – but the function of Field Partners is also hidden from view here. When users begin the actual process of making a loan, details about the Field Partner involved are provided, but at this point the interface diverts attention. The title, aim, and picture of the borrower take centre stage, where the user can choose to directly support the loan ("Lend now") or click buttons to view the "Borrower story" or the "Loan details". The latter option actually skips the "More about this Loan" heading, where the Field Partner is introduced, for this, users can only manually scroll down.

It might go too far to draw the conclusion that Kiva misleads its users – although Inderpal Grewal rightfully recalls that Kiva's human-centred appearance turned against the platform when lenders realised "that Kiva did not provide loans directly, and that loans went to [...] distant sites" (*ibid*, 76).[100] While it is true that an emphasis on direct connectedness sometimes eclipses the role of field partners, Kiva can be said to be transparent about the existence, role, and work of these partners. However, the point here is not to debate sincerity, but to understand how Kiva invites us to take up a position that

[100] In her article, Grewal here uses the word "intermediaries" in her description of these "distant sites". This denotation is left out here, as the word can be confusing in a context where the differentiation between intermediaries and mediators is part of the conceptual framework. In Grewal's use of the word "intermediaries", she seems to refer to what would here be termed a "mediator" – though more generally, the distinction between the two is not made in Grewal's text and is of no importance to her argument.

is characterised by a "suspension of disbelief". Here, the user might be aware that microlending is facilitated through complex, bureaucratic, and sometimes impersonal financial programmes, but is tempted to side-line these aspects to become part of a narrative of human connectedness. While Carr argues that Kiva is "based on an illusory sense of connection" (Carr et al. 2016, 153), this illusion can be very well explained by interpreting it as the result of contemporary development discourse.

Ultimately, the technologically enhanced connectivity of Kiva is presented as direct and unmediated, not compromised by bureaucratic organisations but rather as bolstered by solidarity and human connectedness. In this respect, Kiva follows the early history of social media platforms, where, according to Van Dijck, it was envisioned that web technology platforms "enhanced the natural human need to connect and create" (2013, 10). She continues to say that "the very word 'social' associated with media implies that platforms are user centred and that they facilitate communal activities, just as the term 'participatory' emphasizes human collaboration. Indeed, social media can be seen as online facilitators or enhancers of *human* networks—webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value" (*ibid*). In this sense, Kiva renders itself invisible, as a negation of itself: existing technologically, but driven by humanitarianism and human connectedness.

~ Idealization of the market: 'connected capital'

Social media platforms are not just technical utopias. They have also been interpreted as a "utopian marketplace" (Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018, 2), where distributed digital technologies are understood as the final and ultimately fitting match to liberal free-market economies. Therefore, Julie Hannah as the chair of Kiva, connects the market-oriented foundations of Kiva with the techno-optimism discussed in the previous paragraph by outlining that Kiva aims to "use the internet as a new form of connected capital where you can harness the principals of capitalism to benefit society" (Wavelength 2011). In response, the neoliberal market-orientation of Kiva has been critiqued multiple times (McKinnon et al. 2013; Carr et al. 2016; Yartey 2017). These critiques do not require extensive retelling, but the parallel presentation of digital networks and markets as facilitators of human connectedness are the backbone of Kiva's platformed development. In times of "structural adjustments", economics had come to represent impersonal statistics that dehumanised its subjects. Here, the market is idealised as a humanising force *par excellence* as it comes to stand for personal development, creativity, "dreams", productivity, and work. The human face is mainly attached to the market by an emphasis on small-scale entrepreneurship in which production is de-alienated (Black 2009; Prasse-Freeman 2017). As will become clear, the market is reimagined as a platform, and the appeal of platforms strengthens the market's public image as an open, egalitarian catalyst for creativity, and a neat fit with the human condition.

When looking at work and production, Kiva emphasises its platformed potential to unlock what is already organically there as part of human creativity and work ethics. As Kiva states, "people around the world work hard, everyday". The celebration of hard work is visible in the profiles on the platform (showcasing machines, offices, farmlands, products, and people at work) and affirmed in Kiva's self-representations and promotion materials. The claim that people around the world work hard every day also emphasises work as a factor external to Kiva, where the platform does not interfere but simply supports, enables, and "ignites" something that is already there. Similar to, for instance, the disaster appeals alliances, that aimed to "just remove all the barriers" for humanitarian togetherness, Kiva taps into the rhetoric of facilitation so present in discourse about platforms. As Van Dijck notes, "it is a common fallacy, though, to think of platforms as merely *facilitating* networking activities; instead, the construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive" (Van Dijck 2013, 6). In their representation of work and entrepreneurship as parts of people's daily realities, economics are imagined through a focus on the products and services that lenders have to offer – products that illustrate how the marketplace is a space where authenticity and creativity flourish.

While small-scale enterprises, human craftmanship, authentic products, and personal growth are lauded in Kiva's rhetoric, a new and better form of modernity is envisioned for humanity in its entirety – dismissing the impersonal forces of mass production and the alienating forces of classic modernity. The universality of dreams in which the entrepreneurial spirit unites people is translated into the artefacts produced in small-scale environments. The particular nature of the commodities represented is striking, as all these have a fairly basic character and are deemed to be essentials rather than complex or specialised goods. In general, the representation of these goods reflects what Eugenia Siapera refers to as 'folkloric difference' (between, in this case, the 'modern' fortunate spectator and the 'authentic' unfortunate other)[101]. Here, difference "is reduced to external elements or symbols of culture, such as dress, food, religious festivals, and cultural artefacts, which appear to celebrate difference while at the same time ignoring its demands for equal recognition" (Siapera 2010). Elements of culture like this are indeed showcased and highlighted extensively in micro-lending, in ways similar *and* different to Siapera's description. As she rightfully notes, "the folklorization of difference in this regime has the effect of ossifying culture, looking at it as a relic from the past, charming but ultimately irrelevant in the modern world" (*ibid*). Although the authentic charm of the folkloristic elements depicted clearly distinguishes them from modernity, they are also depicted not as 'irrelevant', but as hyper-relevant – the better, handcrafted, and genuine

[101] In Siapera's account 'difference' is studied in relation to multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, importantly, lacks the crucial role of 'distance' that is so important to most forms of humanitarian communication (this marks their difference above all other differences that can be named). Yet, discourses around humanitarianism and multiculturalism can certainly be thought of as running parallel in touching upon similar sensitivities in contemporary debates on cosmopolitanism.

version of modernity (enhanced by the capital of microfinance and the possibilities of digital technology), positioned in the future rather than in the past. On the one hand, this means that the dichotomy between charm and modernity still stands. On the other, however, Siapera notes (and this is important for an accurate interpretation of the images under scrutiny here) that "while folkloric representations domesticate difference through focusing on superficial and stereotypical aspects of cultural difference, another theme within the same regime is that of insisting on similarities and the essential sameness of people" (*ibid*, 141). Instead of focusing on 'the big' and the 'collective' (as was the case in disaster relief), micro-finance is focused on the 'small' and on an internally *diverse* community that, in the case of Kiva, is held together by what is deemed the creative, innovative, forward-thinking spirit of the entrepreneurial.

For Kiva, this entrepreneurial spirit is encapsulated in giving people access to a marketplace of financial services, where loans do more justice to borrowers than donations. This is exemplified in their "why loans instead of donations?" newsletter. Here, according to Kiva, lending and borrowing creates "a partnership of mutual dignity—and a community where we stand together, believe in each other, and work toward global equity, one loan at a time". This idea that the market expresses the "partnership of mutual dignity" is key for Kiva, where it allegedly sheds of the inequality ingrained in international development. Here, we see that the attempts of regular development NGOs to reinvent themselves in terms of dignity and dignified representations addressed in the previous chapter run parallel to Kiva's self-representation of that as an outsider that potentially revolutionises the same sector. Rather than being paradoxical, this parallel between supposed insiders and outsiders in the sector is an illustration of a context and discourse where notions of dignity, empowerment, and self-reliance are entangled and mutually informed – in this case through partnerships facilitated by the marketplace as a "community where we stand together". As one borrower in the newsletter expresses that "being self-reliant; that's what I'm most proud of", the ideal of empowerment is represented as running parallel to the marketplace she can participate in.

Essential to the sustenance of "partnerships of mutual dignity" between lender and borrower is what is called "connected capital". According to Julia Hanna, there is "an opportunity for a new form of capital. We call it 'connected capital'. (…) So, the idea is: how do you harness the principles of capitalism that are so powerful and effective for economic development, but do them in a way that benefits society" (Wavelength 2011). Similarly, CEO and founder Matt Flanery discusses the concept in a range of interviews, where he highlights that connected capital is "sent from people to people to create social change" (Birnbaum 2014) and that 'people are motivated by the connection it involves" (Quillen 2012). The 'connection' implied in the lending process entails various gratifications on the side of the lender, which are expressed in the platform's interface, newsletters, and blogs. The gratifications of connected capital involve the ability to

endlessly choose from a number of borrowers, the possibility to get inspired, the potential of being repaid (including the ability to relend the money), and the involvement in a community of lenders and borrowers. These gratifications are clearly addressed in monetary terms and related to the marketplace as a platform of human-sized exchange. In line with Chouliaraki's post-humanitarian construction of solidarity through "minor gratifications to the self" (2013, 3), these four gratifications (choice, inspiration, perpetuation, and community) will be shortly addressed below.

The notion of choice between different causes, borrowers, enterprises and "inexpensive feel-good investment opportunity[ies]"[102] is proposed as a market of free choice for lenders. Particularly this proposition is contrasted with the notion of charity, where, according to Kiva, "donations are collected and the organization decides how it should be distributed". Alternatively, "lenders determine who they want to fund and what types of enterprises they want to support" with Kiva. The notion of choice and the ideal of browsing, filtering, and selecting from a range of seemingly limitless options is paramount to the interface. On the homepage of the website, the three most prominent options (the "lend"-button in the menu, the "find a borrower"-button on the landing-page, and the first option after scrolling) prompt an overview of categories (from agriculture to health or single parents) where users can choose to either "explore" or "filter". For the sheer endless number of choices for lenders ("with thousands of inspiring borrowers on Kiva every day"), exploring and filtering are part of a personalisation process where "finding the perfect loan to fund is easy (and fun!)". Indeed, according to one of the newsletters, "you can quickly filter loans by category, location, industry, and even fine-tune your search for ultra-specific results, like 'women borrowers in Colombia applying for their first loan'". If this does not help, newsletters present "personalized loan recommendations curated just for you", where the algorithm functions as a tool to facilitate the search. An open and egalitarian platform is suggested as a free market of choice, where borrowers are empowered to make their individual preferences count. As a result, finances are distributed not according to a plan that can be deemed to be either just or unjust, but according to a supposedly egalitarian organising principle of preference and choice. Interestingly, lenders can even choose to filter for loans that will expire soon, but have not yet been fully funded. With these options, Kiva is even more clearly idealised as a platform where well-informed and tailor-made procedures of choice on the side of the lender will provide financial equity that can be organically organised around personal preference.

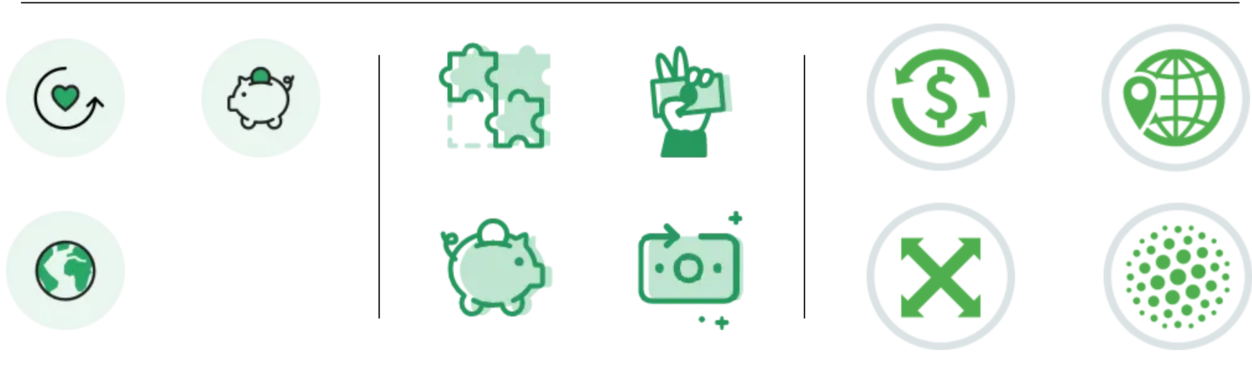
In another attempt to guide users through the various choices, Kiva encourages users to ask themselves questions like "Whose story do I want to be a part of?". Users are essentially promised a narrative in which their lending can result in what Boltanski examines "an altruistic commitment to causes which enables one to 'realise oneself' through action" (1999, xiv). Such self-realisation is mostly attained through stories and

[102] See: https://pages.kiva.org/press

causes that target the personal interests and aspirations of users, where they are exposed to "inspiring stories" and "inspiring borrowers". They are encouraged to browse "categories that are meaningful to you", for instance suggesting the user is "passionate about access to clean water" and subsequently providing related loans. Through inspiration, meaningfulness, and passion, Kiva presents lending as an opportunity of personal growth, enhancing identification and self-realisation. This becomes clear in the "Kiva Store", where gifts made by Kiva borrowers are on sale; partially funding the platform. The Kiva Store is established with one of Kiva's "trusted field partners" who has been "working directly with artisans in Asia, Africa and Latin America since 1999".[103] Particularly through this store, its visuals, and its products, the notion of "folkloric difference" (with, generally, the Global South) as discussed above is made part of the self-realisation of Kiva users and other consumers. Consumers can "build your own donation gift set" and "meet the artist" through an extensive profile of the entrepreneurs that sell the goods. The supposed connection between Western consumers and "artisan producers" is emphasised by presenting the life stories of the producers. According to the Kiva store, the connection is made possible through a "unique infrastructure enabling purchases to go from the country of origin directly to the consumer". Here what bell hooks calls the "desires for the 'primitive' or fantasies about the Other" (2014, 45) can play out, as the appropriation of Otherness is paired with an emphasis on simplicity, authenticity and artisanal quality. This can be recognised in the visual and written emphasis on handiwork, with pictures showcasing modest workshops and craft, as well as in the store headline that states that consumers can "Shop unique gifts, handmade by Kiva borrowers; Support small businesses worldwide." Here, notions of uniqueness, handmade quality, and small business present an integrated narrative where, following Prasse-Freeman's words on practices of microlending, a "small-is-beautiful" discourse is made into a "petit bourgeois fantasy" of development (2017). This construction, which combines smallness, craft, and Otherness, is presented as a way for consumers and lenders to achieve self-actualisation and form a connection with "inspiring borrowers" and "artisan producers" – or, to "meet the artist".

Such self-actualisation is shaped by discourses of impact-making on the side of lenders. According to Kiva, "it's people like you that are really changing the world, one dollar at a time!". Yet, while impact-making is a rather generally appealed to in humanitarian communication, Kiva represents such impact through a recurring cycle where the gratification of impact is perpetuated – just in line with the "multi-fold impact" of girl-oriented appeals. Kiva's iconography, which centres on piggy banks, investment symbols, and particularly repayment cycles (the latter being present in all three sets visible below), illustrates the long-lasting and recurrent effects of wise financial decisions.

[103] See: https://store.kiva.org/about/



Three sets of icons used at Kiva. The first are mainly used as a fact-sheet emphasizing impact, the second as a flow-chart that guides users through the lending process, whereas in the third icons are used to represent the characteristics of the platform through a story about "what makes us unique"

The cycle of lending and relending after repayment is presented as Kiva's "most popular feature", where in one newsletter a user states that she is "constantly blown away by the impact from the same $25". When compared to "one-time donations", the market is presented as a more sustainable model for development due to its perpetual cycle of investments – where the opportunity for lenders to relend their money is extended to borrowers through stable "financial equity and access to the resources". In this setup, getting repaid is also evidence of success and impact, demonstrating the success of Kiva's general model that they term the "recycling effect", as well as in terms of the reliability and success of borrowers. As a result, the platform highlights the 96% repayment rate across its website as a testimony of its ways of working. This means that for users, the possibility of being reimbursed is portrayed as an occasion to celebrate their impact and as an opportunity to once again go through the experience of lending their money "to another inspiring borrower!".

Whereas Kiva presents the previously discussed gratifications (choice, inspiration, and perpetuation) as being characterised by the market-oriented rationale of "connective capital", the notion of community is more broadly addressed in terms of its general platformed logic. As Black discusses, Kiva seeks to create "robust feelings of community" (2009, 269) and enables new modes of "feeling global" (*ibid*, 270). In one of its newsletters, Kiva tells the story of Rebecca who began lending money at the age of six years old. Now, at the age of fifteen, she remarks "[I was] beginning to see myself as a global citizen with a responsibility to take the many advantages that I was randomly born into...and use them to empower people around the world". With this quote being emphasized, the newsletter highlights Rebecca as an example for others to follow, not in the least because "she has founded several Kiva lending teams". The lending teams are self-organised groups, facilitated on the platform, where lenders can "rally around shared lending goals".[104] The teams are a popular feature of Kiva, ranging from only a few

[104] See: https://www.kiva.org/teams

members to teams of more than 100.000 lenders. These can be organised on a national level (Team Canada), around companies (Visa Empowerers), religion (Kiva Christians), lifestyle (Nerdfighters), civil society groups (LGBTQIA Kivans & Friends), and more casual common interests. When browsing the different teams (which is the default way of finding out about them) users get acquainted with the teams through an answer to the question "we loan because", which each team is required to answer. Apart from a name, an avatar and a few statistics, this sentence stands out for all the teams, where teams generally reaffirm Kiva's mission and goals with a particular emphasis on community: "It's a lot of fun to contribute to the community of life"; "collectively we can positively impact social change"; "We believe in the generosity of the human spirit"; "we believe in the power of mobilizing our people, expertise, resources, and community"; "We care"; "our combined efforts through Kiva will help make this world a much better place"; "We are all ONE and the SAME". Particularly, the teams emphasise how and where their knowledge or experiences run parallel to Kiva's aims, or to potential borrowers' experiences. They mention their "roots as a startup" to demonstrate their understanding of starting a business; make note of their understanding because "[a]s travelers we have seen poverty first hand"; refer to their own disadvantaged background to emphasise that they "know what it is like to face barriers"; or refer to their religion to underscore the command to "Love one another". As such, the platforms' affordances nurture shared experiences by allowing users to feel part of a global community of entrepreneurs.

The gratifications involved in connective capital position the market as a mode of power-neutral connectivity, where borrowers can freely choose and self-actualise, lend, and relend, make "impact", and be feel a "global citizen". In light of this, the market is re-envisioned as a platform, for capital, goods and stories, as well as for more fleeting constructions like identities and inspiration. The market is positioned as a flat, utopian space where these can circulate freely, uninterruptedly, and apolitically.

