

HUMANITARIAN AID REFRAMED: THE POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE DIGITAL
STORYTELLING TO RESTORE THE PUBLIC'S FAITH IN THE FIGHT
AGAINST INTERNATIONAL POVERTY

By

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Decades of stereotypically negative and emotional public appeals for financial support of humanitarian causes in the developing world by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have resulted in increased compassion fatigue and a loss of efficacy among the Western public that their contributions are effective. This literature review of NGO communications research explains how stereotyping, othering, and the intentional targeting of emotions such as pity and guilt, has led to compassion fatigue. It also brings to light the promise and potential that positive, alternative tactics could have in revitalizing public's support for foreign aid while instilling a belief that they can contribute positively in alleviating some of the most pressing challenges the developing world currently faces.

This research examined the literature on alternative, positive NGO communications approaches, and outlines a contemporary, digital storytelling approach that is based on a hybrid practice of traditional photojournalism and public relations conventions, one that frames aid according to broadly intrinsic values, such as shared community building, participatory democracy, self-sufficiency, egalitarianism, shared prosperity, and broadmindedness. If widely

adopted within the NGO sector, such a communications approach may serve as a counter-hegemonic force capable of reversing some of the damaging legacy of the stereotypically negative NGO appeals relied upon for decades.

This review suggests that values matter, and NGOs that frame humanitarian aid and foreign assistance according to pro-social, self-transcendental, and intrinsic values, may have great persuasive power to overcome compassion fatigue and convince audiences to support their endeavors.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Most Westerners that have access to a smartphone, a television, print magazines, and/or the Internet are likely familiar with some form of humanitarian aid appeal by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the Red Cross, Oxfam International, or Save the Children. If asked to recount particular advertisements, they would likely describe similar visuals and messages, be it a decades-old print advertisement, the child sponsorship TV ads common in the 1990's, or an NGO's social media posts appearing in a Facebook newsfeed. They would likely describe imagery depicting non-white women and children, possibly dressed in soiled and thread-bare clothing, set amidst a backdrop of barren landscapes, destroyed infrastructure, or general squalor. The expressions upon the faces of those depicted might be described as sad, vulnerable, and longing, fixated upon the viewer, their gazes emotionally disturbing, possibly even triggering feelings of sympathy, pity and guilt. Such is the means by which the world's NGOs have depicted humanitarian aid and asked the public for financial support to tackle some of the most challenging natural and man-made crises the developing world has faced, from famine and malnourishment, to war and disease, to climate change-induced natural disasters.

Since the first public appeals in the wake of the Second World War and the rebuilding of continental Europe, these communication strategies were effective in generating revenue to fund programs that rehabilitated populations coping with crisis and trauma. Such tactics were not without consequences, as a legacy of ads that stereotyped, othered, and subjugated those they sought to serve, have embedded widespread misconceptions concerning the developing world and its inhabitants. Those misconceptions have only perpetuated inequality and valuations of human worth. Combined with the ubiquity of a seemingly infinite flow of sensationalist imagery of poverty and war in the mass media, NGO appeals have become drops in a ceaseless media

deluge, while compassion fatigue, the gradual numbing to the effects of such imagery and the loss of a sense of efficacy that the developing world's problems can be addressed, has made NGO communications decreasingly effective, and audiences are tuning them out at a greater frequency (Grayson, 2014; Hudson et al., 2016). I have come to understand this problem through the following thesis and literature review that examines how and why NGO appeals for support are declining in effectiveness, how the aid sector has historically attempted to mitigate some of the adverse effects of its negative legacy, as well as identifying some contemporary, alternative, and positive communication strategies that could be successful in combatting compassion fatigue and reversing some of the damaging effects caused by decades of stereotyping and marginalizing the developing world.

NGOs have historically relied upon what Chouliaraki (2010) calls “shock effect appeals” (p. 110), those that include representations depicting aid beneficiaries as poor, malnourished, and vulnerable, because they have been the most effective means of attracting financial support amongst the public to date. The objective of such tactics was to foster a sense of guilt and complicity amongst the viewers that persuaded them to act by taking out their wallets and giving money to NGOs (Chouliaraki, 2010; Wells, 2013). Contemporary research indicates that there have been long-term negative consequences, most notably that NGO appeals have helped construct hegemonic Western ideologies and beliefs about what the developing world is like based on gross inaccuracies. Benthall (1993) found that by the mid-1990's, the majority of British citizens polled believed that more than fifty percent of all world's children were malnourished, when the actual figure was estimated to be closer to one percent of the world's total youth population. The British also believed that three-quarters of the world's population lived in destitute poverty when the actual percentage was nowhere near as high (Benthall, 1993).