Conclusions

In addition to the microlending platform at Kiva.org, three Kiva programmes are developed under the heading of "Kiva Global". First, Kiva Protocol aims for a "digital infrastructure for inclusive financial systems". Second, Kiva Capital focuses on "impact investments for financial inclusion". These two side projects exemplify the two aspects of Kiva's platform discussed above (networked technologies and the marketplace). Yet, the third is the most illustrative programme because it aims for "practicing and promoting new approaches to social impact measurement, technology, and impact investing". Thus, Kiva Labs (as it is called) is about innovations in long-term development. Here, the ideal of platforms as an expression of a "new" approach to development is highlighted and contrasted with traditional development. Kiva's platformed development reflects a mode of development that seeks to be human-sized and as far removed from anything that could be described as political. The human scale of individualised connectedness and community-oriented sociability can be read as a statement in response to the history of

development and the burdening associations with rigidly planned programmes and economic adjustments. Kiva's presence and self-representation is a statement in that it aims to "rethink how we give" – up to a point where the platform positions itself outside of the 'system' of development. Kiva is presented as a utopian platform in the sense that it seeks to reconfigure existing development discourse to establish itself as the panacea for (what is perceived as) decades of stranded intentions and hopes in development work. It would, however, be more fitting to understand Kiva as an illustrative example of the changes in development discourse over the last two decades.

These changes in development discourse, from a "modernisation paradigm" to "empowerment", represent a broad, cultural transition in long-term development. With the introduction of the notion empowerment (as a term, but also more broadly as an approach to development at large), development discourse is enhanced with conspicuous self-critical reflexivity. The approach is recurrently and self-reflexively introduced as a novelty and a fundamental change to development. As such, and in line with the reflexivity highlighted in the study of the codes of conduct, the empowerment discourse not only displaces the modernity paradigm, but it also conspicuously sheds off associations with the kind of top-down rationale and socially engineered approach that the modernity paradigm implies. As a "key concept in contemporary development discourse", empowerment, according to Calves, followed from a general "rejection of the asymmetrical principal of technology transfer, and of 'top-down' planning, information flow, and decision-making" (2009, 737). As in the previous chapter it was highlighted that The Girl Effect explicitly ruled out "internet", "science", "government" and "money" as unexpected solutions for the (failure of) development, it aimed to present a viable alternative to the known and tried development paradigms. By presenting "a girl", and by extension a person or an individual, as the solution and offering an alternative to impersonal development "programmes", The Girl Effect and other girls-focused campaigns that have followed it give development the much-desired human face. These campaigns can be seen as illustrative of the empowerment discourse and a prelude to an approach to development in which microlending and Kiva flourish.

Critically, two changes are proposed in the development discourse, both of which can be considered critiques on the modernization paradigm. First there is the emphasis on a "human face" in development, wherein cold and impersonal economic "adjustments" are supposedly side-lined in favour of human stories, human-sized programmes, and (in extension of the former chapter) dignified representations instead of victimisation. Second, but closely related, is the implied subversion of top-down, rigidly planned, and hierarchical development into a bottom-up, egalitarian, and organically organised mode of development. Rather than structurally challenging power-structures in development (discourse), however, the empowerment paradigm tends to side-line politics through a utopian discourse centred on the values it appropriates: personalisation, egalitarian hopes, and flywheels of community-led change. To put it another way, the paradigm expressed in

Kiva and the girl-oriented campaigns reasons from a utopian perspective where organically structured, small-sized, and bottom-up empowered change is celebrated in the presumed power-neutral environment that it envisions. Rather than confronting a power-struggle head-on, contemporary interpretations of empowerment are not politically oriented, but rather built on fantasies of a world in which politics do not exist.

This is in line with the main critiques regarding the appropriation of the term empowerment itself. Here, it is noted that in its early theorisations, "empowerment comes from marginalized people themselves; it is not something that can be bestowed upon them by those who hold more power" (Riddle 2018, 172).[105] Yet, as various authors contend in their (mostly historical) analyses of how empowerment is employed in development discourse, the latter is precisely how empowerment has been taken up (Wong 2003; Calvès 2009; Riddle 2018). Empowerment came to be 'bestowed upon', rather than self-directed. As such, empowerment came to function as "a concept at the service of the status quo" (Calvès 2009, 746) as "the once-radical nature of empowerment was essentially co-opted by large development institutions" (Riddle 2018, 173). Accordingly, the empowerment discourse does not function to (radically) challenge development discourse – in spite of the proposal of the Girl Effect to give the world "a kick in the pants" and Kiva's proposals to "rethink" development.

The ideal of a power-free world is projected onto an ideal of platforms, whether they take the shape of networked connectivity facilitated through digital technology or that of open markets facilitated through financial services. Particularly the latter has received an abundance of convincing critiques, both in regard to microlending in general and Kiva in particular. Kiva, according to several authors, is part of "an ideology that the solution to poverty is the integration of the poor into market relations" (Prentice 2017, 201), and of a process of "framing of poverty in financial terms" (Schwittay 2014, 509). Given the broad range of neoliberal critiques available in the field (Karim 2008; Bateman 2010; Carr et al. 2016; Prasse-Freeman 2017), this aspect is mostly bypassed in the analysis above in favour of a derived critique on the depoliticised utopianism of markets as platforms – in extension of networked technologies. However, particularly the ideal of egalitarianism through "partnerships of mutual dignity" on the platform are emblematic for a discourse of empowerment, agency, and self-reliance that spearheads a neoliberal utopia in which poverty can be overcome through entrepreneurialism. Less optimistic accounts of the rise of self-reliance point to the precariousness associated with debt and labour in the

[105] Patricia Hill Collins for instance clearly underlines how empowerment should be self-directed. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, she writes that "self-definition is key to individual and group empowerment, ceding the power of self-definition to other groups, no matter how well-meaning or supportive of Black women they may be, in essence replicates existing power hierarchies" (2000, 36).

neoliberal market. Indeed, the parallels between ascribing both 'agency' (the ability to act) and 'self-reliance' (the imperative to take care of oneself) to vulnerable others are paramount. This draws attention to a more general tendency that is part of the discourse of development in the last two decades: the imperative of self-reliance and individual responsibility or liability in a market system. In providing individual loans that are to be refunded, Kiva reflects this tendency because, according to Rebecca Prentice, the "empowerment of the microloan recipient is encapsulated in the *neo*liberal disposition of the self-regulating citizen-subject: entrepreneurial, adaptive and self-reliant" (Prentice 2017, 201).

As such, the empowerment discourse in development is caught between an appeal to revolutionary revisions in the practice of development (or even, to an outsider's position, as "non-development" in the case of Kiva) and a position that upholds the status quo. It amounts to Dey and Steyaert's "grand narrative of harmonious social change" (Dey and Steyaert 2010) that is being attributed to social entrepreneurship in general and microlending in particular. This narrative appeals to both a revolutionary rhetoric that upends established practises, and to a harmonious, smooth transition that is inspiring rather than unsettling. Kiva does so by tapping into characteristics usually attributed to platforms – as flexible, organically structured, non-institutional, power-neutral, bottom-up enhancing modes of organisation. These characteristics are presented as an alternative to traditional development, particularly in proposing that "connectivity" can right the wrongs of development under the modernisation paradigm of the Washington consensus.

It is therefore hard to understand Kiva's power-neutral appearance and its utopian appeal to platformed development without considering how this approach is shaped by the historical context of the post-Washington consensus of adjustments with a human face. Whereas the proposal of "adjustments with a human face", which is regarded as a "turning point in development thinking" (Jolly 2012), Kiva builds on changing sentiments in development discourse and presents a platformed logic, and by extension itself, as a mode of development where "the human" can thrive. Here, particularly important are the claims to universalism, where the celebration of universal connectedness is caught in terms of "dreams", an entrepreneurial spirit, "connected capital", and images and icons of globes and world maps, where lenders feel like "global citizens" and lending teams that emphasise that we are "ONE and the SAME". Different academic sources refer to this as "feeling global" (Black 2009), Kiva's "flat world" (Carr et al. 2016), and to the financialization of poverty and "its universal definition as a common condition shared by poor peoples all over the world" (Schwittay 2014, 510). It is these universalisms that are being projected onto the "connectivity" that Kiva proposes and facilitates, in which a dispersed range of actors, small businesses, and limited capital flows are contrasted with institutionalism associated with international development. Instead of presuming that the story of humanity is part of an ideological "grand narrative" of solidarity, Kiva illustrates common humanity as a dispersed but thoroughly connected identity. In this sense Kiva

presents markets and technology as quick fixes to reorganise an otherwise scattered human community as a connected common humanity.

CHAPTER 5: CONFLICT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

"Africa. This is where humans originated". The official film trailer of *We Come as Friends* (Sauper, 2014) points to Africa as the mythical place where the roots of humankind can be found and where it all began. The establishing shot that situates the story as indeed taking place on the African continent, is shot from a small propeller plane (the sort of plane that became part of the iconography associated with Africa), showing woods and plains. Introducing these lands as a place of humanity's origins puts a firm emphasis on the category of 'the human' as an entity that is intimately connected to the continent. The human (by being retraceable to the African continent) potentially finds its 'true' essence here. The voice-over then continues. "Much later, it was discovered, over and over, and enslaved, and dispossessed and colonized". These words are accompanied by ominous sound effects, jittery camera movements, low-key lighted shots of women and children huddled together, and shots of sandstorms and weapons: the mood is set as being menacing and violent. In this short segment of only 30 seconds, Africa is being introduced as a place of both human origin and human distress.

The idea of human essence and roots reflects the naturalist discourse of human rights in which human rights are considered as an intrinsic part of being human. They exist *prior* to judicial agreement and can thus "exist independently of social recognition, even though recognition is preferable" (Dembour 2010, 3). In this conceptualisation, there is no place for contingency, and tracing its origins means to look for the origins of humankind. This 'naturalist' or 'orthodox' approach to human rights (that, according to Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, is the most common approach; 2010, 3) holds that human rights (universally) originate in what it means to be a human being. Therefore, this chapter will once more begin with the concept of common humanity – with the myth of human 'origin', and the orthodox understanding of human rights as a straightforward, singular narrative. Yet, *We Come as Friends* focuses on conflict and human rights, a topic that builds on aesthetics and platforms different from those present in emergency relief and development as discussed before. In the context of conflict and human rights, common humanity is challenged in its own ways: here, the naturalist narrative of humanity is accompanied by the messy, everyday reality in which human rights appeal to a range of different meanings. The focus employed in this chapter thus sheds light on how the singularity of common humanity is complicated by a tendency of diversification as "different justifications of human rights inevitably lead to a certain variation in content" (Benhabib 2011, 60) with regards to what human rights exactly entail.

In the orthodox understanding, human rights are retraceable to "the human" and a range of inalienable rights associated with it. This allows for discursive clarity, singularity, and stability that, according to Samuel Moyn, made it the Last Utopia of "grand narratives" (Moyn 2012, 9). At the same time, however, human rights have come to function as an umbrella term that unites a broad range of social struggles and movements. Human rights are invoked in different contexts and uses, and in relation to (mainly)

politically progressive causes, ranging from LGBTQ+ to religious rights, from access to education and housing to freedom of speech and the right to protest, and from local issues to geopolitics and international relations. As such, the "human identity" that underpins human rights allows for a number of different (and sometimes contradictory) understandings (Benhabib 2011), making it possible for various movements for justice and rights to unite under the banner of human rights. Human rights are, in short, defined by both singularity and multiplicity, which is why in this chapter platforms of heterogeneity will take centre stage: human rights film festivals. Festivals, generally, allow for heterogeneity in content and form (with a range of different cultural texts being programmed side by side), while also being coherent in relation to a theme or identity and closed off in terms of time and space (that is, with regard to venue(s) and duration). Human rights film festivals therefore allow for a heterogeneous understanding of what human rights entail, while simultaneously uniting these various narratives under the flag of these same human rights. This means that other than combatting disintegration (as was highlighted in the domain of disaster relief) or repurposing and modifying it (as was discussed with regard to long-term development), the domain of human rights mostly moves along with the disintegrated cultural landscape of post-humanitarianism. It will be argued that human rights film festivals do not so much adapt to post-humanitarianism, but that they rather exemplify its dispersed and open-ended character.

The festivals showcase multiplicity and heterogeneity in several ways. In their programming and setup, they are assemblages of different styles and genres, as they programme documentaries, fictional narratives, shorts, animations, and films in other categories. In addition, different media forms are employed to further diversify the programming. For instance, the venues provide space for art installations, photo-exhibitions, virtual reality and other sensory experiences, while in some instances, the festival experience is dispersed over a range of different locations and public spaces. In these various formats, a multiplicity of audiences is catered to, including experts, activists, journalists, humanitarian practitioners, as well as the general public. As Q&As, discussions, lectures, and network events are programmed on-site, in addition to the educational and networking initiatives beyond the initial festival contexts, these different audiences are brought together in various combinations by attending activities that go beyond mere film screenings. The festivals themselves can therefore be theorised as platforms (as was done previously in Tascón and Wills' *Activist Film Festivals* (2017)), which showcases human rights through a broad range of cultural texts to enable and enhance its heterogeneity. The different styles, media forms, audiences and activities while thus be studied here to get a grasp of how the heterogeneity of human rights is embedded in the festival form. For this, the Human Rights Film Network (HRFF) will be the primary case study, as the network is a primary site of cooperation between a vast range of human rights film festivals.

We Come as Friends was screened at various human rights film festivals, including One World (in Prague), Docudays UA (Kiev), Movies that Matter (The Hague), and the Human Rights Arts & Film Festival (Melbourne). Many of the programming leaflets cited the film's official synopsis to introduce *We Come as Friends* as a "cinematic endeavour". Indeed, the film appeals to cinematic qualities, as the review in the *New York Times* references a "sort of angled aerial footage that you might associate with 'Apocalypse Now'". The review continues in visual language, emphasising the documentary's cinematic qualities: "With an eye for landscapes stunning and hellish, [Sauper] is the rare documentary filmmaker who not only takes on tough subjects but also explores them with a vivid visual and aural approach" (Kenigsberg 2015). In a similar way, *Variety* notes that "'We Come as Friends' is often beautifully photographed, which serves to make the horror even more pronounced" (R. Nelson 2014), whereas *The Intercept* headlines about a "beautiful nightmare" after which the film is described as "an improbable, cinematic magical mystery tour of a documentary" (Turse 2015). This illustrates how, despite the fact that human rights film festivals frequently screen films with lower production values, cinematic aesthetics have started to play a significant role in human rights discourse. The high production values and cinematic imagery of the film makes *We Come as Friends* stand out as a form of humanitarian communication that differs from more conventional spots, appeals, and campaigns. Therefore, and to understand how film festivals became a cultural form where human rights discourse can thrive, aesthetics should be understood in conjunction with the festival as a cultural form. The contextualization of this chapter thus consists of two parts: one on how cinematic aesthetics and storytelling are embedded in traditional appeals in the domain of conflict and human rights, and the other on festivals as cultural forms and the emergence of human rights film festivals as a particular subgenre.

For the former, it is important to recognise that visualising human rights has proven to be notoriously difficult. In fact, Sharon Sliwinski comes to the conclusion that when considering either written or visual accounts, different points of origin for human rights discourse should be chosen (she chooses to alternate the declarations associated with the French and American revolution with the visual accounts of the Lisbon 1755 earthquake). Written accounts of human rights, Sliwinski notes, were mainly endowed with 'self-evidence' when it comes to the rights and dignity of the 'human subject' (aligned with a somewhat naturalist approach as described by Dembour, where humans in their very nature are invested with a priori and inalienable rights). Yet, on the other hand, Sliwinski states that "the visual images that have historically inspired human rights discourse show a world rife with disaster and atrocity" (2009, 24). As such, visual discourse departs from a more naturalist account of human rights, which permits a more scattered understanding of what human rights exactly entail – precisely the diffuse understanding that can be accounted for in the heterogeneous form of a festival.

With respect to the festival as a cultural form, it will be outlined that the cross-over character of human rights film festivals integrates the complex "issue networks" (Marres

2006) that usually surround human rights issues. These issues (specific human rights violations addressed in a particular film, or certain themes addressed in, for instance, programming or debates) function as nodes in networks, around which people, organisations, and meanings assemble. As such, they create conjunctures, described as "relatively durable assemblies (...) around specific social projects" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002, 22). The argument to be unpacked here is that human rights film festivals function as platforms of heterogeneity, holding together a range of different "issues" or "nodes" in an ever-shifting conjuncture of human rights discourse. Similar to the previous chapters, which discussed how the work of NGOs is shaped by platformed organisational structures, this chapter addresses how film festivals are an appealing cultural form for NGOs to reach out to their publics.

This goal of engaging the audience through human rights film festivals is however distinct from the kinds of appeals and campaigns discussed in earlier chapters. In these earlier cases (disaster relief campaigns, the imagery of development appeals, and a microlending platform), the case material invited its audience to donate to a particular cause. In contrast, human right film festivals are not in the business of fundraising. Instead, they serve to set the agenda of public debate, engage and connect the audience, and draw attention to particular cases of human rights (abuse). This distinction between fundraising and engagement is addressed by Luc Boltanski, who states that, in response to distant suffering, "two forms of action are envisaged: paying and speaking" (1999, 17). The latter of the two generally represents the aim of human rights film festivals to publicly discuss human rights and speak out about violations. The festival form is a valuable site for such discussions, as Boltanski rightly observes that speaking has to entail more than simply sending the sufferer "the good word". Instead, he notes that "[f]or speech to reduce the unfortunate's suffering, and for it to be regarded thereby as a form of action, in the sense that 'speaking is acting', a different kind of instrument is needed: public opinion engaging directly with political institutions" (*ibid*, 18). Indeed, Anne Vestergaard notices that this is what sets the communications of Amnesty International (one of the organisations more elaborately addressed further on) apart from other types of humanitarian communication. She notes that "Contrary to aid organizations, whose communication with the public is primarily concerned with raising funds for disaster relief and whose practices are typically based on a principle of impartiality, the purpose of Amnesty International is the protection of human rights that is, social change" (2008, 473). This chapter will make the case that film festivals are sites that are very well-tailored to showcasing, channelling, and building such public engagement. They do so in multifold ways, as the lines between audiences and journalists, opinion makers, NGOs and other institutions are short: the different actors are present at the festivals, and interaction is emphasised in Q&A's, debates and network meetings. In this sense, the setup of film festivals emphasises that speech is made meaningful by giving the public access to the formation of issue networks: "the open-ended alliances formed by NGOs working on common social, environmental, and humanitarian issues" (Marres 2006, 5).

The theme "conflict and human rights" can, at least for analytical purposes, be separated from disaster relief campaigns and long-term development appeals. This will be further explicated upon by addressing the already mentioned aesthetics of conflict and human rights related appeals, by means of an overview of campaigns by Amnesty International, the International Committee of the Red Cross and War Child. The use of visual spectacle, (fictional) storytelling, and immersion in these campaigns deviates from regular appeals and can be considered similar to the kind of the "vivid visual" style of *We Come as Friends*. After addressing the role of cinematic imagery, the emergence of festival culture will be shortly explored as another explanation of the active role that human rights NGOs have taken in founding or supporting human rights film festivals. The proliferation of the now vast range of human rights film festivals will addressed before going into the role of the Human Rights Film Network (HRFN) as which a knowledge and support platform for human rights film festivals. As meeting places for people and organisations, the festivals themselves and the Human Rights Film Network function as the conjuncture through which human rights discourse is debated and (re)negotiated. As was the case in the previous three chapters, the stories and discourses upheld and distributed throughout the networks closely mirror their setup. In this instance, this means that the eclecticism that is inherent in festival culture[106] is illustrative of the range of actors playing their part on the platform. While disaster relief platforms are focused on their integrative aims and near-monopolies of defining the narrative of certain disasters, and long-term development platforms are largely centred around internal values of introspection and legitimacy, the human rights film festivals are harder to pin down, both by definition and, it could be argued, on purpose.