Recent research by Vossen et al. (2016) claimed that British NGOs still overwhelmingly represented the developing world as if such negative tropes were accurate, despite the fact that we are now two decades removed from an industry-wide awareness movement that negative, emotional appeals were becoming a destructive force in shaping public perception. NGO representations matter because they construct beliefs that can inform policy and behavior toward foreign populations in need.

Since the mid-1990's the Internet became widely adopted across the globe and fundamentally altered the media landscape. Today, thanks to a 24-hour on demand news cycle and access points to it via phones and portable devices, we are now witness to a seemingly endless barrage of images depicting tragedy and crisis predominantly afflicting distant locations and disproportionately affecting minorities. NGOs have always been intertwined with news media because news organizations traditionally depended upon NGOs to gain access to crises in exchange for publicity that demonstrated that a particular organization was providing immediate aid to those afflicted populations (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). However, after the proliferation of personal digital devices and the normalization of the 24/7 instant news cycle, NGOs are having to work harder than ever to distinguish their own media appeals from the overwhelming supply of negative news that we are inundated with everyday (Cohen, 2001; Moeller, 1999). Thus, NGOs are trapped within the media cycle, adopting their tactics of sensationalism and increasingly explicit imagery, just so that they can compete with international news and have a chance to get their message out (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). This cycle has led to "compassion fatigue," the notion that Western audiences are witness to so much imagery that portrays the developing world as stereotypically negative and perpetually impoverished, that they are

increasingly tuning out NGO messaging due to an erosion in their belief that foreign aid can address the problems it seeks to resolve (Hudson et al., 2016; Wells, 2013).

The humanitarian aid sector has not been monolithic in its stereotypically negative depiction of its work, as it experienced a period of awakening in the 1990's and responded with efforts to reverse and mitigate the effects that it has had on shaping inaccurate perceptions of the developing world. Oversight bodies such as the UN General Assembly of European NGOs were the first to publish recommendations of communication tactics that avoided stereotyping, while numerous other NGOs devised and adopted their own codes of communications conduct (Vossen et al., 2016). These reforms resulted in some organizations creating appeals that ranged from having overtly positive and contrived imagery, to Madison Avenue-style ad campaigns that broke the mold, resembling tactics used to sell consumer goods more than they appealed to one's sense of charity for aiding impoverished strangers. However, positive appeals have been greeted with skepticism, codes of conduct have been non-binding and lack authority, and the fact that emotional appeals targeting pity are still effective to some degree, has meant that no single alternative NGO communications approach has been adopted and put into practice across the sector.

Today, evidence suggests that industry-wide communication tactics have reverted back to less explicit but still traditionally negative and stereotypical appeals, and audience research indicates that compassion fatigue is decreasing the effectiveness of all NGO appeals for public support (Hilary, 2014; Hudson et al., 2016; Radley & Kennedy, 1997). At the same time, audiences express the desire to see alternative representations of the developing world coming from NGOs and the media (Moeller, 1999). Therefore, this thesis defines and advocates for the adoption of a multimedia digital storytelling approach for humanitarian aid NGOs. The

approach combines still, video, and written media, and is informed by research regarding positive communications approaches that have been tried and researched in the past.

In reviewing the literature and research concerning efforts that have been made to present foreign humanitarian aid in a more positive light, this thesis picks certain aspects of these strategies that can be implemented into the approach that I advocate for. It explores how intentionally communicating empathy for beneficiaries by focusing on shared characteristics and desires, could potentially have greater persuasive power than targeting the emotions of pity and guilt. It examines the emerging practice of NGO reportage, as Grayson (2014) has defined it, and suggests that such tactics of applying news gathering and visual journalism techniques to the NGO sector is an effective foundation from which to build a strategy of NGO storytelling as it allows for the maintenance of reportage-style visual aesthetics NGO are accustomed to, while being flexible enough to augment it with the more setup or arranged approaches to creating imagery that is common in public relations. This thesis also takes a look at the how pro-social, or intrinsic framing has been effectively used in environmental conservation movements by various NGOs to directly appeal to, and influence target audiences that share similar values. It describes how communicating through visual representations and written word; the ways that humanitarian aid and its beneficiaries gain and exercise inalienable rights, obtain the health, agricultural, and entrepreneurial knowledge necessary to thrive; and how they lift their own communities up in the process; act as a network of surface values that come together to construct positive, all-encompassing frames that altruistic audiences are likely to be influenced by.

The contemporary storytelling strategy presented here is therefore a fusion of current practices and past attempts at positivism, borrowing the ideas that have worked before and utilizing them to create success stories of empowered beneficiaries through representations of aid

work that targets audiences' sense of charity (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015; Darnton and Kirk, 2011). Reference and analysis of examples of contemporary NGO media where such tactics are utilized demonstrate how they are empowering to beneficiaries, while remaining simultaneously altruistic and satisfying audiences' desires to see non-stereotypical representations. In the discussion and conclusion chapter, I address some of the challenges and potential solutions for implementing aspects of such practices in the field based upon my own experiences doing so in Tanzania in 2014, as well as some possible implications for instructing this or similar NGO reportage approaches and digital storytelling within the exciting world of humanitarian aid NGO communications.

CHAPTER 2 NGOS AND WHAT THEY DO

The NGO has become synonymous with humanitarian aid efforts such as famine relief, disaster response, refugee relocation, and capacity building efforts in the form of training and education throughout the developing world. The World Bank defined NGOs as “private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (World Bank, 1995, p.7). Davison (2007) identified NGOs as organizations outside of the public and private sectors, categorized as either southern or northern, with the southern organizations predominantly concerned with providing humanitarian aid to the developing world. That an NGO exists outside of public and private sectors means that they are not created by a national government to provide official services, nor are they corporations seeking to make a profit through selling a good or service. It is not uncommon, though, for NGOs to partner with national governments that need their assistance in providing essential services, nor is it uncommon that they resemble corporations in their structure, branding, and marketing.

Willets (2001) defined an NGO as “an independent voluntary association of people acting together on a continuous basis, for some common purpose, other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities.” The four main characteristics of an NGO, according to this definition, are that it is not part of the government in power, not a political party vying for power, not seeking profit, nor is it a violent criminal organization. Willets acknowledged that while NGOs cannot be competing for political power and cannot constitute a political party, they may sometimes be affiliated with a party in practice, and, despite not being profit-seeking enterprises, they can generate revenue through consulting or selling

publications, thus sometimes blurring the lines between NGOs and for-profit enterprise (Willetts, 2001).

The term “NGO” was coined during the formation of the United Nations (UN) in the wake of World War II in order to identify and distinguish the various private sector groups that the UN would work with, though NGOs that operated nationally and internationally advocating for specific causes operated as far back as the early 20th Century (Willetts, 2001). There are NGOs that operate on a strictly domestic basis, as well as those that conduct operations transnationally. Thus, some literature distinguishes between the two by adding “International” to their designation, hence the acronym, INGO. It is generally acknowledged that in the global political sphere, NGOs are acting transnationally, so the “I” preceding INGO is often unnecessary and omitted (Willetts, 2001). Chouliaraki (2010) takes it for granted that NGOs act internationally as he defined an NGO as a “transnational actor that engages with universal ethical claims, such as common humanity or global civil society, to mobilize action on human suffering” (p. 108). In this thesis, I use only the acronym NGO, rather than INGO, in reference to all organizations discussed because all of those I have identified work across borders and communicate to a global, but predominantly Western, English-speaking audience.

According to the website NGO.org (n.d.), an NGO is a “not-for-profit, voluntary citizens group that is organized on a local, national, or international level.” They are generally concerned with very specific goals and objectives like urban sanitation, public health, refugee resettlement, or combating malnutrition just to name a few areas of specialization (Definition of NGOs, n.d.). For example, the Red Cross, one of the most widely recognized NGOs on the planet, has a mission that is narrowly concerned with alleviating human suffering in the wake of an emergency or disaster (Red Cross, 2017). Contrast that with Oxfam International, whose stated

mission is to “end the injustice of poverty,” by “taking on the big issues that keep people poor such as inequality, discrimination, and lack of access to resources” (About Oxfam, 2017). Like the Red Cross, Oxfam has a presence providing aid in the aftermath of a disaster, but Oxfam is more concerned with long-term aid designed to gradually erode the root causes of poverty through gradual social capacity building. Since this thesis explores alternative, more positive visual communications strategies in communicating NGO success stories, its focus will be on organizations like Oxfam, entities that share long-term objectives such as reducing poverty and food insecurity. Organizations such as Oxfam should have a greater ability to methodically construct the media representations of their work than those NGOs that primarily respond to traumatic crisis, given the nature and immediacy of their work.