After this, the networking function of the HRFN will be studied through an exploration of their organisational structure and aim, as well as through an analysis of their handbook on *Setting up a Human Rights Film Festival*, which has been published in two editions (Porybná 2009d; Kulhánková et al. 2015). Ultimately, the work done by the HRFN and the festivals themselves manifests itself in a variety of cultural texts assemblages in a more or less coherent programme that is constructed around the discourse of human rights. Both the networking function of the HRFN and the programming work done by the festivals themselves comes down to assembling actors and cultural texts around the theme of human rights, in various capacities, contexts, and around different topics and issue networks. The film festival's function as a platform of

[106] The eclecticism that can be found in festivals is part of their very setup as "the possibilities for cultural aggregation are great within festivals, and this is part of their attraction for both producers and consumers: the opportunity to coalesce, play together, find synergies and enrol different consumers, experiences and cultural tastes" (Bennett and Woodward 2014, 12). At the very same time however, festivals can be rather specific, niche and therefore focussed on a strictly demarcated audience, subject or style (*ibid*). Both aspects hold true for human rights film festivals, which are specifically constructed around human rights discourse and (art-house) cinema culture, while the range of actors assembling around a variety of causes and issues is vast and diverse.

heterogeneity can be witnessed particularly in such strategies of assemblage: it serves as a venue where different meanings can be attached to human rights. As a result, the tensions between the purported universalism of human rights and the eclecticism of film festivals present a useful final case study to explore the strain between common humanity and disintegration, which lies the heart of this dissertation. Therefore, both the festivals themselves and the HRFN will once more be interpreted as platforms – this time, platforms that circulate the heterogeneous (visual) discourse of human rights.

Context: Conflict and human rights campaigns and cinematic storytelling

This chapter will discuss 'conflict and human rights' as a separate 'genre' in humanitarian communication. This is based at least partially on the specificities of the "aesthetics of human rights" (Sliwinski 2009). While the difference between short-term disaster relief and long-term development cooperation has been commonplace in numerous analyses and categorizations by professionals and academics alike (Barnett 2011; Dogra 2013),[107] addressing 'conflict and human rights' as a specific form of humanitarian communication is not self-evident – and, as any categorisation, not unproblematic. Although it is obvious that the categories reflect a certain reality (institutionally, in developmental work on the ground, and with regard to representation), this reality is messy and fluid. Hence, the categorisation used here serves an analytical purpose for now. The purpose of singling out campaigns regarding conflict and human rights lies in the argument made here, that the complexity of the aesthetics of human rights make it an ideal inroad to more unconventional and innovative ways of campaigning. With respect to the aesthetics and cultural form, this entails the use of fiction, drama, and spectacle, which is facilitated by the use of technological advancements such as special effects, virtual reality, and (video)games. Even though NGOs that concentrate on conflict and human rights are not unique in the use of such styles and techniques and are not the sole drivers of their uptake, the cross-over aesthetic is notably common when trying to distinguish a category like 'conflict and human rights' in humanitarian communication.

Wendy Hesford examines this cross-over of a visually striking style and creative multimedia storytelling in her book on the visual rhetoric of human rights. Here, she coins the "term *spectacular rhetoric* to highlight the visual rhetoric of human rights, of which

[107] Barnett notes a central distinction between two branches of humanitarianism that have dominated thought and practice and that "for much of humanitarianism's history (…) had parallel lives" (2011, 10). The first, the 'emergency branch', focuses on symptoms. It has "reigned supreme and its definition of humanitarianism was the industry standard" (*ibid*). The second, the 'alchemical branch', adds the ambition of removing the root causes of suffering. Those in the latter branch tend "to avoid the discourse of humanitarianism in favor of the discourses of relief and development" (*ibid*). Nonetheless, according to Nandita Dogra, it is possible to witness a "blurring of lines (…) between the themes of disaster and development, with many images falling in more than one category" (2013, 29). Dogra therefore at some point distinguishes three types of campaigns, in a way that most looks like the distinction made here. She shortly mentions: "three types of messages – disaster ('negative'), development ('positive') and advocacy" (2013, 159).

the spectacle is only a part, and to accommodate audio-visual and mixed-media forms and rhetorical techniques (...) that are used in speech and writing to convey experiences of vision" (2011, 8). Such spectacular rhetoric is highlighted in the overview of campaigns run by Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and War Child, where spectacular, cinematic representations of human rights violations are part of a broader turn to cross-media aesthetics in, for instance, games and magazines. A range of much debated, prominent campaigns have been discussed in the analysis, with a focus on instances where those campaigns made references to other media like movies, video games, and magazines. The selected case studies come from three leading conflict and human rights organisations, and they are indicative of how organisations like these rely on spectacular, immersive, and compelling storytelling techniques. Leshu Torchin, in her work on human rights and visual culture, cites a comparable example and emphasises how, in describing its goals and working methods, Amnesty International employs "metaphors of extended visuality, suggestive of visual media technologies" (2011, 2) – which, as we will see, is extensively done in a broad spectrum of human rights appeals generally. The aim of the analysis below is therefore to highlight how spectacle, visual culture, and visual technology have shaped human rights-related appeals and how this explains the productive merger of human rights discourse and film festivals.

In addition to aesthetic differences between human rights and humanitarianism, the focus on cinematic storytelling also entails the narrative characteristics that sets apart these kinds of campaigns. The domain of storytelling is as messy as the aesthetic one, but also here some general distinctions can be made – mainly with regard to the role and representation of different actors. In their assessment of how "human rights and humanitarianism are historically distinct", Wilson and Barnes (2008, 7) address "the antipathy of human rights activists to the language of humanitarianism" (*ibid*, 9). According to Wilson and Brown, the wariness of humanitarian discourse comes down to the idea that "beneficiaries of humanitarian aid are more likely to appear as passive recipients" in comparison to "self-directed individuals vigorously pursuing their claims, immunities, privileges, and liberties" in the domain of human rights (*ibid*). It leads them to the conclusion that human rights narratives are less likely to be depoliticised. This point is echoed and refined in Kate Nash's analysis of human rights films, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of victims of human rights violations. Nash introduces what she calls the "atrocity triangle" in relation to the narrative structure of the films, outlining how they usually feature a victim, a witness, and a perpetrator (396). This triangular setup differs noticeably from the straightforward setup of agents in humanitarian communication, which minimally requires a fortunate spectator and an unfortunate other, but not necessarily a perpetrator (Boltanski 1999, 3).[108] This generally denotes

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[108] The difference between the two actors of Boltanski's approach (a more general approach to distant or mediated suffering) and Nash's triangular set-up can be explained rather easily by pointing to the fact that Boltanski's approach is shaped by his theoretical elaboration on a "politics of pity": a politics that is invoked by considerations of misfortune rather than of justice, where the focus lies with "the action

complexified and politicised narratives, which are evident in the campaigns examined below as they deal with moral dilemmas in which none of the choices are ideal, as well as narratives of shifting allegiance, surprise and perspective. In what follows, these narratives will become part of the exploration of how the different campaigns are intertextual, cinematic, and immersive, with an emphasis on the stylistically rich spectacle of the imagery used. This is part of the unfolding argument presented in this chapter, which is that human rights NGOs and their campaigning strategies are an important side to look at for innovative and alternative modes of storytelling, coalition building, and distribution networks.

~ Amnesty International: cross-media excess

The cross-media aesthetics surface when looking at various notable campaigns by, for instance, Amnesty International, such as the *Bullet: The Execution* (AI France), *Glamoria* (AI The Netherlands), and *See What You Can Do* (AI Denmark). *Bullet: The Execution* is a video that received a Golden Lion at the Cannes Festival in ad productions in 2007 and makes extensive use of (ultra)slow motion to depict numerous petition sheets that prevent a bullet from reaching its target in a manner reminiscent of *The Matrix's* bullet time effect. Emphasising the idea that each signature on the petition makes a difference when they are combined, the spot relies on special effects to visualise the symbolic importance of 'mere signatures' for a petition. Here, the effect concretises what cannot be concretised, namely the assumed indirect effect of signing a petition, in a way that is clearly not realistic (in terms of the scene being played out), while the slow motion technique aesthetically implicates coming as close to (this fictional) reality as possible. In her (more elaborate) analysis of the appeal, Chouliaraki indeed highlights the spot's exaggerated realism, or hyper-realism, that results in "a perfected sense of the real that can only be fictional" (2013, 67). Unlike the lauded *Bullet: The Execution* campaign, the Dutch *Glamoria* mock lifestyle magazine garnered mostly unfavourable feedback for its innovative aesthetics. The magazine's aim was to raise awareness about the situation in the Moria refugee camp in a confronting style, by presenting this message in the form of lifestyle glossy – to be recognised in a layout with abundant spacing, saturated colours, sans-serif typefaces, page-filling images, printed on thick, glossy paper and of course article types. The stark contrast between form and content, where a glossy does not appear to be naturally appropriate for conveying information on the suffering in refugee camps, explicitly highlights the role of

needing to be taken to bring an end to the suffering" (Boltanski 1999, 5) rather than with considerations of how rights can be maintained, justice can be secured and how the suffering came into being in the first place. This approach can quite generally be aligned with the former two chapters, on disaster relief (where the cause of the suffering is mainly thought to be 'natural' or simply a case of 'bad luck') or long-term development (where economic injustice is sometimes brought to the fore, but commonly too abstract or intricate to be directly addressed). In this sense, the introduction of a perpetrator (either as a person, or as an organization of even a 'process') means to highlight the political aspects to humanitarianism more explicitly.

medium and style as part of its mockery of consumerism, glamour, and what has come to be known as 'first world problems'. Regarding contents, typical glossy-like sections and articles are used. A fictional advertisement promotes a padlock that can be used to lock toilet doors to prevent rape; a celebrity interview contrasts the hardship in the camp with trivial struggles in the life of the interviewee; and the circumstances in the camp during a cold winter are addressed under the heading "top five winter must haves". What was supposed to be 'confrontational' stylistic choice was being read as "harsh cynicism" by the Dutch broadsheet newspaper *De Volkskrant* (Onkenhout 2018). The magazine's cover received some particularly harsh criticism for depicting a woman of colour sensually lying on a bed of life jackets, an obvious homage to the iconic depiction of Mena Suvari in *American Beauty*.[109] Following these critiques, the cover was retracted (Ratcliffe 2018).

Not only do the two iconic film references (to *The Matrix* and *American Beauty*) highlight the cross-over aesthetics in these two examples, but so does the use of hyper-realism or parody to point to the mimicking of existing media genres and the intertextual exploration of forms and styles not usually deemed fit for humanitarian campaigns. In a more elaborate exploration of Amnesty International's *See What You Can Do* Campaign, Anne Vestergaard emphasises a similar tendency.[110] As she points out, the campaign is eclectic in form and style, taking a different approach than aid campaigns: "Rather than using a traditional documentary appeal, where people in need are exemplified and the audience is urged to make a donation, this spot is composed as a collage of fictional moving images drawing on a blend of the genres of advertising, news and horror film, tied together by a voiceover in the style of reporter commentary" (475). This 'blend' of genres, and more broadly the use and referencing of different media forms and styles, is important because it reflects the intention to immerse an audience in the narratives and 'realities' of conflict and human rights. For this, the campaigns heavily rely on narrative cinema and games, as demonstrated in campaigns by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and War Child.

~ International Committee of the Red Cross: narratives of choice

In her analysis of *See What You can Do*, Vestergaard outlines how Amnesty International proposes a range of simple statements on how they protect human rights, noting that in the video "their mission is as simple and straightforward as their syntax" (Vestergaard 2008, 485). In various campaigns, such straightforward simplicity is derived from the judicial aspects of human rights – because they are considered laws, they are non-negotiable by definition. This is, for instance, the case in ICRC's *The Rules of War*, a short and animated video that explains how human rights are applied in the context of war,

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[109] An open letter by Alexia Pepper de Caires and Shaista Aziz details: "A woman of colour, lying alluring on a bed of life jackets, gazing into the camera as if ready for sex, semi-nude and hair spread out around her head. 'I'm here for you, ready and waiting' the image whispers, mirroring American Beauty's problematic depiction of Mena Suvari" (Pepper de Caires and Aziz 2018).
[110] As the TV spot is from 2004, I have not been able to retrace and watch the video myself.

conflict, and violence. The crucial anchor points in the video's beginning, middle and end are linked to statements about human 'nature' and history. Respectively, the video outlines that "Since the beginning, humans have resorted to violence as a way to settle disagreements" (beginning); that the "humanitarian spirit" that led to rules being imposed on war in the Geneva conventions (middle); and that human rights law is "about making choices that preserve a minimum of human dignity in times of war" (end). Here, the words 'beginning', 'spirit', and 'minimum' do not only refer back to humanity, but to a core or essential humanity that can be traced back to its very start, found in its spiritual character, or laid bare when all else is stripped away. Yet, as stated in the conclusion of the video, the ICRC emphasises that human rights and rules of war are upheld by the choices that people make.

As such, choice is a recurring theme in many ICRC campaigns, as is evident from the titles of the campaigns, such as *What Would You Choose?*, *Can One Decision Change Your Life?,* and *Choosing Humanity*. [111] The first two videos are both similarly set up. The videos appear to be focused on choice as they both present two storylines based on different decisions being made early on in the video. Yet, ultimately, the videos both surprise as the two scenarios turn out to be ultimately similar – the choice made earlier does not make a difference. Rather, the moral of the story is that the true choice to be made lies in whether the human rights are respected in the first place. Interestingly, the videos present decisions that make common humanity the rule, which in the end does not depend on how the different scenarios unfold, but rather on the transgression of the boundaries of human rights. In *What Would You Choose?* two friends are standing on a beach, where one asks the question: "If a nuclear bomb were to explode right now, what would you choose? Live or die?". The other friend's facial expression indicates that the decision is fairly straightforward: "Live". What follows is human life in a nutshell, embedded in the experience of the everyday, as he explains why he would never choose to not to live. "I'd never see my family again. I'd miss the sun on my face. I'd never eat my favourite food again. Never travel. Never be in Love. I wouldn't… live". Here, some of the most recurring themes in the discourse of common humanity are listed under the caption of 'human life': family, nature, food, the world, love. The unexpected twist in the video occurs when the other friend is asked the same question. "Die. Because, if I survive… I wouldn't be able to a lot of things again". What follows is the exact same enumeration: "I'd never see my family again…", and so forth. "I wouldn't… live". In short, the ICRC presents a story where the difference of life and death is rendered unimportant in a

[111] For *What would you choose*, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-IxaeP4Zus. For *Can one decision change your life*, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDtSk9WnuzU. For *Choosing Humanity*, see https://www.icrc.org/en/document/choosing-humanity-new-video-and-online-game-challenge-us-confront-how-numb-we-have-become-0. The latter campaign will not be discussed in detail here. *Choosing Humanity* is an aggregate of different materials produced by the ICRC, including also *Can One Decision Change Your Life?* and *The Rules of War*. Apart from this, the decision-related set-up of the campaign is most apparent in a simple quiz-like game around which the campaign is set-up.

situation where a nuclear bomb erases everything that makes life worthwhile. Important here is that in line with many of the campaigns discussed here, this campaign has high production value and relies on visual spectacle and fiction to make the video compelling. In particular, both the scenarios outlined by the two friends are illustrated by rich and vivacious imagery, which heightens the story's tension and makes it feel real and palpable. The first story is accompanied by beautiful and peaceful imagery of the one friend and his loved ones, travelling the world and eating his favourite food; the second is the polar opposite, with a range of images depicting death and destruction. While the verbal descriptions of life and death are the same, the visual emphasises that the hope for life is vain when confronted with the all-encompassing and non-discriminatory destruction of nuclear weapons – the kind of weapons that are rendered to violently touch upon all aspects of common humanity.

Similarly, *Can One Decision Change Your Life?* produces different choices ultimately useless. A boy gets up, packs his school bag, ties his younger sister's shoelaces, kisses his grandmother goodbye, is hailed by his mother as he forgot his school lunch, strokes the cat outside his house, and is patted on the head by his older brother. A peaceful scenario that is suddenly disrupted when, on the street, he is struck by an airstrike. The screen turns black. Back to the beginning: the boy gets up; the same scenario starts. A voice-over is introduced: "if this boy had packed his bag before…". Indeed, the scenario is slightly altered as the boy swings an already packed bag over his shoulder. The shoelaces do not need to be tied, that grandmother is not kissed, the lunch is not forgotten, the cat is not stroked. He leaves a little earlier and the airstrike does not hit. That is, it does not, until it does – only a few seconds later, a little closer to his school. The text on the screen reads: "This was not an accident. It was a decision. Breaking the rules of war is always the wrong decision". Once again, the subdued intimacy that gives the video a human face (zeroing in on family and food once more) does not alter the situation much. Human factors are, in short, the constant even if they are being changed. The real decision is, according to the ICRC, whether humanity is being respected, or not.

~ War Child: immersion and perspective

The theme of choice, and the choice for humanity, is most explicitly reflected in ICRC's *Choose Humanity* (also launched under the name *Don't be Numb*), a simple quiz game with questions about the rules of war. In the game, participants receive medals for choosing the right answer – that is, when choosing to respect the Geneva Conventions and when choosing humanity. The game-like setup is aimed at "younger generations with a new way of engaging with the Geneva Conventions". Whether to engage young(er) audiences or others, War Child emphasises the importance of 'imagination' as well, primarily through immersive strategies of games and cinema. For this reason, War Child regularly approaches the entertainment industry for cooperation, leading to bigger productions like an expansion pack to the game *This War of Mine* called *The Little Ones* (Mazur and Zieliński 2016). According to War Child, "*This War of Mine: The Little Ones* explores the hardships

of wartime survival as seen from an entirely new perspective — that of a child". Here, imagination and immersion are emphasised because, as the game's trailer claims, it makes the player "experience the war through children's eyes".

Building on a similar kind of experience in another campaign, War Child present a video called *Duty of Care* [112], with the name referencing one of the most successful war game franchises: *Call of Duty*. The reference to *Call of Duty* is important here since it is a first-person shooter game. This type of game is defined by its perspective, where the player takes the 'first person' perspective of the protagonist, seeing the world through its eyes and acting through its body. In *Duty of Care*, this perspective is highlighted precisely because there is no actual game to be played: it is a video. This clearly demonstrates the imitation of game aesthetics and perspectives. The immersive nature of games is highlighted by taking the viewer through several game set-up screens, for instance, selecting the location and the character for the game. The surprise effect occurs when the character is selected. Instead of two anonymous soldiers ("Soldier 1"; "Soldier 2"), a girl named Nima (whose indicated score on "aggression" is very low, while "vulnerability" is immensely high) is chosen as the character, highlighting the unique perspective of the child once more. The video then adopts a mix of styles; relying on the photorealistic appeals of handheld camera work (suggesting a documentary aesthetic) and referencing the game world in overlays with typical "game menus" monitoring the gamers status (in this case two 'bars' monitoring the level of "trauma" and "health").

In another War Child appeal, the perspective of the child is centralized once more, where the final quote of the their "Batman" appeal informs us that "For some children, fantasy is the only way to escape reality". To the soundtrack of Queen's "You're My Best Friend", this short video tells the story of a boy in a refugee camp who is surprised to find himself playing football and hide-and-seek with Batman – all in the setting of a desolate refugee camp. The boy's life is made bearable and worthwhile by the figure of Batman, who also assists him with carrying a bulky water container and who sings songs to the boy and his friends at the campfire. At the end of the video, the boy is carried around by Batman in a crowd, where the camera briefly loses sight of them before picking them up again in a constellation where the boy's father is actually (and always has been) his "best friend" – against a background of smoke plumes, worn-down, colourless tents, and dusty roads. The appeal was laureated in several competitions for advertising, creative communication, and PR.[113] Indeed, also here, the perspective of the child is central as the imagination of the boy is represented throughout the entire video, only except the final shot.