NGOs are premised upon the functioning of a civil society. Civil society in the United States is comprised of organizations of citizens acting upon their own will to advocate for desired social, economic, or political rights (United States Department of State, 2017). NGOs are an important part of that advocacy as they provide a powerful means of organization and their freedom to operate unhindered by the government is paramount to the functioning of a healthy democracy. It is estimated that there are about 3.7 million operating NGOs working across the globe, and they represent virtually every conceivable social, religious, political, and ideological cause (United States Department of State, 2017). While the humanitarian work that NGOs conduct in the traditionally democratic free societies of the West is important, their value throughout the developing world is especially high because in the absence of mature civil society and democratic institutions, the organizational strength of NGOs are often the most effective means citizens have of advocating for their rights, alleviating poverty, and securing the resources they need to survive.

Communicating Solidarity

Humanitarian aid in any form is expensive. From sheltering victims following natural disasters, to long-term health and nutrition education within a rural community, it all costs money. While some funding of NGO operations is derived from government grants that work through NGOs to achieve desired objectives, some of an NGO's effectiveness can be dependent upon public financing. In order to raise the necessary money to operate and carry out their objectives, NGOs need to effectively communicate a vision, including what their goals and objectives are, as well as report on the progress being made towards those ends, all within a coherent identity or brand. If the public reciprocates by backing their objectives and donates money to an NGO's cause, then an organization will have successfully aligned their mission with their targeted audiences' desire to help, achieving what is sometimes referred to in the aid sector as "solidarity" (Orgad, 2013, p. 296; Hudson et al., 2016, p. 10). Achieving solidarity and garnering the financial support necessary to operate may be the primary public communications goal amongst NGOs that depend on public funds, but for decades the means to create solidarity have too often relied upon visually and textually negative and demeaning stereotypes of the developing world and the beneficiaries NGOs serve, resulting in the decline of the public's perceived efficacy of their ability to contribute to reducing international poverty and its consequences (Wells, 2013).

NGO media comprises everything from traditional print ads and annual reports, to TV ad campaigns, as well as contemporary and innovative social media marketing strategies that can reach the public and attempt to establish solidarity. To Davison (2007) NGO communications are about upwards and downwards accountability. They report up to trustees, donors, and host governments, and down to partners, staff, beneficiaries, and others (Davison, 2007). Types of NGO accountability can include, but is not limited to, reporting on finances, defining

organizational goals and objectives, resource use and efficiency, the social and/or environmental impact of operations, as well as reporting on both the immediate and long-term impact their programs are having (Davison, 2007). For example, Oxfam International must be accountable for their organizational culture of making a difference through collaboration with beneficiaries, social accountability, cost-effectiveness, and innovation in their implementation of specific programs that secure sustainable livelihoods, health care and education, rights to life and security, rights to be heard, and rights to gender and ethnic/racial equity amongst the world's poor (Davison, 2007). Oxfam's communications and public relations arm is tasked with communicating all of that and more to their various audiences through a variety of traditional and contemporary online media. The type of communication and audience most relevant to this thesis concerns how an organization like Oxfam reports to the public about what their organization stands for, what they are doing to provide humanitarian assistance, how they provide aid, and what the intended audience can do to help them achieve those goals.

While some of the larger, well-established NGOs have budgets and communications resources that have enabled them to market themselves almost as if they were widely recognizable consumer brands, their communications objectives are principally concerned with selling human care and compassion, as well as social and political ideals to the public, rather than any product (Orgad, 2013). Similarly, Smith and Yanacopulos (2004) agreed that NGO communications have the objectives of "securing funding, promoting different value systems, perpetuating an organization's self-interest, building of their particular constituencies, and promoting an organization's political ambitions around development issues" (p. 661). Vossen et al. (2016) stated that an NGO's primary communications task is to raise funds for specific projects and/or bring about awareness of social issues. One of his studies identified the most

frequently encountered purposes of NGO advertisements were sixty-nine percent fundraising, eighteen percent raising awareness of a given cause, eleven percent increasing brand recognition, and two percent thanking donors (Vossen et al., 2016). With NGO ads being overwhelmingly used for the purposes of public fundraising, there have historically been concerted efforts put into the construction of messages that emotionally affect viewers and persuade them into giving money in support of a cause. However, in order to achieve solidarity between audience and NGO, blatantly emotional and melodramatic visual and textual device targeting audiences' sense of guilt have historically been relied upon. Through imagery and text that reinforce negative stereotypes of aid beneficiaries as perpetually poor, dependent, malnourished, and beholden to relentless natural and man-made calamity, NGOs have effectively overshadowed any alternative narratives. As a consequence, such representations have become socially dominant perceptions regarding the reality of the developing world in the eyes of the Western audiences, regardless of how inaccurate they may be.