Apart from explicit film references to *The Matrix*, *American Beauty,* and *Batman*, a cinematic style and narrative can frequently be found in the appeals of conflict and human rights

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[112] See: https://www.warchild.org.uk/get-involved/gaming/game-on/gaming-campaigns.

[113] The campaign received a Golden Lion at Cannes Lions in 2017, the Silver Ciclope at the Ciclope festival in Berlin and the Bronze Lamp at the Dutch Creativity Awards.

oriented NGOs. For War Child, this even went as far as contributing to and supporting the production of a feature-length action movie set in "the heart of Africa" (to use the film trailer's words) in 2008. *Wit Licht* (Van de Velde 2008; Dutch edition) or *The Silent Army* (international edition) stars long-time War Child ambassador and Dutch celebrity Marco Borsato. He embarks on a quest to save his son's best friend who has fallen prey to an evil warlord's (who is modelled after Jospeh Kony) recruitment of child soldiers. The film's elaborate (and, frankly, unashamed) reproduction of white saviourist tropes is amplified in the genre of a classic action movie – with the explicit aim to make "a real Hollywood movie" in the Netherlands (Thielen 2009). Although the Dutch version of the film is indeed blockbuster-like in its spectacular action movie style, the film also attempted to address a more "politically engaged" (Linssen 2009) audience by distributing an international version (*The Silent Army*) of the film through various film festivals, including those in Cannes, Busan, and AFI Fest (Los Angeles). As part of the celebrations for Human Rights Day, the movie was also screened in various institutional settings, including UNESCO, the European Commission, and the UN. For *The Silent Army*, the director turned the spectacular action movie into a self-proclaimed 'art house film' by changing the soundtrack, cutting out the happy ending, and reducing the heroic leading role of Borsato.

This example, and particularly the fact that through its two versions the film similarly relies on a spectacular, blockbuster aesthetic and appeals to a politically engaged audience through film festivals and human rights institutions, brings together the "two systems of meaning" that Sonia Tascón emphasizes in the introduction to her work on human rights film festivals: "human rights and the visual" (2014, 5). In the next paragraph, it will be argued that the cross-media aesthetic of human rights visualisations, along with multi-perspective narratives that allow for complexity, fit the cultural form of the film festival. As is explored above, NGOs working in the field of conflict and human rights are keen to explore the possibilities of audio-visual storytelling. Branching out to a broad range of media and entertainment formats, magazines, cinema, and games are emulated for their style. These styles can broadly be referred to as "cinematic", but more precisely most of them are eclectic, intertextual, and well suited in the context of festivals. The next paragraph will therefore address the proliferation of human rights film festivals as platforms of heterogeneity. These are fuelled by a visual culture of spectacle, cross-media excess, and intertextual referencing, as well as immersive styles, perspectives, and narratives that go beyond the photorealism, news, and reporting of common appeals.

The visual spectacle and upfront representations of fear, loss, and hopelessness presented in the campaigns by AI, ICRC and War Child is hardly tolerated in 'regular' humanitarian campaigns, as became particularly clear in the imagery debate discussed in the third chapter. Yet, such scenes are mostly tolerated here on the basis of two (related) premises, namely that the representations are fictional and that the harsh depiction of suffering has a clear narrative function (in contrast to the 'pornography of pain' that has no meaning

except for the suffering itself). Particularly Amnesty International's *Glamoria* is a case in point, where the criticisms of the mock magazine specifically addressed the issue of whether the narrative function of the confronting (and sexualised) visuals and message could be deemed appropriate. These choices in terms of style and genre result in aesthetics that are not just bold and daring but also self-awarely so; for example, think of a magazine appropriating a glossy or a video appropriating a first-person shooter. The campaigns are in fact a testimony of what they dare to say or do and, in addition to their initial message they tell us that 'we will not look away'. As a result, innovative, immersive, cinematic styles and narratives are key to some of the conflict and human rights-related campaigns, which helps to explain, at least in part, why human rights-focused NGOs decided to found and proliferate film festivals as a particular communications outlet.

In light of the innovative and cross-media tendency in human rights aesthetics and discourse discussed above, it is not surprising that the first Amnesty International Film Festival was established in 1995 as a result of the organisation's desire to "restyle their communication tools" (Lobato and Porybná 2009, 131). From the start, the cooperation with NGOs has been defined as one of the "key pillars" for human rights film festivals (Blažević 2009a, 15). As the HRFN itself outlines, "Many festivals are associated with or have been formed by human rights organisations: Movies that Matter is a successor to the Amnesty International Film Festival, One World is attached to People in Need, the Refugee Film Festival was established through UNHCR Representation in Japan and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival was created over two decades ago by Human Rights Watch in New York City" (Piekarczyk 2015, 6).

The heterogeneous platform: Human Rights Film Festivals

At the 2019 edition of the OneWorld human rights film festival in Prague, the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art was one of the venues to host a special activity. The festival itself comprises of many different locations, where the film programme was expanded through talks, debates, Q&As, exhibitions, network events, theatre, concerts, and masterclasses. At DOX, a VR installation was set up to 'screen' two short virtual reality documentaries, though the cinema screen was replaced with about 30 headsets to individually experience the VR documentaries. The VR installation was available in the afternoon on every consecutive festival day and scheduled in hourly blocks. With about 30 audience members waiting for instructions simultaneously, the hourly timeslots put a little strain on their capacity because the headsets had to be operated separately, and the volunteers had to assist each person individually. When asked why the programme was designed with timeslots like this, and if it would not be easier to have the headsets available at all time so people could come and go as they pleased, the answer was simple. As a volunteer put it, "it is nicer to have people in here together, for them to have the same experience as a group".

This example demonstrates that festivals are about being together and experiencing things collectively. While this should not come as a surprise, it is interesting how this runs

counter to the diverse range of experiences festivals hope to offer. A short review of literature on festival cultures marks this dual nature of festivals and lends support to the idea that (human rights film) festivals incorporate a cross-medial, fragmented, and diverse set of cultural practices in a coherent program, delineated in space and time (that is: venues and schedules). Festivals seem to effortlessly navigate between a range of styles, venues, cultural texts, genres, and modes of addressing publics (these publics being notably plural as well), while it similarly seems straightforward that they provide anchor points for mutual understanding and identity (thereby integrating their publics, as was the aim at OneWorld). In their study of *The Festivalization of Culture* Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward point to this duality as being foundational for festivals. They state that in "a world where notions of culture are becoming increasingly fragmented, the contemporary festival has developed in response to processes of cultural pluralization, mobility and globalization, while also communicating something meaningful about identity, community, locality and belonging" (2014, 1). "The contemporary festival", they state, "develops in response to processes of cultural pluralization, mobility and globalization. Yet, at the same time as festival discourses point to being open to the swirl of multiple and heterogeneous cultural differences, they also assert the importance of the local and the rooted" (Bennett and Woodward 2014, 18). This is most certainly the case with human rights film festivals that, more often than not mix films on local issues with films on international politics and human rights violations across the globe; schedule and support films by local film makers together with internationally renowned productions; and reach out to local (media) partners as well as to international NGOs. The simultaneous appeal to heterogeneity and rootedness is widely recognised in the field of festival studies, as festivals are thought to be part of "the diversification of portfolios of cultural consumption" (Bennett and Woodward 2014, 16), while they also "by definition they have a theme" (Getz 2010, 7). The sharp increase in the number of festivals worldwide (Giorgi and Sassatelli 2013, 2), thought of as "characteristic of cultural life and politics" (Verderame 2015, 672), therefore not just coincides with cultural fragmentation but can also be read as a part of and a response to it.[114]

As discussed in the second chapter, in which the historical context and theoretical framework of this dissertation are addressed, such cultural fragmentation and the disintegration of grand narratives form one key aspect of post-humanitarianism. This puts a strain on a common (understanding of) humanity, and in this case human rights. As festivals can be theorised as a response to cultural disintegration, the growth of human rights film festivals (in number and scope) can be understood similarly; in this case this

[114] As festivals have "have long been associated with resistance and social protest" (Sharpe 2008, 219) as well as with cosmopolitanism (Verderame 2015, 672; Sassatelli 2018), festival culture is well-align with human rights considerations. Therefore, it is no surprise that parallel to the rise of festival culture generally, human rights film festivals have seen a remarkable growth in number, mainly as a particular strand of activist film festivals (Tascón 2014, 41).

means that they are addressed as platforms of heterogeneity. The analysis conducted here takes up the festivals' programming of films as the logical starting point because they form the basis of what the festivals have on offer. This means to address the heterogeneity of genres, clusters, labels, competitions, and prizes that subdivide the field of human rights films – as this results from the festival programming. In relation to this, some attentions will be paid to ancillary programming and initiatives developed in the wake of the festivals, to pay attention to the heterogeneity of media forms and activities that allow festivals organisations to experiment and "make impact" by reaching out to different audiences. In the final phase of this analysis, the networking aims of the festivals are scrutinised, where the festivals themselves become part of platforms of international cooperation and knowledge exchange. Here, it will become evident that networking organizations emphasise flexibility and sensitivity regarding context and culture while adhering to a core ideal about human rights.

In this sense, the coming paragraphs represent a set of concentric circles, with the innermost circle representing the festivals' core activity: the screening of human rights films. It will become clear that a range of activities are employed to diversify the number of sides through which human rights discourse can be flourish based on this core activity. To understand the dynamics of heterogeneity, it has been a deliberate choice to more or less "scratch the surface" of all of these activities – rather than to go in depth into some particular films or initiatives. With such a bird's-eye view, it is possible to analyse where the limits of human rights discourse are defended and where they are actively widened, diversified, and eclectically combined. Following Jepson and Clarke, festivals will be read as a "platform for cultural exchange" (2016, 3) – as platforms that conduct and channel human rights discourse.

For the analysis, four festivals have been visited on location: Document (Glasgow) OneWorld (Prague), Movies that Matter (The Hague), and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival (London).[115] Field notes have been taken at the festivals to get acquainted with the wide range of activities, environments, audiences, and informal interactions. Departing from these mostly informal observations,[116] the programming of the festivals has been studied through festival programming booklets and websites, while information on the ancillary programming is derived from festival websites and complementary documents. However, the two handbooks on *Setting Up a Human Rights Film Festival,* edited respectively by Tereza Porybná in the first edition (2009d) and a group of four in the second (Kulhánková et al. 2015), are most important throughout the paragraphs on

[115] Whereas this study is partially structured around the work of the Human Rights Film Network, the Human Rights Watch Film Festival is not a member of the network. The other three festivals are.

[116] Informal in this case means for instance that I talked to several festival organizers (ranging from interns and volunteers to programming officers and festival directors), but that none of these talks were considered interviews, and neither have these been recorded. Similarly, the visits to the festival have not been meticulously planned or set-up in a way that allowed me to conscientiously describe and analyze the festivals in detail. Rather, the visits have allowed me to experience the festivals more generally – so that any analysis is made from a position that is informed by the more general festival experience on site.

programming, ancillary activities, and networking. Both handbooks (from now on referred to as the first and second edition of "the handbook")[117] have been set up to comprise of two parts. The first part in both handbooks offers suggestions for setting up a human rights film festival along the lines of central themes such as programming, technical production, or PR. The second part of the handbooks consists of case studies, in which a range of festivals are spotlighted and to share their particular perspective. The analysis of the handbooks resembles the analysis of the Codes of Conduct that were central in the chapter on reflexive platforms, and indeed also these handbooks are in part reflexive. While both the Codes of Conduct and the handbooks are instructive documents that (ideally) guide readers in their ways while producing humanitarian communication, the handbooks go one step further in their attempts to establish a global network of human rights supporters.

As will become clear in the networking paragraph, the two handbooks are notably different. This is mainly because the first edition was primarily put together by staff from the OneWorld festival in Prague, while the second edition was a deliberate attempt to make it a collective effort across the Human Rights Film Network. The handbooks are considered in combination with the founding document of the HRFN; its "charter" that was drafted in 2004 (Human Rights Film Network 2004). The three documents, which are the most prominent material-discursive proceeds of roughly fifteen years of networking, collaboration, and "friction" (Bowles Eagle 2019), shed light on the attempts to construct a network that reinforces "global civil society" (Piekarczyk 2015, 8). The platformed approach does play a crucial role in this, both explicitly when the festivals themselves are named as an invaluable "middleperson" or "platform" for activism (*ibid*, 10) and implicitly in the setup of the booklets themselves as edited volumes in which different festival organizers each have their "own" chapter. To underline this, nearly all the different authors have received feedback and editing suggestions (which are explicitly credited) from colleagues from other festivals – these being from a particularly diverse range of festivals from the Global North and South, but also from different festivals in terms of financial resources, freedom of speech and cultural background.

~ *Programming: themes, quality, and impact*

For festival visitors, the programming booklet of that year's edition is the most prominent text through which the programme can be addressed. In a range of booklets, the introductions encourage visitors to "explore" and "discover" the films, to "feel free to open your mind", to be "open to the world", to be "provoked", to be part of "unpredictable and surprising debates", and to open up to the "expressive testimony of

[117] Both handbooks are edited volumes, with different authors for each chapter. This means that references will contain a range of different authors. Where relevant, the edition of the handbook will be mentioned in the running text. Otherwise, references indicate the edition through the year of publication – 2009 for the first edition, 2015 for the second.

where today's world is heading" that the films provide.[118] The booklets explicitly highlight the range of different and contrasting perspectives that the festival has to offer and stress the open-ended nature of the program that they present. Visitors are thus encouraged to pick and choose from a variety of styles and topics and to intuitively roam the festival. Because audiences are encouraged to immerse themselves in the festival program, the booklets present the festival as a programming flow that is clustered simply by the date, time, or screening venue. Contrasting the open-ended experience that is promoted, the second edition of the handbook for setting up human rights festivals, however, notes that the "programming for your festival should be purposeful, not random" (Bartošová, Kulhánková, and Raušová 2015, 27). This means that while the various films are presented as a flow that can lead audiences in different directions, a certain mode of organisation is presented alongside this. While indeed a celebration of the versatility of the festivals often takes centre stage in the programming booklets, three modes of organization stand out as pillars under the purposeful programming at the festivals: themes (the categorisation of films), quality (and its different conceptions), and impact (through ancillary programming). While other aspects to programming can be named, these three rationales stand out in terms of how they govern the considerations about how the festivals position themselves. While this indeed has to do with the programming of films specifically, the concerns over thematic organisation, quality markers, and impact drivers are more generally part of how the festivals present themselves and their program as a whole.

To start with the former, the handbook continues that "it is important to nail down topics and themes before you begin looking for films. The topics you want to highlight and communicate are actually what makes a human rights festival, not the films themselves. The film is a piece of art that reveals its meaning in the context into which it is placed" (Bartošová, Kulhánková, and Raušová 2015, 27). The context in which these films are placed can be found in the annual theme that many of the festivals use to position their festival as well as in the themes that are used to categorise the movies, where films about certain topics are labelled. For some of the guides, such labelling is the primary structuring principle, while the "flow" of the festival itself (in time and space) is most important for others. In case of the latter, not all films are assigned to a specific category, and occasionally no thematic categorisation is used. Additionally, while in some cases rather abstract categories are used (Document 2018, for instance, used categories like "Strangers in the Archives", "Any Time, Anywhere", and "No life to be lived") others are rather concrete (such as "Save the Planet" for environmental films at Movies that Matter).

[118] To capture the sense openness to the unexpected, a range of program guides has been studied. As the booklets have no author and publisher, sometimes come in different versions and cannot easily be found online, these have not been referenced in the bibliography. The quotes enumerated here are however from the program guides of respectively Document (2018), Movies that Matter (2019), OneWorld (2017), the HUMAN International Documentary Festival (2016) and OneWorld (2019).

Pictures of the Movies that Matter 2019 and One World 2017 programme guide. Two pages from the Movies that Matter guide showcases four categories, under which between three to seven films are categorized; a page from the OneWorld guide highlights one category that holds five films

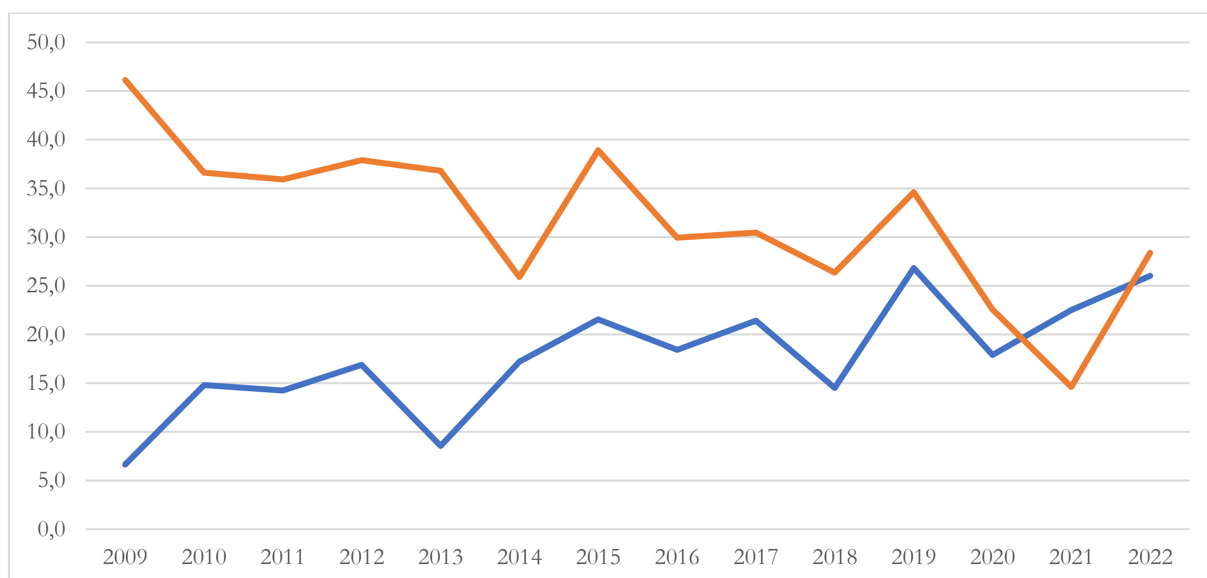
In relation to such themes, the first edition of the handbook raises the question about what "should be considered the scope of human rights?" (Bronkhorst 2009, 124). Due to their character as versatile and multifaceted cultural platforms, festivals allow for a relatively broad interpretation, which is confirmed in the handbook. Addressing the history of the Amnesty International Film Festival (AIFF), it is recalled that at the time when the festivals was founded, "Amnesty's 'mandate' was still quite narrow – mainly prisoners of conscience, torture, executions and refugees. (…) Yet from the start [of the festival] in 1995, AIFF operated from that broader perspective, advertising its domain as that of 'human rights and human dignity'" (*ibid*). Although the festivals have always had a relatively broad setup, there has recently been a tendency toward further diversification of the issues addressed in the films. Over the past fifteen years, human rights films have come to address an extensive range of such topics.

While a variety of tendencies can be observed in the contents and while certain genres, issues, and subjects temporarily come and go, a general diversification of themes certainly characterises the direction in which the programming of festivals is headed. A few numbers can illustrate the broadening up of themes as a first step in interpreting this. For this, an analytical distinction between a "traditional" and a "heterogeneous" conception of human rights comes in helpful. In line with the campaigns and appeals discussed above, a traditional understanding of human rights is tied to notions of conflict, war, and authoritarianism, under which human right violations are associated with observable, tangible, and physical violence and conflict. The heterogeneous approach to human rights film includes a more broadly dispersed number of themes that cover a wider range of socio-cultural issues. Although traditional human rights issues still play a significant role in what is thought of as human rights film, its approach has been supplemented by a variety of issues that complicate the perception of what is considered to be a human rights topic.

To capture this general tendency in numbers, the online programming archives of two of the largest human rights film festivals have been assessed. The OneWorld festival (Prague) and Movies that Matter (The Hague) each provide an archive with a classification of all the films screened at their festivals.[119] Between 2009 and 2022, OneWorld screened 1580 different films, while Movies that Matter screened 849 films in the same period. In their archives, the films have been labelled according to a range of different themes – respectively 44 and 34 themes per festival, where multiple labels can be assigned to each film. The numbers that result from these categorisations should be interpreted cautiously, especially since it remains unclear how the festivals attribute themes to films. The categories are not clearly defined or explained, and it remains unclear whether the process of assigning categories to the films has remained the same over the years. However, an overview of two theme clusters illustrates a tendency towards a more comprehensive understanding of human rights (films). For traditional approaches to human rights, we can look at the number of films that, in the case of OneWorld, address "war and conflict areas", "authoritarian and totalitarian regimes", "post-war and torture trauma", and "racism, nationalism and extremism" and in the case of Movies that Matter, deal with "armed conflict", "crimes against humanity and war crimes", and "peace and reconciliation". A number of themes related to culture, identity, and social justice can be considered examples of the more extensive, heterogeneous definition of human rights: "arts and culture", "social issues", "gender and LGBTQ+ issues" and "lifestyle" for OneWorld, and "Identity", "Culture and Religion" and "LGBTQ+" for Movies that Matter. The number of films screened in each category has been counted per year, and has been measured relative to the total number of films at the festivals that year. The graph below shows the average of the percentages of the two festivals, per cluster of themes.[120]

[119] The approach taken here renders it impossible to include a broader range of festivals, for some different reasons. Some festivals for instance do not yet run for as many years as the timespan for consideration here, as they have been founded after 2009. Others (if not to say: most) have a fairly limited number of films on offer each years, which by and large reduces the reliability of the outcomes. A few festivals have programmed a sufficient number of films, since 2009, but do not provide a (categorized) archive (such as FIFDH in Geneva and BIFF in Bergen).

[120] This means that the relative numbers measured at both festivals are accumulated and then halved, for the average relative numbers. As over the course of the years OneWorld programmed about twice as many films as Movies that Matter, this in turn means that the relative weight of films programmed at the Movies that Matter festival is increased. Nonetheless, the choice has been made to distributed equal weight to both festivals as the strategy in programming is central, regardless of the absolute number of films being programmed across both festivals.



Average relative number of films per year on themes related to conflict (blue) and culture and identity (orange) at the OneWorld and Movies that Matter festival

Whereas in recent years the programming of films with more traditional human rights themes roughly runs parallel to the programming of films with socio-cultural labels, the difference between the two was about a factor seven in 2009 (when the first edition of Movies that Matter took place).[121] This tendency towards a more inclusive definition of human rights is furthered as the programming at the festivals reflect the emergence of widespread societal concerns about climate, ecology, and (forced) migration. OneWorld, for instance, addresses this expanding definition of human rights in its description of the section on environmentalism in its 2019 programme guide. "Environmental films at a human rights festival? They increasingly have a place here. Living conditions are changing irreversibly in some parts of the world, and environmental changes lead to migration or trigger armed conflicts". It is interesting to note that the category's relevance is taken into account in reference to traditional terms when mentioning potential armed conflict and migration. Yet, as climate and ecology-related films are steadily on the rise as a topic of human rights related interest, and migration-related movies received increasing attention following the 2015 European border crisis, the programming can be understood as flexible and multifaceted. This adds to a picture where a range of other themes (such as freedom of speech and press, rule of law, democracy, economic justice, and the position of various minority groups) complements the tendencies sketched above, which results in an increasingly complex, mixed, and inclusive picture of human rights film programming. Therefore, it is not surprising that the second edition of the handbook states that the role of human rights film festivals "is to bring these difficult issues to the broad public, even

[121] In 2009, the Movies that Matter festival succeeded the Amnesty International Film Festival (AIFF). The AIFF was first held in 1995.

broadening the definition of human rights by finding unexpected connections and using creative approaches to documentary filmmaking" (Bartošová, Kulhánková, and Raušová 2015, 30).

This is an interesting approach because the more traditional themes that address conflict, violence, and authoritarianism give meaning to human rights in a manner that roughly aligns it with humanitarianism more generally – that is, with the representation of disaster relief and international development discussed in earlier chapters. This means that the films dealing with larger-scale deprivation, bodily inflicted suffering, and violent conflict can be understood within the framework of the "humanitarian gaze" that, according to Sonia Tascón, is evoked in and through human rights film (2014). According to her, human rights film festivals encourage a way of looking that "is organized by a relationship of unequal power premised on humanitarianism, a discourse that shows some to be (persistent) victims, and others as aiding them" (2014, 7). As such, traditional human rights films are considered close to the basic distinction between fortunate spectators and unfortunate Others that structures humanitarian communication. This in turn begs the question of how this traditional setup is challenged or destabilised when festivals broaden their scope and aim to complement traditional human rights visualisations with "unexpected connections" and "creative approaches" as proposed in the handbook.

The idea here is that, potentially, a heterogeneous understanding of human rights (expressed in a concern for a broad range of political and cultural topics) can complexify social justice, render human rights concerns more proximate to a Western point of view, or problematise the idea that human rights violations are merely a concern in the Global South.[122] This is not to say that a broad setup necessarily results in the programming of films that allows for a more complex understanding of human rights: films may or may not transcend dichotomies and may or may not trivialise or complicate social issues. What it is to say however is that an appeal for unexpected connections and a mixture of different approaches on what human rights might be can question otherwise self-evident

[122] A parallel can be found in the UN "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs; agreed upon in 2015) that succeeded the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs agreed upon in 2000). After some persistent critiques on the MDGs for their top-down, or even neo-colonial approach (Durokifa and Ijeoma 2018), the more recent SDGs have been framed as a more inclusive and multifaceted agenda. The problem, it was understood, was that "the MDGs were a North–South aid agenda. The goals and targets – such as universal primary education – were mostly relevant for developing countries only" (Fukuda-Parr 2016, 44). In contrast to this, Fukuda-Parr explicates, the SDGs were different in "purpose, concept and politics", as they were "universal goals that set targets for all – not just poor countries" (*ibid*). Parallel to the film festivals, the broadening of the policy agenda is here understood in terms of denaturalizing the dichotomy that accompanied the "North-South aid agenda". Indeed, the SDGs were introduced to overcome the "narrow conception of development" associated with the MDGs, and were meant to carry out "a broader agenda that includes environmental, social, and economic sustainability (*ibid*, 45). Whether the SDGs succeed(ed) in this can be debated (Briant Carant 2017), but the parallels between broadening and complexifying topics and concerns on the one hand, and the (largely implicit) attempts to shed of a "North-South aid agenda" are clear.

dichotomies in the "humanitarian gaze". To put it another way, the question is whether and how human rights film festivals in broadening their scope manage to transcend the basic setup of most humanitarian communication and its reliance on the strict dichotomy of a fortunate spectator and an unfortunate other. In the coming paragraphs, it will be explained that while the festivals by no means accomplish a complete destabilization of the dichotomies connected to humanitarian communication, at least some of the (largely implicit) attempts to unsettle a traditional set-up of humanitarian communication succeeds. This means that although the heterogeneity of the festivals are part of an attempt to supersede traditional humanitarianism and its rootedness in dichotomies between "the West and the Rest" (Hall 1992, 276), compromises are made and difficult-to-combat legacies, structures, and inequalities continue to surface.

One such legacy simply lies in expectations. In the second edition of the handbook it is explained that, at the Movies that Matter Festival "one hardly feels the urge to make people aware of their own rights; it's more about the rights of others —those oppressed and marginalised by repressive regimes" (Bronkhorst and De Jong 2015, 17). While the authors are not entirely clear in how they deal with these expectations (more generally, they do not problematise the dichotomy), it is clear that festivals work within such boundaries of expectation. More broadly, according to Ryan Bowles Eagle, "uneven flows of knowledge and power" problematise the work of human rights film festivals. In his study of human rights films festivals and their cooperative efforts through the Human Rights Film Network, he observes how the festivals struggle with these imbalances in their efforts to build "sites of global exchange where the meanings of human rights media activism are co-produced and co-created" (Bowles Eagle 2019, 4). After having explored the issue of themes and categories, this struggle will be further explored in relation to considerations of quality.

The notion of quality is linked to what festivals consider to be "good" human rights films, but also with what they consider to be good practices of programming, screening, and supporting human rights films as a whole. Considerations of quality are complex because people tend to disagree on how certain cultural productions meet quality standards, but also on what quality means in the first place. Nico Carpentier, who calls the notion of quality a "Gordian knot" (2011, 311), assesses different domains of the concept from five different perspectives: aesthetics, professionalism, audiences, societal impact, and technology. In both editions of the handbooks, these different considerations are thoroughly discussed, with for instance overviews on how to improve the technical quality of film screenings or references to how quality is dependent on audience appreciation. Most clearly articulated, however, is the position that aesthetics (albeit important) are regarded secondary to diverse, impactful, and relevant topics and content. As it is stated that "[m]ost of the time content takes precedent over artistic quality of the film" (Bartošová, Kulhánková, and Raušová 2015, 33), programmers are encouraged to make rather bold decisions and to not shy away from films with a smaller budget. As

such, it is emphasised that "there are a lot of equally relevant reasons why to select a film, not just the filmmaking quality. Even if the film is not a masterpiece or doesn't embrace all aspects of the given problem, don't be afraid to program it" (Zajícová 2009, 31). Elsewhere, this is related to the importance "different voices" and "independent films": "they really need a platform anyway. Don't be afraid to select a film even if it lacks artistic quality" (Lobato and Porybná 2009, 133). Another observation to underscore this interpretation of quality can be found in a conversation I had with the director of a big festival. Discussing the general character of human rights film festivals, he told me that he was not the right person for the job he held because, in contrast to the rest of the organisation, he prioritised aesthetics over human rights concerns. Shortly after, he quit. When I spoke to him later on, he mentioned having advised the festival board to change the vacancy text for his position as otherwise the festival might be "stuck with someone like me again".

The quality question does, however, allow the festivals to shape a certain identity and position themselves as outsiders: to the film industry, mainstream journalism, and society at large. Human rights film festivals are, for instance, contrasted with regular festivals as it is stated that "a film event, even a human rights one, requires good quality projection" (Blažević 2009a, 20), while elsewhere it is stated that "'our' type of festival is not an event intended for film professionals, but is distinguished by its broad audience coming from a variety of backgrounds" (Zajícová 2009, 26). Generally, the festivals emphasise the relative 'make do' character of their operations, expressing how content is prioritised over looks and how marginality is either reluctantly accepted or expressly embraced as a result of the themes festival programmers wish to address. While the festivals do emphasise a desire to have an impact by engaging a broadly defined audience (this is mentioned more often than the wish for a large audience), a commitment to marginalised topics, peoples, and aesthetics remains central. Programmers are, for instance, discouraged from screening "non-confrontational glossy films" since these would "definitely be more boring and less thought-provoking than a varied selection which surprises and disturbs the audience with unexpected types of films" (Zajícová 2009, 31). As the festivals aim to "draw attention to stories that are not covered by the mainstream media" (Blažević 2009a, 15), their position is defined outside such mainstream, and festival organisers are willing to assume the role of a "newcomer [in the] world of film business" (Zajícová 2009, 32). Collaborations with mainstream organisations are presented as a balancing act, and organisers are advised to be cautious with how they approach journalists: "try to be easy going, relaxed and do not look like you must save the world!" (Štěpánková and Šebek 2009, 84). Similarly, contacts with marketeers are characterised by cultural differences between human rights film festival organisers and the world outside: "you will find that those people are 'from the other planet' than you are. Probably, they will find you even more out there" (Blažević 2009b, 58).

The handbooks are ambivalent about the advantages and downsides of an outsider's position, and they also alternate between arguments to shed off some aspects of their role as an underdog while in other cases cultivating that very same role. Regardless, their identities linked to it. The outsiders' position is ingrained in notions of quality because aesthetic considerations, professional opportunity, technological means, and access to financial resources are bound up with it. In turn, this allows some of the larger Western festivals to symbolically side with film makers, film festivals in the Global South, and marginalised people more generally. As mentioned by Lechu Torchin, the festivals aim to "become sites of capacity-building harnessed by the filmmakers/activists and facilitated by the festival programmers" (Torchin 2012, 8). This means that while the festivals position themselves as outsiders at home, the (activist) film makers and partnering festivals in the Global South are considered likeminded partners. The underdog status of the festivals, in other words, is perceived to correspond to an appreciation of filmmakers working under difficult circumstances. For example, it has been said that "[f]ilmmakers and international guests are normally most interested in the cultural specifics of your area and are less interested in streamlined production value and glamour. Still, do not underestimate how much filmmakers value quality screenings of their own films" (Kuhn 2015, 77–78). Although the ties between human rights film festivals from different parts of the world are complex (to be addressed below), the mutual interests and sought-after solidarity between the festivals and the filmmakers is noteworthy since it draws attention to an important point that sets human rights apart from most other kinds of humanitarian communication.

When compared to the imagery circulated in disaster relief and long-term development campaigns, a significant number of films programmed at human rights film festivals is produced by filmmakers from the countries, regions, or (often marginalised) communities that are the subject of the films. This is to say that while disaster relief campaigns have often been constructed by journalists, broadcasting institutions, and appeals alliances in the West, and while long-term development appeals are generally produced by communications professionals and departments from Europe or the US, human rights film festivals tend to diversify their sources. Even though a thorough analysis of the cultural backgrounds of filmmakers would be rife with complexities of identity, it is safe to say that the film festivals can encompass a more heterogeneous range of perspectives than (most) other platforms in humanitarian communication. This also has to do with the relative status of the communication pieces produced since the films are deemed to be of intrinsic artistic and impactful worth. Rather than just a means to a (fundraising) end, the films are qualitatively appreciated as impactful communicative products in and of themselves. This is highlighted by the names of the festivals, as Document refers to the act of documenting stories (and, of course, to the genre of documentary) and Watch Docs and Movies that Matter speak for themselves. At the latter festival, the most prominent competition is named "Camera Justitia", emphasising the direct importance of the filmmakers' work in humanitarian terms. As a result, the

producers of audio-visual material are not just intermediaries passing on the story of others, but they are understood to be activists and are rendered closer to these Others themselves.

This is not to say, however, that Western filmmakers are not still in privileged positions; access to equipment, training, and financial resources are unevenly distributed, and so are opportunity, networking, and critical acclaim. When it comes to these terrains, the festivals also hold a powerful position because in addition to providing opportunities for filmmakers to have their films screened, the festivals have branched out with funding opportunities, training programmes, and networking events for film makers. As Tamara Falicov notes, this comes with an inevitable "power dynamic that lies between the European/Asian/North American funders and those from the Global South seeking funds to begin or complete a project" (2016, 218). This is particularly important since the selection of the film festivals functions as a kind of "stamp of approval" for both the quality of films and their adherence to a framework of human rights more generally. Particularly through the various competitions at the festivals, notions of quality, urgency, and originality are attributed to certain films and subsequently weighted. The competitions illustrate different aspects of curation at festivals, showcasing how films are respectively selected, organised into a coherent programme, and lauded as outstanding productions that exemplify the best of (audio-visual) human rights discourse.

While the understanding of quality is flexible (tapping into notions of aesthetics, addressing the professional drive of filmmakers, attributing broad audiences as indicators of quality, and emphasising technological screening quality), one approach to quality can be considered pivotal for the festivals: impact. This means to tap into a discourse in which "quality becomes grounded in the beneficial societal impact the cultural artefact produces" (Carpentier 2011, 315), or, more precisely, into an understanding of quality as expanding "the individual viewer's vision of what the human condition, in its multiple manifestations along lines of class, race, gender, age, etc., is and can be" (Schrøder 1992, 212). The festivals' emphasis on impact is hard to ignore and is primarily related to engaging heterogeneous audiences. This includes those audience members who can be considered changemakers, such as activists, journalists, policy makers, politicians, academics, and, of course, film makers. In this way, the set-up of the festivals as platforms for a broad range of actors and audience members is linked to its imperative for impact-making. This, once again, points to the versatility of the festival format and the heterogeneous approach to human rights they entail.

In her overview of trends across "three major human rights film festivals", Marijke de Valck points out that audience engagement is a long-standing aim for these festivals – which is now embedded in a discourse of "impact" (2017). Indeed, many of these festivals have highlighted audience engagement as one of their key concerns, as is evident, for instance, in the "key pillars of a HR film festival" according to OneWorld founder Igor Blažević's. Out of the six pillars he presents, three deal with audience engagement, as

according to him, a human rights film festival (1) "places strong emphasis not only on film screenings but also on discussions", (2) "develops educational and outreach programs", and (3) "has a tendency to develop touring programs" (2009a, 15). Because of this, ancillary activities (these can either be held on site at the festival or beyond) are closely connected to the act of constructing different audiences. Marijke de Valck's argument on these outreach programs is focused on a discourse of "impact", where she points to to a "tendency to present more tangible evidence of the marks that are left" by the festivals (2017). According to her, a more general purpose of audience engagement and outreach is now increasingly understood through a "quantitative framework of effects that can be traced or measured" (*ibid*). For this, De Valck emphasises the role of a neoliberal perspective on the position of human rights festivals. This is, for instance, reflected in the second edition of the handbook where the chapters on funding and evaluation recommend to "use your track record (evaluation of results and impact) to convince donors" (De Jong and Carrión 2015, 118). Further on, it is more explicitly noted that funding entities "will be particularly interested in knowing what impact the event may have on targeted audiences, especially if it coincides with their strategic goals in that country" (*ibid*, 119).

In the handbooks, the orientation towards impact is mainly expressed in reference to the film festivals as a hub-like platform. That is to say, the festivals take pride in gathering a broad number of potential changemakers under one roof. Though very different in the way they function, the festivals are akin to the disaster relief platforms because both are determined by a certain delimitation of time and space. The festival's temporality (running for a limited number of days) and their spatial organisation (by programming the event at a limited number of venues in one particular city) enable the hub-like function in the sense that they allow the festivals to leverage their locatedness to a claim to impact. As Leshu Torchin puts it, the festivals might best be understood as a network "in the case of film festivals with an activist function. The value of networking that takes place at, and behind the scenes of, film festivals cannot be underestimated [sic]. It appears in varying forms: the casual alliances built among audience members according to shared taste and interests, the card swapping of professionals in the lobby, the pick-me-up of communing with the similarly socially engaged" (Torchin 2012, 9). For this, festival organisers are encouraged to "think in terms of creating a festival center" (Porybná 2009c, 79) and to "create a space where your guests can meet every day" (Porybná 2009b, 101). As the festival team should, according to the handbook, try to make time to attend these places to foster the networking taking place, the hub-like function of the platform is emphasised. The festivals use a range of metaphors to address this, for instance, referring to themselves as "an *interface* between committed creative documentaries, NGO *multipliers* and interested audiences" (Gravenor 2009, 209–10; italics mine). Elsewhere, they refer to themselves as "platforms for discussion", noting the broad range of "experts, artists, policy makers, journalists, civil society organizations and the audience" that can join the discussion (De Jong 2015, 59).