There is debate within the scholarship of humanitarian aid media and representation as to whether images of suffering, disaster, and trauma can create a solidarity amongst audiences for the well-being of distant others, versus the view that media representations are inadequate to establish any ethical relationship between audiences and distant sufferers (Orgad, 2013). Such a relationship in this sense would have a moral obligation to it, a consensus among an audience that to do nothing, to let starvation or prolonged malnourishment persist, to not assist refugees under siege of conflict to seek safe harbor, or to not provide the education or tools for a developing society to become self-sufficient, would be fundamentally wrong. Most members of the general public cannot simply drop whatever they are doing, interrupt their lives, and go to where distant suffering is taking place, but they can indirectly act by donating the money that

will allow organizations to help in their name. The key to establishing that solidarity has traditionally been through the use of melodrama in the form of morality plays. Emotions of guilt and pity are intentionally targeted through the use of a variety of storytelling device and stereotypical tropes that now seem to be doing a disservice to NGO communication objectives (Orgad, 2013). This thesis presumes that media, and particularly the images they use to depict the developing world, while not a substitute for being present and personally witnessing the plight of those in need, can establish an ethical relationship and obligation between audiences and those who are suffering and in need of humanitarian aid. Media representations are the only means by which the vast majority of the world will ever be able to contextualize the experiences of distant others. We must presume that depictions have real power to create positive change in the world. If they could not, then there would be no point in trying to improve upon the representations of humanitarian aid and its beneficiaries so that they may attract greater public support and foster long-term, meaningful change.

How Visual Communications Create Solidarity

Garnering public support for an NGO's cause is not a simple and straightforward function of making and then disseminating visual and textual messages to a given audience. Solidarity is the result of careful and deliberate efforts at constructing representations that will affect viewers in a desired way. Therefore, depictions of NGO work should not be taken for granted as reality, but instead, as media representations that are the culmination of conscious decisions to include and exclude certain content in order to elicit a desired response (Orgad, 2012). Representations range on the spectrum between being a reflection of reality, to the extent that is possible, to constructionist, where meaning is made through very deliberate inclusion and exclusion of subject matter (Orgad, 2012). NGOs have traditionally done both by employing the conventions of photojournalism and even relying on the press for their media to mirror reality, to

taking a public relations approach by crafting their messages through staged manipulation and extensive pre-planning. The practice of NGO communications then is more than meets the eye, it is a source of power because NGO representations “encode power relations and thereby produce and reproduce those relations by constructing knowledge, values, conceptions, and beliefs” (Orgad, 2012, p. 25). What NGOs have historically done with that power is create representations that have relied upon stereotypically negative imagery, emotive device, framing, and othering to construct a hegemonic narrative amongst the Western populace that poverty and crisis in the developing world is endemic and intractable, with blame often placed on the beneficiaries themselves, which are directly or indirectly insinuated to be inferior.

Visual imagery has been a critical tool utilized in NGO communications for decades. Davison (2007) argued that photos are as important for NGOs to remain accountable as copy and figures, so the manner in which NGO imagery might convey accountability is significant. Regarding the power of the photograph, Sontag (2003) wrote that “nonstop imagery is our surround, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite and provides a quick way of comprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it” (p. 22). Davison’s oft-cited analysis of a single image that appeared on the cover of an Oxfam annual report demonstrates how typical NGO imagery uses specific device and techniques to not only convey tacit knowledge about the developing world, but to also affect a viewer’s emotions to the extent that they will most likely achieve solidarity with that organization (Davison, 2007). He based his analysis on Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, the standard for photographic philosophy and meaning theory, in order to demonstrate exactly how the image in question communicates solidarity to an audience (Davison, 2007). Images such as that used on the Oxfam cover (Figure 2-1) contain what Barthe’s identified as a stadium and a punctum, and

those two components work in tandem in any successful image to convey specific knowledge and to affect in a certain way (Davison, 2007). The stadium accounts for the tacit, or understood knowledge of an audience, the social codes, conventions, and symbols that are mutually understood between producer and receiver (Davison, 2007). The punctum is a certain quality or component, often intangible, which punctures or disrupts a viewer's contemplation of the image, often producing an emotional response, one that an NGO hopes would trigger a viewer's sense of charity (Davison, 2007).

The Oxfam report cover that Davison analyzed features two African children seated at a table with numerous overturned bottle caps that have letters of the English alphabet written on them. The crop of the photo is tight, only containing the two boys in the upper one-half portion of the image, the table and bottle caps occupying the lower half. The camera angle is steep and shot from overhead, the boy on the right appears to look down at the table while arranging the bottle cap letters in rows, while the boy on the left, gazes slightly upward and acknowledges the presence of the camera (Davison, 2007). In Davison's analysis, the stadium conveyed the notions that the viewer was already familiar with, that Oxfam works in Africa as development aid providers and that parts of Africa are poor and rely on repurposing waste such as bottle caps into useful resources (Davison, 2007). The punctum on the other hand, made up of the child's gaze, arouses the viewer's compassion and is the quality that triggers their charitable instinct, causing them to support Oxfam's efforts (Davison, 2007). Davison argued that this particular punctum, conveyed an authenticity and innocence, and demonstrated that the children's education, through whatever English word or spelling game is being practiced, is working and that they are learning, results that could evoke the targeted emotions of solidarity and charity within the viewer (Davison, 2007).

NGO imagery can be thought to affect audiences according to Barthes's stadium and punctum, regardless of whether the imagery is positive and empowering, or negative and traditionally stereotypical. The punctum though, what Davison (2007) referred to as the "emotional, uncoded, and the personal," is a critical means of triggering the desired emotions and action of a target audience (p. 140). When it comes to a human subject, a photograph creates an illusion that time is defeated and that the depicted person is looking back at the spectator, but that illusion gives the subject an emotional attachment and their gaze can be interpreted in any number of ways that may dictate a viewer's response (Davison, 2007). Studies of alternative, positive aid imagery have reinforced this notion with findings that suggest that certain visual cues have a positive emotional correlation among audiences. Cues include using children, smiling subjects, and subject/camera awareness through eye contact (Dyck & Coldevin, 1992).

Imagery interpretation though is personal and subjective. Preconceptions, what people have seen before, and their beliefs about other places and cultures, factor heavily upon their interpretation of imagery, therefore, presenting a photo to them does not present a limited possibility of interpretation. Images may reinforce existing preconceptions, or they may challenge and shatter them (Radley & Kennedy, 1997). In interviewing photojournalists that have covered international crises and relief efforts, Clark (2004) cited one particular photographer's statement regarding how they are able to influence interpretation when that photographer proclaimed that:

Chaotic, fractured, complex, blur, out of focus images tend to make places look like that. They make places look mad, chaotic, where nothing can be solved and when you apply that to Sierra Leone or Palestine for example the viewer assumes these places are beyond help. (p. 698)

And therein lies the power of the image within the foreign aid sector to influence audience behavior. Depending upon how visual representations of aid work and the people

served are presented according to these basic underlying mechanics, and depending on the preconceptions held by an audience on the receiving end, images can shape mass opinion and have critical ramifications in establishing hegemonic notions of international power dynamics, race and ethnicity, not to mention human deservedness. These perceptions can influence decision makers and ultimately determine the effectiveness of foreign aid and the perceived intractability of international poverty and its wide-ranging consequences.

Framing, Melodrama, and Complicity

Framing of international aid and humanitarian work can be as critical to communicating solidarity as visuals, and oftentimes, they are mutually reinforcing. Vossen et al. (2016) defined frames as “meta-narratives” for understanding “something about the problem at stake, the causes and consequences, the moral judgment and the possible solutions” (p. 3). In this way, they are similar to the already discussed concept of an image’s stadium, and can be thought of as packages of preexisting knowledge, ideas, and beliefs commonly shared amongst a group of people and triggered by certain visual or textual cues. For instance, if an NGO reporting on a drought-stricken farmer in Somalia chooses to represent him as an innocent victim of circumstance, which is a frame loaded with ideas of victimhood and causation, then a viewer who is not familiar with that farmer’s specific circumstances, could still be expected to recognize that he is in need because the viewer shares a similar definition of victimhood as the communicating NGO (Vossen et al., 2016). In other words, the frame works to convey the intended message because the NGO and the targeted audience member share the same or similar conceptions of victimhood. Therefore, frames are collective in that they are part of shared memories common to large groups of people and they function to communicate common values and ideas amongst a group for any given subject (Vossen et al., 2016).