This enumeration that points to a mixed character of the audience, is generally celebrated as one of the festivals' key characteristics and as an important indicator of the impact the festivals hope to have. The heterogeneous audiences are generally thought of as the main strength of the platforms that the festivals provide, which is reflected in a heterogeneity in contents, style, and form. Indeed, it is stated that "festivals optimise their impact by shifting between different strategies for different objectives" (Bronkhorst and De Jong 2015, 24), which ties together the notion of impact and heterogeneity. As the first handbook points out, the programming should be "about showing the richness and variety of styles and trends in grasping certain topics" (Zajícová 2009, 30). This is, for instance, explained in the second handbook in reference to the various cultural forms that enhance the impact of the film program as it claims that "cultural performances such as dance, theatre, music, spoken word performances or poetry readings can work as a way for the audience to reflect on the films' subject matter" (De Jong 2015, 60). According to Marijke de Valck, a diversification of cultural forms and audiences is important in "refuting the critique that HRFFs preach to the converted" (De Valck 2017), which is exemplified by the Perspektive Festival. In the chapter of the handbook where they outline the character of their festival they explicate that they "want to reach out to a much broader public than 'just' the human rights crowd" (Kuhn 2009, 141). Besides screening films, an enumerating of activities at the Perspektive Festival is provided, including "art exhibitions, panel discussions, lectures, theater performances and concerts. Many screenings are followed by post-screening discussions with the director(s), protagonist(s), or expert(s) on the topic of specific films". Subsequently, it is also stated that "all genres are accepted (documentaries, fiction films, shorts, animation, experimental films)" (*ibid*, 138-39). As such, the hub-like setup of the festivals serves two parallel objectives: to diversify the form, style, and audience of human rights discourse, as well as to strengthen und bring together audience members and networks in a single place.

The relation between the promoted 'locatedness' and impact is profoundly articulated in reference to the cities where the festivals are held. The festivals are often used as "a means to put a nation or city on display", while indeed "film festivals continue to be spaces of locatedness, even if they screen cinemas from all over the globe" (Tascón 2014, 9). The festivals thus facilitate the marketing and placemaking of certain cities or regions, but the reverse is also true. In order to tap into the imperative to make an impact, some festivals point to the respective cities where they are being held as places where a difference can be made. Major human rights film festivals are being held in cities that brand themselves and are broadly considered cities of peace, international justice, and human rights. These cities are home to various international institutions related to human rights, international cooperation, justice, or humanitarianism more broadly. They include New York (UN headquarters), The Hague (International Court of Justice), Geneva (various UN agencies, WTO, Red Cross, the Geneva conventions), and Nuremberg (Nuremberg trails). For similar reasons, Prague-based OneWorld has recently branched out to Brussels, organising the festival at "the heart of major European institutions in

order to draw attention to serious cases of human rights violations" (One World n.d.). As we will see in the upcoming paragraph, the Human Rights Film Network seeks to establish a global network of human rights film festival that is premised on egalitarian status of all the different members of the network. As such, egalitarianism is hard to uphold in the face of a clear disparity between (mostly) European festivals and festivals in the Global South. The fact that festivals gravitate towards cities that present themselves as established human rights hubs is a point in case. Whereas differences and a clear power disbalance is evident in terms of financial means, knowledge, experience, and opportunity, the proximity of Western human rights institutions to some festivals only serves to highlight this.

~ Networking

The foreword of the first handbook for *Setting up a Human Rights Film Festival* disclaims that it is not meant as a fool proof cookbook for a successful festival at any given place in the world: "Of course we realize none of this is universal" (Porybná 2009a, 8).[123] It is hard not to read this explicit disclaimer in the light of a power imbalance between the different festivals discussed in the handbook. Written from the perspective of OneWorld, the largest human rights film festival in the world and one that is located in Europe, the handbook is cautious in its claims about what others should and should not do to make their festival a success. The question of universality is, however, on the table, as the second handbook explicates how the hopes of establishing a "global civil society" in and through the Human Rights Film Network (HRFN) have been an important purpose for the network from its inception. In the introduction to the second edition of the handbook it is remarked that "With the idea of a human rights movement spreading from the local to the worldwide in the era of globalisation, a number of human rights film festivals decided to join their efforts in reinforcing a global civil society" (Piekarczyk 2015, 8).

The Human Rights Film Network (HRFN) is a network of film festivals dedicated to human rights. It has 40 members from all parts of the world, even though these are unevenly spread across all continents: Europe is notably overrepresented with 18 members. Interestingly, the network emphasises its broad reach by emphasising a range of different festivals *other* than their Western European counterparts. Contemplating the growth of the network, Karol Piekarczyk states that they "never dreamed" of so many different festivals: "From South Korea, through Burkina Faso, through Ukraine, to Bolivia. From Buenos Aires, through New York, through Vilnius, to Kuala Lumpur" (Piekarczyk 2015, 8). The cosmopolitan enumeration of the geographically (and culturally) dispersed range of festivals connotes a true and equal global cooperation, which is underscored by omitting the Western European festivals. Paradoxically, leaving them off

[123] More generally distancing itself from a ready-made recipe (or "cookbook" (Porybná 2009a, 8)) of setting up a human rights film festival, the second edition of the document asks the reader to "please take our recommendations with a grain of salt. We have never been in your shoes" (Bronkhorst and De Jong 2015, 16).

the list despite their dominance (in terms of history, financial, and organisational resources and in reference to the number of attendants) appears to make the list truly exhaustive and thus global. This is due to the fact that drawing attention to the advance of festivals in places outside of Western Europe is a way to demonstrate that the network not only encompasses festivals that talk *about* distant vulnerable Others from a Western (European) perspective, but that it works *with* the communities that are usually associated with both humanitarian struggles and human rights issues.

Piekarczyk's approach does not come from nowhere. As Ryan Bowles Eagle observes, the second edition of the handbook seems to correct the first edition's shortcomings in considering non-Western perspectives.[124] Bowles Eagle outlines that the "differences between the first and second handbooks are remarkable. In the revised handbook, non-Western HRFF organizers' perspectives are woven throughout the chapters instead of relegated to case studies at the back" (2019, 17). Seeking the explanation for the shift in approach in the increased interaction (and the subsequent productive "friction") between the different festivals worldwide (in meetings, workshops, and other networking events), Bowles Eagle outlines how relations between the different festival organisers are, though determined by power relations and imbalances, productive encounters to open up space for cosmopolitan activism. Thus, the handbooks are considered to be reflective of the Human Rights Film Network's endeavours as a platform of knowledge sharing and support.

In their capacity as edited volumes, the handbooks can in some way be understood as platforms in and of themselves. Being a collation of relatively autonomous texts by various authors from various backgrounds, the edited volumes represent just the kind of meta-organisation as those that have been studied earlier. Whether maybe far-fetched to call the handbooks a platform for the various authors and the festivals they represent, the collaborative nature of the books is a reflection of the heterogeneous outlook the HRFN wants to represent. In the introduction to the second handbook, the range of festivals that are brought together is explicated as a journey since the reader will be "taken to Malaysia" and "visit Burma", after which "in Burkina you might find a city crier standing on the main square announcing that the *Ciné Droit Libre* mobile cinema has arrived in town" (Piekarczyk 2015, 14). Thereafter, "this journey will take you to the infinite sands" of the Sahara, after which "the next stop will be Ukraine" while subsequently, there "will also be a chance to travel to Guatemala", and finally, "you will arrive in Sierra Leone" (*ibid*, 14-15). Such "imaginative mobility" (Salazar 2020) is expected to benefit the audience as well, as a cosmopolitan outlook is anticipated to result from the different

[124] Interestingly, Bowles Eagle does not only study the booklets, but is also one of the four main editors of the second edition to the booklet himself. How exactly he has played a part in the drafting of the handbook does however not become exactly clear (he is the only editor who has not also authored a section of the handbook and his article in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* does not mention his involvement).

perspectives the films have to offer. In line with the festivals themselves, the multiplicity of perspectives is part of an approach that aims to overcome the strict binaries between fortunate spectators and unfortunate Others – and in this case the strict binaries between "established" (and relatively well accommodated) festivals in the West and "emerging" festivals in the Global South.

Although Bowles Eagle is relatively optimistic about the HRFN's attempts to establish egalitarian ways of working, he also acknowledges that these efforts are beset by "uneven flows of knowledge and power" (Bowles Eagle 2019, 4) between the various festivals. While it seems unproductive to provide a 'verdict' on whether the network succeeds in breaking down the barriers between established and emerging festivals and destabilises the uneven power distribution within the network, it might be more helpful to try and understand how they struggle. Let us take a look at an example. In spite of "weaving in" non-Western perspectives in the second edition of the booklet, as Bowles Eagle puts it, the dominance of European festivals still shows in terms of authorship. The more general first chapters are written from authors affiliated to Watch Docs (Poland), Movies that Matter (The Netherlands), One World (Czech Republic), and NIHRFF (Germany), with a minor role for authors affiliated to the FiSahara (Western Sahara) as a noteworthy exception. Instead, non-Western festival-organisers have either provided feedback or, as was the case in the first edition, have written the case study chapters for the second part of the handbook. This results in a self-reflective style of writing that both contemplates *and* reiterates the 'default-position' of the Western humanitarian (or, in this case: human rights activist) as presented in the first edition of the handbook and partially abandoned in the second. Particularly, the chapters that set the tone (in the sense that they introduce the volume, provide a framework to categorize the different festival forms and schools of thought in human rights) are drafted by experienced authors from established festivals from a European context.

As was the case in the handbook's first edition, some explicit references were made to how established festivals can lead the way. Illustrative is the advice given to festivals taking place in "transition society, post-conflict society or failed state, development country or where human rights are at risk" (Blažević 2009b, 62). These festivals are "first of all" advised to align with "one or maybe even two of the existing human rights film festivals in Europe" (*ibid*). Moreover, the question is raised whether it is "necessary (or at times even a wise decision) to develop a festival with its own name and brand" (*ibid*, 53). Alternatively, it is proposed that it could "be much more efficient for you to ally with an already established human rights festival abroad", where it is mentioned that "One World Prague and Movies that Matter have both assisted many festivals in other countries" (*ibid*). Yet whereas such paternalism is absent in the second handbook, the centralised position of the more established festival is now *implicated* in the setup of the book where the editors and authors continue to write from a perspective of established festivals.

That at least some of the power imbalances in the HRFN are reproduced in the handbook is, however, not surprising. Arguably, some historically rooted, organisational, and symbolical forces pull the contributors (festival organizers, chapter authors and handbook editors) towards the centre of gravity – that is, towards the established European festivals. First, film festivals have strongly developed roots in the European continent (De Valck 2007), which provides a powerful backdrop and infrastructure for the European HRFN members to build on. This is, for instance, reflected in the fact that the annual meeting of the HRFN takes place in Amsterdam at the biggest documentary festival in the world, IDFA. Notably, the IDFA does not specifically address human rights and is therefore not a member of the HRFN, which emphasises how European film festival culture more broadly affirms the central position of European members of the HRFN. In other domains as well, OneWorld and Movies that Matter hold key and central positions in the network. OneWorld's founding NGO (People in Need) is the publisher of the handbooks, while Movies that Matter carries the HRFN secretary (De Valck 2017). These activities work out on a symbolic level as, according to Bowles Eagle, the "larger and more established festivals substantiate their own continued relevance via their visible support of new festivals and the continued expansion of the Network" (Bowles Eagle 2019, 5). Indeed, for instance, Movies that Matter maintains a "Support Program", an "expertise centre", and an "outreach program" (Bronkhorst 2009, 125), which emphasises how experience, knowledge, and scale are valued. This historical, organisational position results in a setup in which the established festivals are hard to circumvent as they are centres to which the network automatically gravitates. Tellingly, the analysis of topics provided in the previous section has also been based on the archives of OneWorld and Movies that Matter – affirming their position in ways similar to the handbooks. Also here, the very existence of elaborate archives that go back a sufficient number of years was an important reason to choose these festivals as a starting point for the analysis.

Whether hard to bypass or not, the central position of the established European festivals in the network reminds us of traditional humanitarian genres – with a certain separation of established, well-accommodated, Western organisations on one side, and emerging, marginalised non-Western organisations on the other. Yet, it should similarly be emphasised that in the HRFN, the input of non-Western Other is significantly more substantial when compared to other domains of humanitarian communication. Just as the film festivals create a space for filmmakers from marginalised communities to tell humanitarian stories, the network also aims to overcome the established dichotomies as they aim to work with a diversified number of perspectives, which is reflected in the multi-authored, collaborative character of the handbooks. While established festivals set the tone and seem unable to entirely relinquish their central position, this position is contextualised in a collaborative and heterogeneous document about festivals that strive to be heterogeneous in terms of both content and style.

Conclusions

Following the screening of the film *On Her Shoulders* at the 2019 OneWorld festival, Joshua Castellino was invited to address and take questions of the public in response to the film. The Middlesex University law professor began by stating that, in reference to the festival's name, that "the film shows there is not really 'OneWorld'". Pointing to the different perspectives presented in the film, but also pointing out the gross inequality that imposes fault lines on this principle of "one world", Castellino questioned the universality implied by the festival. The statement is representative of the arguments that characterise some human rights film festivals because it is obvious that both the festivals and the Human Rights Film Network struggle with claims to universality. While a certain notion of cosmopolitanism is embraced by the festivals and the HRFN, the universalism of human rights is sometimes reluctantly endorsed, sometimes stretched to its limits and sometimes implied in a multifaceted and heterogeneous programme of films and activities that represent a global vision of progressive politics and humanitarianism.

The charter document that lies at the roots of the HRFN is an exception to the cautious approach to human rights expressed in the handbooks for *Setting Up a Human Rights Film Festival*. In the charter, human rights are characterised "as universal. Human rights cannot be annulled or diminished on basis of 'tradition', 'culture' or any other excuse" (Human Rights Film Network 2004). By explicitly distancing itself from cultural relativism, the HRFN provides an example of how human rights can be a tempting exception from the tendencies of relativism that accompanied the end of the grand narratives (Moyn 2012).[125] This 'orthodox' understanding of human rights, to put it in Dembour's words, has received a number of critiques because under such an approach, "human rights discourse (...) tends to treat all people as one. It is a discourse of human unity rather than of human diversity, emphasising our membership of a common 'humanity' from which our rights are derived, and hence can readily ignore such factors as gender, race, and class. A human rights discourse that is devoid of analyses based on class, race, gender and so on is likely to reinforce such structural inequality rather than address it" (Ife 2009, 82). More generally, human rights have been critiqued as a stronghold of Eurocentric universalism (Douzinas 2000; Cheah 2007; Moyn 2012; Mignolo 2013), as they permit not only for universalist fantasies and ideals based on liberal democracy (at best) or neoliberal, global power-politics and interventionism (at worst).

These questions are closely related to both the notion of a common humanity and to the festivals and their understanding of human rights, but they have not been explicitly addressed throughout this chapter. As the various festivals differ greatly in how and when they lay claim to universalism (if at all), such an attempt would both be fruitless and might not do justice to the different facets of the festivals. Certainly, in wording, symbolics, and

[125] While Samuel Moyn outlines that human rights were "born as an alternative to grand political missions – or even as a moral criticism of politics", he holds that later they have been "forced to take on the grand political mission of providing a global framework for the achievement of freedom, identity, and prosperity" (Moyn 2012, 9).

rhetoric, the festivals do reference universalism, as festival names such as "OneWorld" or "Nationality: Human" underscore. Yet, in practice, such references seem fleeting and hard to pin down. Therefore, as Pheng Cheah proposes: "the question should not be whether universal human rights exist or not. Instead, we should focus on the nature and limits of the normative claims being made by various actors – Northern and Southern states and NGOs – when they appeal to human rights within the theoretical framework of established human rights discourse" (2007, 148). For questions like these, the festivals prove to be an excellent starting point. The multifaceted character of the festivals does not just make them challenging to study but also makes them examples of heterogeneous platforms that illustrate a post-humanitarian condition under which grand narratives of universalism are strained.

As such, the HRFN and its festivals do not operate in a vacuum and are not immune to the self-reflexive deconstruction that characterises the humanitarian sector and its communicative practices. The deliberate eclecticism of festivals is indicative of this and is furthered by the sought-after diversity in form and programming. Here, festivals form an ideal site for disintegrating the notion of (the universality of) human rights, by looking at it from different angles and perspectives (opened up by a range of styles, films, and issues). Indeed, while the charter of the HRFN is strict on the absolute universality of human rights (dismissing culture and tradition as 'excuses'), the handbook recurrently emphasises how approaches, circumstances, and perspectives differ per festival, claiming that "none of this is universal" (Porybná 2009a, 8). In this context, the fact that a strongly demarcated universalist ideology can be detected in the domain of human rights also means that such universalism can be discussed explicitly and that, in this sense, "common humanity" becomes debatable in the first place – something that rarely occurs in other forms of humanitarian communication.

In general, visual human rights campaigns emphasise the notion of perspective through new and immersive modes of storytelling, technologies, and cinematic visualization. Yet, whereas traditional human rights appeals explicitly reach out to innovative modes of storytelling, referencing the aesthetics of film, games, magazines, and other modes of mediation (increasingly also virtual reality; Raessens 2019), the different perspectives are predominantly based on a Western approach. This becomes particularly apparent in the intertextual cultural references on which the appeals build, which are mainly rooted in American popular culture (*Batman*, *American Beauty*, *The Matrix*, *Glamour*, *Call of Duty*). In the appeals, it becomes abundantly clear that they have been produced from a Western point of view, and with a Western audience in mind – received with mixed success, ranging from international appraisal to heavy critique. The cinematic style of appeals like these thus paves the way for the integration of human rights discourse in the realm of

film (festivals),[126] but they lack the range of different international perspectives that the festivals aim for.

The festivals, by contrast, are intended to circulate imagery from marginalised communities in the Global South. As was the case with the Emergency Appeals Alliance, Concord, and Kiva, film festivals (regarding their main activity) are not content producers. As with the former case studies, the festivals can be seen as meta-organisations conducting humanitarian communication by providing a platform for its contents and stories, but mainly for an audience to gather around them. But in contrast to the aforementioned platforms, the festivals principally circulate of non-Western content.[127] A versatile understanding of thematic relevance, quality, and impact is applied. In doing so, the festivals extend notions of what human rights entail, highlight marginalised perspectives, and explore the different domains in which human rights discourse can be relevant. In that capacity, they emphasise that "Human rights are multidisciplinary, comprised of legal, social, philosophical, political, economic, religious and cultural aspects" (De Jong 2015, 62).

Yet, as has become clear, the festivals and the HRFN struggle in their attempts to construct an egalitarian platform for knowledge exchange. Infrastructure, knowledge, (financial) means, experience, and prestige automatically push European perspectives to a central position in the network – thereby reproducing existing power imbalances. Therefore, it is hard to ignore the dependence of smaller, emerging festivals on more established ones in Europe. As has been observed before, "the role of film festival funds is increasingly to elevate their 'cultural prestige' when festivals 'produce' films from the developing world" (Falicov 2016), which places the festivals in a position that is very similar to the often unidirectional setup of traditional development. Indeed, the chance "for film festival curators (...) to screen these new works" (*ibid*) is very much tied to the power dynamics that the network aims to escape.