Visual representations serve as frames because inclusion and exclusion of certain elements construct messages that conform to commonly held ideas and associations about the things being represented. For example, NGO media representations have historically included an overabundance of images of women and children to suggest notions of dependence and victimhood because such traits have traditionally been associated with those demographics. However unfair and inaccurate, such preconceptions have existed outside of the world of international humanitarian aid, reinforced over time through repetition, thereby solidifying a widely-understood and entrenched frame recognized by multiple cultures. Other frames that have been utilized within the aid sector that can be characterized as predominantly negative because they've perpetuated damaging stereotypes include: aid beneficiaries are perpetually starving, that they live in squalor, that they are adverse to working hard, and that their nations are unusually prone to war and/or natural catastrophe (Vossen et al., 2016). Just as there exist negative frames that have shaped NGO communications and public perceptions in undesirable ways, there have been attempts at alternative framing. Research suggests that some of these communication tactics could be adopted amongst NGOs to serve as a counter-hegemonic force and reverse the consequences of decades of damaging representations.

Negative representations that attempt to garner solidarity by targeting collective guilt, have historically framed poverty as a consequence of colonialism's legacy. Chouliaraki (2010) examined classic shock effect NGO appeals issued by Oxfam and the Red Cross in the 1950's and 60's that utilized imagery that contrasted extremely emaciated bodies to those of healthy Western citizens. In such portrayals, complicity in the subjugation and misfortune of beneficiaries was implied by suggesting that their struggles were the consequence of colonial powers (of which the majority of the audience belonged) putting into place the institutions and

systems of exploitation and oppression that led to the current state of affairs, thereby leaving their audience to feel guilty by association (Chouliaraki, 2010). The resulting sense of shame was hoped to prompt public action primarily through financial donations (Chouliaraki, 2010). Psychologically, the shock effect communications approach worked to attract support because in Chouliaraki's words, "failure to act is failure to acknowledge our historical and personal participation in perpetuating human suffering" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 111). The idea being that citizens of the developed world are complicit in the suffering of distant others because it is the Western nations whose economies perpetuate the poverty that so many aid appeals are seeking to alleviate (Chouliaraki, 2010).

Targeting emotions of complicity and guilt through dramatic visuals and narrative device is what Wells (2013) identified as melodrama. Melodrama is dramatic storytelling, or "extravagant theatricality," and it is a device that has been used in oral and literary storytelling history to convey characters' internal struggles, particularly human suffering (Melodrama, n.d.; Wells, 2013). Wells examined traditionally negative NGO media and characterized melodrama as a common device employed to foster a sense of solidarity by having viewers see a subject, such as a young and vulnerable child, as that subject's parent might. A suffering child's parent would be expected to feel a great amount of sympathy for their young, thereby making a potential villain out of anyone who would watch and would do nothing, the distant viewer of the aid appeal included. Using melodrama in this way simply becomes another method of implying complicity and targeting guilt and shame as the primary emotions upon which audiences are expected to act (Wells, 2013).

Stereotyping, Othering, Ideology, and Hegemony

Stereotyping is another device that constructs hegemonic notions of the developing world and a perceived lack of effectiveness in the fight against global poverty. Hall (1992) defined

stereotypes as “one-sided descriptions, which result from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple cardboard cutout, becoming the essence of what they represent” (p. 215). In traditionally negative NGO media, nothing is more stereotypical than the reliance on visuals of masses of visibly malnourished women and children in tattered and soiled clothing, looking pitiful and vulnerable amidst a setting of ruin and dilapidation. Over time, as NGOs predominantly used such imagery to elicit financial support, such depictions of the developing world, however misrepresentative they might be, have become reality to Western populations who have no means of contextualizing what that world is actually like outside of the stereotypes that are repeated in the media and by NGOs.