[126] Indeed, as is emphasized by Kate Nash, "the making and showing of human rights films are very often linked to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)" (2018, 395).

[127] It could be argued that the profiles of borrowers from the Global South presented on the Kiva would represent such content. Yet, whereas human rights films are contextualized by the festivals setting, the debates, competitions and the rest of the festival program, they remain to be autonomous productions. This latter is not the case at Kiva. Here the borrowers' profiles are edited, restructured in accordance with the micro-credit intermediaries and made subservient to the overall functioning of the platforms, up to a level where it is hard to consider it to be autonomously produced and circulated content.

CONCLUSIONS

From a film festival titled "Nationality: Human" to an aim to "foster a sense of our interconnected common humanity" outlined in a code of conduct, and from the idea that "dreams are universal" on a microlending platform, to holistic representations of unity in the face of disaster – this dissertation examines different configurations of a universalised common humanity. Whereas the concept of common humanity relies on a certain amount of indefectibility, its different conceptualisations are diverse and open-ended. Put differently, while a common humanity is often referenced as naturally occurring and impartial, its different representations highlight a multifaceted social construction. Despite its occurrence as something self-evident and natural, this construction is challenged by what, from a historical and theoretical perspective, served as the starting point of my research: the post-humanitarian situation that presents us with technological, institutional, and ideological disintegration. As mentioned before, in her theorisation of the concept, Chouliaraki explains that post-humanitarianism highlights "a generalized reluctance to accept 'common humanity'" (2013, 2).

To go looking for it nonetheless served two aims. First, it pays debt to the fact that appeals to "humanity as an identity" (Agier 2010) has for decades now sustained the framework on which humanitarianism and its representations rest more generally. This is particularly the case with regard to human vulnerabilities, that "have been intelligible to human societies across the boundaries of time and place, provide the most accessible route to a cosmopolitan ethic" (Linklater 2007b, 10).[128] Second, the strain on common humanity as it has manifested under post-humanitarianism allows for an enquiry into how such commonality can be reimagined and reorganised. Particularly, the reorganisation of common humanity has been the main focus of this dissertation, as the notion of the platform has been emphasised as a social, organisational structure that allows for the (re)imagination of common humanity. Through a scrutiny of "meta-organisations", the circulation of humanitarian imagery and the management of a discourse of common humanity have been studied.

Yet, despite the fact that various domains of humanitarian communication have been addressed (disaster relief, long-term development, human rights), one particular strand of humanitarian debate has been notably absent in this dissertation. This is the much-debated domain of (forced) migration, human displacement, and the (lack of) care for refugees. Thus, this conclusion will touch upon migration as a way of addressing some of the political implications on the construction of a common humanity before moving on

[128] Another such point is outlined by Barnett and Weiss. They posit: "That human beings intrinsically have ethical obligations to one another as such requires both a notion of transcending kinship, nationality, even acquaintance, and a notion of 'bare life' dissociable from specific cultures and webs of relationships" (2008, 78).

to more comprehensive conclusions on the role of platforms. While the (de)politicisation of common humanity has been discussed implicitly and sometimes explicitly throughout the previous chapters, migration emphasises political questions that have previously been side-lined – both by the representations themselves and subsequently in the analysis of them.

The topic of migration and its representations raises political issues for the exact same reason that the topic was initially excluded from the domain of humanitarian communication as studied here: it has everything to do with the notion of distance. For this dissertation, humanitarian communication has been defined by a certain amount of distance, as theorised by Boltanski in his book *Distant Suffering* (1999). Here, he explains that the figure of the "unfortunate other" necessarily deals with "suffering from the standpoint of distance since it must rely on massification of a collection of unfortunates who are not there in person". Highlighting the representation of migration and refugees, he continues that "when they come together in person to invade the space of those more fortunate than they and with the desire to mix with them, to live in the same places and to share the same objects, then they no longer appear as unfortunates and, as Hannah Arendt says, are transformed into '*les enragés*'" (Boltanski 1999, 12–13). To put it differently, whereas humanitarian communication can always depoliticize the implications of accepting the notion of a common humanity to some extent, the domain of migration is different due to the proximity experienced on the side of the fortunate spectator. Within the domain of migration, the acceptance of a general idea of common humanity almost always calls for politically engaged solidarity, while in general humanitarian communication the concept of common humanity can be constructed without acknowledging the political consequences. It is not for nothing that Chouliaraki refers to the reluctance to accept a common humanity as a "*political* collapse of narratives of common humanity" (2013, 5; emphasis mine). Whereas traditional domains of humanitarian communication reference humanity as an identity in a relatively carefree manner, this is harder in the context of migration, as is abundantly clear in societal debates about migration. The crucial difference between the unfortunate Other positioned at a distance and the unfortunate Other who allegedly invades the space of the fortunate is of paramount importance to distinguish between humanitarian campaigns dealing with disaster or development and the debate on migration – that can be closely related to campaigns on conflict and human rights. The idea of distance (in development) and proximity (in migration) determines the political meaning of 'common humanity' by drawing attention to either the social and political situation far away or back home. In relation to development, this enables the spectator of vulnerability to imagine futures for remote societies, whereas in relation to migration, the spectator reflects on his or her own community.

That an appeal to common humanity can have a decisive impact in the domain of migration was exemplified when the notion of common humanity was inscribed in the body of the three-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi (and later also Omran Daqneesh). A

pivotal moment in the mediated discussion of the 2015 European border crisis can be attributed to the publication of the photograph showing Kurdi lying face down on Turkish shores; a moment that (albeit temporarily) shifted the debate. In response to the photograph, it has been shown that across Europe "media narratives changed significantly" (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017, 8) – in the direction of promoting humanitarian values, openness, and (relative) solidarity. Therefore, it might seem that one picture, in isolation and on itself, had the power to temporarily redirect the debate. Yet, the impact of the picture can also be understood in relation to how the picture tapped into already existing notions of common humanity – wherein commonality is inscribed in the kind of vulnerability that the picture represents. It is this kind of vulnerability, "one that emerges with life itself", that Judith Butler emphasised as "foolish, if not dangerous" to argue with (Butler 2004, 31). This would imply that the notion of common humanity had already been in place beneath the surface, merely awaiting a proper iconic picture to go with it.

If the discourse of common humanity is approached as a resource to draw from in order to give (political) meaning to an image like Alan Kurdi's, then referencing, constructing, and reorganising common humanity can also change and in some cases impede its value – most obviously in cases of haphazard use. The attempts to deconstruct certain uses of common humanity undertaken in this dissertation serve as a way of addressing this. It echoes Edward Said's critique of the use of the discourse around 'the human'. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said not only discusses humanism itself but also its discourse, thereby making note of its rhetorical force. He states that "many of the words in current discourse have 'human' (and implying 'humane' and 'humanistic') at their cores. NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, for example, was described as a 'humanitarian intervention,' though many of its results struck people as deeply inhumane" (Said 2004, 7). Said is therefore bound to conclude that, with respect to American humanism, "one is obliged to say that it has been seriously afflicted with the kind of Eurocentrism that can no longer be allowed to remain unquestioned" (*ibid*, 53). In similar ways contrasting the lived experiences under globalisation with the "discourses of the human" that circulate, Pheng Cheah points out that "the vicissitudes of globalization force us to question these axiomatic discourses of humanity" (2007, 3).

In the domain of migration, the depoliticisation of common humanity is much harder than in the more "care-free" and "matter-of-fact" references in other humanitarian domains. When it comes to migration, discrepancies between referencing common humanity on the one hand, and the actual implementation of solidarity and structural change on the other, surface more obviously. This has become particularly clear where general humanitarianism collides with migration policy, when the EU signed its European Consensus on Development. The proposed "reorientation of aid toward the goal of tackling migration" was fiercely criticised by NGOs, who stated that the solidarity typically associated with humanitarianism was now made subservient to the goals of limiting migration (Abrahams 2017). Extending on those moments where

humanitarianism collides with the interests that prevent migration, notions of the "humanitarian border" and "humanitarian securitization" have been theorised in ways that pointed to the near merger of humanitarian discourse and bordering practices. Indeed, Miriam Ticktin states that the "language of humanitarianism has played a central role in political and media debates about undocumented migrants/refugees" (Ticktin 2016, 255). She contends that humanitarian language is merely used as a substitute for justice (*ibid*, 266). Also, in a more structural sense, the border is conceptualised as a material-symbolic complex where humanitarianism is intimately intertwined with border control. This type of humanitarian securitisation (Chouliaraki et al. 2017, 4–6) taps into a sense of common humanity while at the same time through bordering practices "people are made more or less 'human'" (Squire 2015, 44) in accordance with securitisation interests.

It is because of the above, that the sometimes toothless, decontextualised and a-historic representations of common humanity have been problematised in the domains of disaster relief, long-term development, and conflict and human rights. This is in an uncomfortable undertaking where one can be torn between Judith Butler's (2004, 31) statement that questioning common humanity can be foolish and dangerous, on the one hand, and Pheng Cheah's call to question the "pre-comprehension of the human and, somewhat perversely, even to give it up" (2007, 3), on the other. Following the cautious deconstruction attempted here, common humanity should not be approached as something that simply is (or is not) there, but as something that is nurtured and constructed – often for good reasons as its notion appeals to and safeguards rights, dignity, and justice. Therefore, common humanity should not just be used in a careless manner, but as an imperative to solidarity. Or, to put it another way, common humanity can and should imply something; it cannot come for free.

The question that followed is how common humanity was being reorganised under the conditions of post-humanitarianism and how this reorganisation allows for a (de)politisation of humanitarian concerns. As has been argued here, a range of factors have paved the way for an increasingly platformed mode of organisation and representation in humanitarian communication. First, post-humanitarian disintegration has called for new modes of building alliances around issues and concerns – and ultimately around the notion of common humanity. Second, increased scepticism, critique and the deeply self-reflexive character of the sector has induced the proliferation of meta-reflective spaces for NGOs and their partners. As a recent article in *The Guardian* headlines, the international aid sector is in a "crisis of legitimacy" (McVeigh 2022), citing a recent introspective document published by the sector. In the document, *INGOs and the Long Humanitarian Century*, a number of CEOs from humanitarian organisations shed light on where their organisations "have come from, where they are now, and where they want to be by the year 2030, while staying focused on and true to their founding values" (Baiden et al. 2022, 2). In the section that discusses the "Visions for 2030", one CEO

remarks that "For me, the future of aid is network-based, it's platform-based – this has become my mantra – it's both locally positioned and globally connected" (*ibid*, 17).

The language used to further explicate this idea of platform-based aid is illustrative for what many humanitarians aim to find in the notion of the platform. The CEO speaks of "decentralization" and "groundlevel decisions", and particularly of "common threads and ties between all of these local initiatives that bind the system together, not in a hierarchical way and not in an organisational or institutional way, but as a web" (*ibid*). This imagination of the platform most closely resembles the understanding of platforms in the Kiva case, in which platforms are envisioned to overcome the fact that development has been very firmly rooted in impersonal, top-down organised institutions. Platforms are, in this case, presented as "non-organisations", or in Latour's terms as "intermediaries": neutral structures that just passively circulate and facilitate the social (Latour 2005). Particularly in the case of Kiva, this amounted to an idealisation of common humanity in terms of entrepreneurialism, creativity, and an inclination towards connectedness – all of this unlocked (not produced!) through the platform. In this understanding, platformed environments simply encourage modes of organisation that naturally arise from human interaction. It allowed Kiva to not only present itself as a progressive environment for social interaction and small-scale support for entrepreneurs in the Global South, but also as an outsider to the aid sector and its institutional burdens.

It has been argued in this dissertation that platforms can and should not be understood like this. To stick with Latour, platforms are mediators rather than intermediaries: they shape and conduct discourses, they circulate some kinds of imagery over others, they assemble content, they de- and recontextualise certain stories and, in doing so, they reconfigure (rather than erase) power relations. Throughout the different chapters, many different things have been labelled as being part of a platformed logic – even going so far as to say that the edited volumes of the handbooks for *Setting up a Human Rights Film Festival* could be considered platforms. For this, platforms have been defined as meta-organisations (Ciborra 1996), which allowed me to first emphasise how such structures resemble the highly reflexive modes of operation present in the humanitarian sector and in humanitarian communication. Secondly, it allowed me to shed light on organisations that are not the primary producers of content. Broadcasters produce disaster relief shows, NGOs disseminate the appeals on which development confederations reflect, users provide the profiles and interactions on which Kiva is built, and documentary makers and film producers provide the content for human rights film festivals. While the roles of the different platforms vary extensively, all of them are reflexive meta-organisations.

The analyses of different platforms functioned as a starting point to study some key characteristics of humanitarian communication. They have been studied as conjunctures – as discourses sustained in "relatively durable assemblies of people, materials, technologies and therefore practices" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002, 22). These conjunctures cut

across infrastructures (i.e., media technologies), organisations (NGOs and related institutions), and the campaigns themselves (as audio-visual, textual, discursive products). Various layers enable and mirror each other and are mutually constructive. Comparatively, the platforms vary in their function (denominated here as integrative, reflexive, utopian, and heterogeneous), organisational structure, and corresponding modes of representation. The appeals made to a common humanity differ correspondingly and relate to the kind of humanitarian work that is being carried out.

The first two case studies mainly differed in how they deal with the competitive market of fundraising for development and humanitarian work. Where disaster relief platforms aimed for a temporary suspension of competition through unification, the NGO confederations were occupied with the management of such competition. Regarding the first, the disaster relief platforms showcase how common humanity can be implied in integrative practices and a discourse of holism, where, indeed, competition between different humanitarian NGOs is suspended. In order to provide a unified voice and a one-stop-shop for donors in times of an earthquake, flood, or famine, such holism is expressed on many different levels (local, national, and global). Through the integration different NGOs and media organisations, a unified and coherent understanding of the emergency at hand is constructed – one that leaves very little room for the complexity of root causes or the agonism of politics. Paradoxically, the platform's employees mystify where exactly the feelings of unity come from while also being able to very precisely explain the kind of work they do to sustain the networks and brands that construct such unity. As such, the disaster relief platforms exemplify Nick Couldry's notion of the "myth of the mediated centre" (Couldry 2003). Consider, retrospectively, the definition of the term given by Couldry as the idea that: "beneath these real pressures of centralisation is a core of 'truth', a 'natural' centre (…) that we should value, as the centre of 'our' way of life, 'our' values. This is the myth of the centre, and it is connected with a second myth that 'the media' has a privileged relationship to that 'centre', as a highly centralised system of symbolic production whose 'natural' role is to represent or frame that 'centre'" (Couldry 2003, 45). This definition speaks to different aspects of the disaster relief platforms because it both exemplifies the alleged naturalness of common humanity in the celebration of unity as well as the supposed (political) neutrality of the platforms addressed above. Indeed, one of the interviewees expressed exactly this understanding of the neutrality of platforms, claiming that the emergency appeals alliances have to "just remove all the barriers. (...) To make sure that it is the community that is helping other human beings. And then you just have to facilitate that".

The disaster relief platforms' orientation towards integration has mainly been studied as a response to the post-humanitarian disintegration of media landscapes. In turn, the two platforms considered in the domain of long-term development are read as a response to critique. The first of these critiques addressed here is directed at the representations of development (which was studied through the Codes of Conduct of NGO confederations), while the second critique is directed at the economic and

institutional practices of development (for which Kiva aimed to be an alternative). As a result, both platforms reflect on traditional representations of development, although the NGO confederations do so from an institutional insider's position, while Kiva conspicuously positions itself as a (disruptive) outsider to the sector. For the NGO confederations, the main challenge is indeed institutional: they aim to navigate the interests of individual, competing member organisations, while similarly attempting to construct and sustain a collective, coherent "humanitarian identity" (Barnett and Weiss 2008) of the sector. This becomes a particularly delicate exercise in the face of worries over compassion fatigue and critiques regarding the ethics of representation. In response to the parallel uptake of both these issues, the confederations continuously alternate between respecting the autonomy of organizations while similarly initiating a body of rules to play by. Indeed, in contrast to the disaster relief platforms, the Codes of Conduct are drafted as documents that manage competition between NGOs (rather than suspend it, in the former case). While the Codes of Conduct aim to construct a notion of human dignity in humanitarian communication, the considerations in the documents are similarly preoccupied with institutional survival and self-interest, which mostly prevents the documents from critically assessing power imbalances rooted in the sector and its communicative practices. Arguably, the parallel uptake of instrumental worries over compassion fatigue, and the ethical critique regarding representation plays a decisive role here – incapacitating a potentially critical debate on communication.

Institutionally, Kiva plays a very different role. Emphasising its own platformed appearance and characteristics, Kiva adopts the position of an outsider to 'regular' development. Instead, Kiva refers to digital technology and the market as its main drivers. This is to say that in its set-up and self-representation, Kiva distances itself from institutionalisation and any related connotations and renders itself as a non-institution. Alternatively, platforms are celebrated as the primary replacement for (political) institutions. Specifically, Kiva proposes that platforms (and platformed development by extension) induce organically organised, bottom-up, entrepreneurial, and human-sized social change – in stark contrast to the rigid, top-down, institutional, and impersonal connotations attributed to traditional development. As such, Kiva places itself outside of the domains of development, institutions, and politics more generally. From the perspective of an 'outside intervention', Kiva emphasises connectedness as a keyword, and presents itself as a facilitator of a communal, human spirit. Here, "adjustments with a human face" (Jolly 2012), references to a human scale, and an appeal to human connectedness in a cosmopolitan world emphasise how Kiva depicts platforms as new and innovative places where common humanity can flourish. These utopian imaginations of platforms are, however, structurally depoliticised. They provide accounts of technology and markets as non-hierarchical, open playgrounds for connectedness and entrepreneurialism, rather than as highly unequal and limiting social constructions. As such, Kiva echoes a neoliberal spirit, that understands markets as neutral and apolitical entities. This can be recognised in David Harvey's account of how neoliberalism proposes

that "human well-being could best be advanced by liberating individual, entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework of private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2). Explicitly highlighting the marketplace as an open and flat environment, Kiva builds on connotations of platforms for the further depoliticisation of the market. For this, and despite its conspicuous dissociation from development and institutionalism, Kiva implements a platformed version of the microcredit model that has been labeled the "poster-child for 'millennial development'" (Carr et al. 2016, 145). Moreover, Kiva structurally builds on the empowerment discourse that has become dominant in regular representations of development (Calvès 2009) and, as such, can be considered the pinnacle (rather than a disruptor) of its timeframe and of development discourse.

Compared to the first three case studies, the one on human rights film festivals is an outlier. It is an outlier in at least two ways. First, contrary to other cases, the film festivals have no direct link to fundraising activities. According to Luc Boltanski, there are roughly two modes of action available to "fortunate spectators" when they witness mediated suffering: paying and speaking (1999, 17–19). The first three cases studied here mainly addressed fundraising practices, where spectators of suffering could potentially relieve the unfortunate's fate by paying donations. Following Boltanski, NGOs subsequently function as intermediaries that in one or another way forward the donation to the unfortunates side. In the case of the festivals, this is structurally different – they rely on the spectator speaking out. Boltanski explains how "[f]or speech to reduce the unfortunate's suffering, and for it to be regarded thereby as a form of action, in the sense that 'speaking is acting', a different kind of instrument is needed: *public opinion*" (*ibid*, 17-18). This is exactly the position that the festivals are in: they present themselves as platforms for civic action through debate, protest, and political engagement. This can be observed in many ways. The festivals focus on "impact"; they place an emphasis on debates as part of their film programme; many major festivals are held in cities with human rights institutions; and they "boost an impressive list of partners that cover general categories (media, technical support, academic, corporate, municipal, etc.)" (De Valck 2017). As such, the film festivals position themselves as strongly anchored in civil society and civic debate. For this, they use a variety of thematic preferences, quality markers, and alleged impact drivers.

Second, the film festivals manage to sometimes unsettle the distinction between fortunate spectators and vulnerable Others – while this is noticeably left untouched in any of the other cases. The festivals manage to unsettle this dichotomy through a heterogeneous setup, in which a multiplicity of themes, styles and perspectives amounts to a more complex set of actors. Compared to other platforms, the film festivals are, for instance, better suited to circulate representations of adversity that are produced by or from the perspective of marginalised communities themselves. Similar to this, the expansion of the human rights discourse enables privileged audiences to examine their

own environments, where human rights are typically taken for granted. Also, the Human Rights Film Network showcases its dedication to establish a relatively egalitarian partnership between festivals in the West (that is, mainly in Europe) and festivals in the Global South. More generally, the humanitarian gaze (Tascón 2014) in which Western representations of the Global South invite for a strong dichotomous setup are in some cases challenged. However, as has been discussed, these challenges to the status quo are incomplete and generally thwarted by the reproduction of power imbalances. This shows in the position of "established" festivals compared to the "emerging" festivals that the former aim to support. In terms of infrastructure, knowledge, (financial) means, experience, and prestige, the established festivals automatically draw European perspectives to a central position in the network, while emerging festivals often times remain marginalised.

More than any of the other cases, the chapter on film festivals and the HRFN highlights a vulnerability in the research project for this dissertation. As the established European film festivals are drawn to the centre of the film festival network, so have these dominant festivals been centralised in the analysis outlined here. The analysis of recent tendencies in human rights film programming was for instance entirely based on the archives of OneWorld (Prague) and Movies that Matter (The Hague). As such, the programming strategy of two of the biggest and most well-funded film festivals, both of which are based in Europe, have become the dominant perspective for studying the festival landscape more generally. The reason for this was relatively simple: these were the only festivals that had such an elaborate, thematically structured archive available online. Rather than using this as a good 'excuse' for approaching the festival landscape in this way, the study of the HRFN emphasises quite well that this is exactly where the problem lies. Arguably, the infrastructure and experience that draw established European festivals to the core of the film festival network encompass the exact same forces that draw the research undertaken here to the archives of OneWorld and Movies that Matter. Similarly, for reasons of proximity, language, and time, European festivals and perspectives have presided over alternative approaches. In this sense, this dissertation reproduces Eurocentrism in ways very similar to the Human Rights Film Network.

Whereas the proposal for this PhD stated the aim of avoiding "the reproduction of the binary oppositions that are visible in fundraising", this objective has been obstructed by the power structures under study here. Moreover, while the HRFN presented a range of alternative case studies in the "emerging" festivals that make up its members, the other chapters did not. The cases of the emergency appeals alliances, the NGO confederations and Kiva did not present such alternatives – all the more emphasizing their own Eurocentric position, and with that the Eurocentric choice for case studies in this dissertation. Particularly, the decision to use these case studies has to do with the aim of deconstructing humanitarian communication and its dominant discourses, institutions, and practices. The aim to deconstruct dominant discourses generally competes with a

more elaborate emphasis on its alternatives. Indeed, while this approach has largely eclipsed alternative representations, activist interventions, and grassroots initiatives, the hegemony of Eurocentric humanitarian discourses and practices has been centralised here.

This is emphasised in the choice for a study that addresses institutional settings and the production and particularly circulation of content over a study of audiences and spectators. The drawbacks of this approach are clear, in the sense that also here institutional perspectives are centralized, rather than alternative interpretations on the side of audience members. Through an emphasis on the dynamics of image production and circulation in humanitarian communication this dissertation however responds to a gap in the literature "on the production of humanitarian narratives by NGOs" (Pantti 2021, 35). While the body of literature that exists in this field (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Nolan and Mikami 2013; Orgad 2013; Dogra 2013) has mainly emphasised the production of images, this dissertation particularly highlights their circulation – configured, contested, and reorganised through platforms. The position of the spectator was never far away, but has always been made secondary to the institutional setting it was part of. Kiva users have, for instance, not been addressed as active agents, but mostly through the subject positions offered on the platform. Similarly, the experiences of audience members witnessing development appeals have not directly been assessed; rather these experiences were addressed through the worries over audience engagement and critique on which the Codes of Conduct reflected. And whereas the notion of enchantment that is attributed to emergency relief appeals is usually understood through audience interpretations, here it is the experience of the employees that highlight how they "want to be part of this as well, of something bigger".

The ideal to be part of something bigger, and to be part of the identity of humanity was central to this dissertation. The fact that "the category of the human is not self-evident" (Barnett and Weiss 2008, 78) was the starting point for considering how common humanity was reorganised in the context of post-humanitarian disintegration and critique. The answer to this is found in the construction of platforms that can shape, conduct and circulate humanitarian content. This resulted in an approach that could highlight a broad range of tendencies in humanitarian communication. The platforms are reflexive, they can uphold different forms and discourses of unity and they can mould existing organisations to new purposes. The latter, in particular, emphasises the meta-function of platforms in a sector that is being forced to reinvent itself. Nevertheless, the platforms are oriented towards smooth, depoliticised transitions rather than conflictual, agonistic ones that destabilise the power relations that inform humanitarian communications. They propose, as has been argued in relation to Kiva, a "grand narrative of harmonious social change" (Dey and Steyaert 2010, 88), where small-scale disruptions are allowed as long as the status quo remains untouched.

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Summary [English]
This dissertation addresses the concept of a common humanity in humanitarian communication. Common humanity is here conceptualized as referring to those representations that lay claim to the human experience, addressing it as universal, natural or rooted in convictions about human dignity. As has been argued, the notion of a common humanity is increasingly strained under a post-humanitarian condition – a condition characterized by a dispersed media landscape, a disintegration of "grand narratives" and an instrumentalization of humanitarianism (Chouliaraki 2013). Under this condition, the disintegrative forces of post-humanitarianism unsettle the coherence and definiteness that would otherwise support the construction of "humanity as an identity" (Agier 2010). On top of this, the position and understanding of humanitarianism and development as "justified beyond dispute" (Rist 2008) has started to lose strength, with a parallel rise of critiques from both progressive and conservative political backgrounds. As such, the dissertation enquires into the reorganizing of common humanity under post-humanitarian disintegration and critique.

It will be argued that humanitarian platforms characterize such reorganization as they combat disintegration and respond to critiques. In an attempt to understand platforms as a cultural form, platforms are here defined as meta-organizations that aggregate, conduct and reflect upon cultural content. This means to understand platforms as a mode of organizations that pre-dates the rise of digital media platforms that now dominate the field of "platform studies" (Gillespie 2010; Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018) – even though the spectacular rise of social media platforms in the current media landscape is indicative of how a platformed logic has come to shape cultural processes, including humanitarian communication.

Throughout the dissertation, four different platforms will be addressed. In a chapter on disaster relief, the Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) is studied as an *integrative platform*. The national members of the EAA present us with umbrella-like organizations that temporarily unite different humanitarian NGOs in times of humanitarian emergency. The aim to provide a unified voice and a "one-stop-shop" for donors in times of an earthquake, flood or famine integrates different NGOs and media organizations in order to construct a holistic, unified understanding of the emergency at hand. As such, this chapter emphasizes a platform that combats the consequences of the post-humanitarian, disintegrated media landscape by constructing a temporary "mediated center" (Couldry 2003). After addressing disintegration, the following chapter deals with the critiques that have been directed at the humanitarian communication.

In this first of two chapters on long-term development, European NGO confederations are studied as *reflexive platforms*. The position of these sector associations will be studied through an analysis of the Codes of Conduct that respond to the scepticism and critique that have been directed at development appeals. Critiques have been voiced in an imagery debate (Dogra 2013) and worries have grown over compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999), to which the sector associations respond with proposals for

"ethical" and "effective" communication – in the conviction that these considerations can (or even necessarily do) run parallel. They do so by proposing a collectively upheld notion of human dignity in a context where individual NGOs compete for funding and support.

Subsequently, the second chapter on long-term development addresses Kiva, a social media platform for micro credit, as a *utopian platform*. It will be highlighted that Kiva presents itself as a facilitator of a communal, human spirit that can be uncovered by unlocking the potential of connectedness. In emphasizing its platformed appearance and characteristics, Kiva presents itself as an outsider to 'regular' development approaches in reference to technology and the market as its main drivers. As such, they appeal to a rhetoric about "adjustments with a human face" (Jolly 2012), in which bottom-up utopianism is paired up with neo-liberal market logics.

The last case study discusses human rights film festivals as *heterogeneous platforms*. In and through theses festivals, (visual) human rights discourse is reconsidered through multifaceted film programs. As contemporary festival culture expresses "cultural pluralization, mobility and globalization" (Bennett and Woodward 2014) these are tailored to a versatile mode of programming that in the case of human rights films comprises of different themes and concerns, and various styles and modes of address. This restructures the notion of human rights and broadens its mandate and scope, but also involves actors that transgress traditional dichotomies in humanitarian communication - such as the binary opposition between the fortunate spectator and the vulnerable Other. This versatility is extended to the Human Rights Film Network, that aims to function as part of a "global civil society" (Piekarczyk 2015, 8) build around human rights film festivals. Whereas the festivals as well as this network aim to transgress traditional boundaries, they struggle with rooted power structures that reproduce themselves, despite the versatility of the festival set-up.

With regard to methodology, this dissertation can best be considered to have taken a mixed methods approach. Yet, the different methods (interviews, a walk-through analysis, ethnography) all departs from the conviction that the above-mentioned platforms can be studied as texts – be they the interviews with appeal alliance professionals, policy documents of NGO confederations, the interface of a microlending social network or instructive guides on setting up a film festival. Indeed referring to all of them as linguistically constructed social realities is done in a deliberate choice to take on discourse analysis as the central (and overarching) methodological approach for this dissertation.

From this perspective, it will be argued that whereas the notion of common humanity resurfaces in and through platforms, it is often times detached from its political implications. Put differently, while common humanity is reorganized, and while its appeal seems to run deep, its different articulations do not uphold an imperative to solidarity. What the platforms do, however, is to reflect upon humanitarian communication in ways that allows them to manage and conduct critiques and restructure existing discourses and interests. Whereas all the different platforms explicitly or implicitly state to disrupt

development and humanitarian, their commitment to structurally rethink the dynamics of humanitarianism differs. While some platforms simply seem to reposition traditional discourses and practices of development in the face of post-humanitarianism, others struggle with power structures as they seek modes of challenging them.

Summary [Dutch]
In dit proefschrift staat de notie van een *common humanity* in humanitaire communicatie centraal. *Common humanity* wordt hier geconceptualiseerd als de representaties die refereren aan een verondersteld gedeelde menselijke ervaring, die wordt voorgesteld als universeel en natuurlijk en die voortbouwen op overtuigingen aangaande menselijke waardigheid. Deze notie van een *common humanity* staat onder druk onder wat post-humanitairisme wordt genoemd – een conditie die gekarakteriseerd wordt door een gefragmenteerd medialandschap, het uiteenvallen van de "grote, ideologische verhalen" en een instrumentalisering van humanitarisme (Chouliaraki 2013). De fragmentatie die deze context kenmerkt verstoort de coherentie en zekerheden die aan de basis liggen van de constructie van een "menselijke identiteit" (Agier 2010). Daarnaast staat in meer algemene zin de positie van humanitarisme onder druk, op basis van de parallelle opkomst van zowel progressieve als conservatieve kritieken op het paradigma van ontwikkelingssamenwerking (Rist 2008). Als reactie hierop onderzoekt dit proefschrift de constructie en herwaardering van een *common humanity* in de context van post-humanitaire fragmentatie en kritiek.

Het centrale argument dat hier gemaakt wordt is dat de reactie op fragmentatie en kritiek wordt vormgegeven in geplatformde structuren. Platformen worden daarom hier beschouwd als meta-organisaties die culturele content aggregeren, controleren en bijsturen en hierop reflecteren. Dit betekent dat platformen worden begrepen als een manier van organisatie die al bestond voorafgaand aan de opkomst van digitale mediaplatformen die momenteel het vakgebied van *platform studies* (Gillespie 2010; Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018) domineren – hoewel de spectaculaire opkomst van sociale mediaplatform in het huidige medialandschap wel een indicatie is van hoe een platform-logica in toenemende mate culturele processen, en dus ook humanitaire communicatie, vormen.

In dit onderzoek zullen vier verschillende platformen worden bestudeerd. In het hoofdstuk over humanitaire rampen staat de Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) centraal is "integratief platform". De leden van de EAA zijn parapluorganisaties op nationaal niveau, die op tijdelijke basis verschillende humanitaire NGOs verenigen in tijden van een humanitaire ramp. Het doel van deze platformen is om te functioneren als een gezamenlijke stem en een centraal aanspreekpunt voor donateurs. Zodoende worden verschillende NGOs en media-organisaties geïntegreerd als reactie op een aardbeving, overstroming of hongersnood, wat de platformen in staat stelt om een gemeenschappelijke, holistische interpretatie van de situatie te construeren. In dit hoofdstuk wordt dus uiteen gezet hoe de EAA-platformen tegenwicht geven aan het gefragmenteerde medialandschap van het post-humanitarisme, met als centrale inzet het construeren van een tijdelijk *mediated centre* (Couldry 2003). Na deze analyse van (het tegengaan van) fragmentatie licht de nadruk in het volgende hoofdstuk op het (reageren op) kritiek aangaande humanitaire communicatie.

In het eerste van twee hoofdstukken over langetermijn-ontwikkelingssamenwerking worden Europese brancheorganisaties voor NGOs bestudeerd als "reflexieve platformen". De rol van deze brancheorganisaties wordt bestudeerd aan de hand van een analyse van *codes of conduct*, die reageren op de scepsis en de kritiek die campagnes voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking ten deel zijn gevallen. Deze kritieken zijn verwoord in het *imagery debate* (Dogra 2013) terwijl tegelijk de zorgen over *compassion fatigue* groeiden (Moeller 1999). Op deze parallelle ontwikkeling reageren de brancheorganisaties door richtlijnen voor zowel ethische als effectieve communicatie op te stellen – waaraan de overtuiging ten grondslag ligt dat deze overwegingen complementair (kunnen) zijn. Dit doen ze door een gezamenlijk en gedeeld ideaal van menselijke waardigheid voor te stellen, in een context waarin individuele NGOs concurreren om fondsen.

In het tweede hoofdstuk over ontwikkelingssamenwerking staat het sociale mediaplatform voor microkrediet Kiva centraal, als "utopisch platform". In dit hoofdstuk wordt benadrukt dat Kiva zichzelf presenteert als een platform dat op basis van een ideaal van (digitale) verbondenheid de menselijke maat en gemeenschapszin kan herintroduceren in het domein van ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Door zich de uitstraling en eigenschappen van digitale platformen toe te eigenen kan Kiva zich positioneren als buitenstaander ten opzichte van reguliere ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Hiervoor refereert Kiva aan de vrije markt en aan digitale netwerken als utopische platformen. Zodoende appelleren ze aan een retoriek die hoort bij economische "hervormingen met een menselijk gezicht" (Jolly 2012), waarin idealen over verandering van onderop worden verbonden aan een neoliberale marktlogica.

De laatste casus draait om mensenrechtenfilmfestivals als "heterogene platformen". Op deze festivals wordt het (audiovisuele) mensenrechtendiscourse heroverwogen op basis van veelzijdige filmprogramma's die verschillende perspectieven op mensenrechten geven. De "culturele pluriformiteit, mobiliteit en globalisering" die de hedendaagse festivalcultuur uit draagt (Bennett and Woodward 2014) wordt op de filmfestivals onderdeel van een programma dat verschillende thema's, onderwerpen, stijlen en uitdrukkingsvormen vangt onder de noemer van mensenrechten. Dientengevolge wordt de reikwijdte van mensenrechten verbreed en wordt het onderscheidt tussen "geprivilegieerde kijkers" en "kwetsbare Anderen", dat humanitaire communicatie kenmerkt, onder druk gezet. De veelzijdigheid van de festivals wordt verder aangemoedigd in het Human Rights Film Network dat zich het vormen van een kosmopolitische maatschappij ten doel heeft gesteld (Piekarczyk 2015, 8). Terwijl de festivals en dit netwerk zich toeleggen op het verleggen van de grenzen van traditionele humanitaire communicatie, worstelen zij tegelijkertijd met de machtsongelijkheid die diepgeworteld zit in de sector en die zich ondanks de ongrijpbaarheid van de festivals ook hier reproduceert.

Dit proefschrift wordt gekenmerkt door een *mixed-methods*-benadering. Hoewel er echter inderdaad met veel verschillende methoden wordt gewerkt (interviews, een *walk*-

through-analyse, etnografie) wordt altijd vertrokken vanuit de overtuiging dat de bovengenoemde platformen bestudeerd kunnen worden als teksten – of dat nu is doormiddel van interviews met professionals van de platformen voor humanitaire rampen, of dat nu beleidsdocumenten van brancheorganisaties zijn, of dat nu de *interface* van een social-mediaplatform voor microkrediet is, of dat dat instructieve handleiding zijn over hoe een mensenrechtenfilmfestival opgezet kan worden. Omdat alle platformen zodoende als tekstuele constructies van een sociale realiteit worden beschouwd staat de keuze voor een discoursanalyse centraal als de omvattende methode voor dit onderzoek.

Op basis hiervan zal worden beargumenteerd dat hoewel de notie van een *common humanity* opnieuw wordt geconstrustrueerd in en door platformen, dit tegelijk wordt geconstrueerd als een benadering van *common humanity* die los staat van politieke implicaties. Anders gezegd: hoewel *commun humanity* dus opnieuw onder de aandacht wordt gebracht, worden deze nieuwe configuraties ervan niet structureel verbonden aan solidariteit. Wat de platformen in plaats hiervan doen is dat ze reflecteren op humanitaire communicatie op een manier die hen in staat stelt om te reageren op fragmentatie en kritiek, en die de sector in staat stellen om bestaande discoursen en belang te herstructureren en verdedigen. Hoewel elk van de platformen tot op zekere hoogte zegt de machtsrelaties in ontwikkelingssamenwerking en humanitarisme ter discussie te stellen, blijft de toewijding aan het structureel heroverwegen van de dynamiek van humanitaire communicatie achter.

About the candidate

Wouter Oomen is a PhD candidate and lecturer in media studies at Utrecht University. His research is focused on humanitarian communication and on the platforms that enable and constrain the circulation of humanitarian imagery and discourse. For his PhD project he received a scholarship from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis. During the PhD, Wouter was a visiting PhD at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is co-director of the Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, a non-profit organization committed to better communication on international development. He has taught in a broad range of courses in media studies and social sciences, at the University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen, Utrecht University and the LSE. At the University of Amsterdam he was nominated as lecturer of the year. Wouter published both academically (e.g. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*) and in professional and popular outlets (e.g. through Partos and *OneWorld Magazine*). As part of his visit to the LSE, he was co-author of a report on "The European 'Migration Crisis' and the Media".