Stereotypes have a particularly important role to play in the process of othering, by which Western societies and developed nations come to understand themselves, which often happens to be in direct contrast to the beneficiaries being served. Orgad contends that it is natural for societies to come up with concepts of “others” because how a given group of people come to understand of themselves, relies on developing a strong sense of who they are not (Orgad, 2012). Othering is effectively done through stereotyping by dividing subjects into oversimplified sets of binaries, each side understood through its juxtaposition with an opposite. Each side is ascribed value qualities of either good or bad, a process often referred to as dualism (Orgad, 2012; Hall, 1992). For example, rich versus poor, modern versus undeveloped, and civilized versus uncivilized, are but a few of the binaries that circulate in aid and development discourse. These good and bad quality associations are defined by Western societies, those in a position of power and privilege, which has resulted in them ascribing the good values upon themselves and the bad ones on beneficiary nations as part of this process of meaning making and defining international order.

Othering is a useful tool in manipulating widespread perceptions of foreign populations and generally goes one of two ways. The first is to imbue the other with opposing and negative traits and stereotypes, establishing them as an enemy, while the other tactic is to idealize them as a stranger, but one with which some common traits and ideologies are shared (Orgad, 2012). The foreign aid sector depends upon the latter method to foster notions of a shared humanity and interconnectedness that demands attention when those “others” are in need because their “bare humanity demands care, compassion, and pity (Orgad, 2012, p. 55-56).” Othering through stereotypes though is not just another emotionally manipulated device employed to foster solidarity for a cause, it is the driver of hegemonic ideologies that ultimately determine the dominant social discourse, beliefs, and action of both the providers and receivers of foreign aid.

Thompson defined ideology as “the ways in which meaning is mobilized for the maintenance of relations and domination” (as cited in Orgad, 2012, p. 26). Visual and textual representations of humanitarian aid construct very specific meanings in regard to world power imbalances, perceptions of race and identity of beneficiary nations, and beliefs of human deservedness. Such notions make up the foundation of a dominant Western ideology and mindset that has arguably perpetuated the status quo and is partially responsible for the widespread belief that international poverty is a permanent, intractable condition. Hall (1992) labeled such an ideology as the “West and the rest” (p. 201). The West includes developed European powers and the United States, who are all givers and creators of foreign aid, are imbued with generally positive and powerful qualities, while their binary, the “rest,” encompasses the impoverished, war-torn, malnourished, and vulnerable masses associated with lesser values (Hall, 1992, p. 201). The West functions as an ideology in that it: allows classification of different parts of the world, provides a set of images (accurate or not) that

visualize that classification, allows for a basis of comparison as to how close societies fit their categorization, and allows us to rank societies according to positive and negative feelings (Hall, 1992). If Orgad is correct in her assertion that othering serves the function of defining a group of people according to what they are not, then Hall's assertions have provided an efficient frame for allowing Western populations to conceptualize their power and perceived role in aiding the rest of the world. However, that is a frame that is largely based on antiquated colonial notions of state relationships and the subjugation of disadvantaged populations, as well as a vehicle for perpetuating those conceptions today through the process of hegemony and ideological domination (Orgad, 2012; Hall, 1992).

According to Gramsci, ideology forms as a desire to establish one dominant frame or way of thinking about something, a hegemony, where one single group "claims social, political, and cultural leadership" through that dominant ideology (as cited in Orgad, 2012, p. 26). Hegemony is not forced upon a society, it is approved in mass by making the ideas, conceptions, and beliefs of a given ideology seem like common sense to the majority of society (Orgad, 2012). The ideology of the West and the rest, that there exists a selection of developed nations that are deemed technologically elite, who have the capital, stability, and political clout to dictate how the remainder of the rest of the world can develop, is hegemonic because from the perspective of the United States and Western scholarly culture, this paradigm for understanding the world is taken completely for granted. Representations of the developing world in the mass media, including NGO media, have made this ideology hegemonic through the stereotypical visuals and repetition of reinforcing frames. Today the tenants of this ideology are widely accepted to the point that it is the perceived reality amongst the citizens of Western nations, shaping a discourse around foreign aid that functions to perpetuate that hegemony.

Hall defined discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about (representing) a particular kind of knowledge about a topic (Hall, 1992, p. 201). The traditional discourse and frames that are perpetuated within the humanitarian sector are mechanisms for the maintenance and reproduction of ideology. Orgad stated that “the media engage continuously in the representational practice of othering because they hierarchize, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, and marginalize practices and populations that diverge from what, at a specific moment in time, is socially accepted as central, safe, legitimate, normal and conventional” (Orgad, 2012, p. 54). What is important to point out about Orgad’s statement is that hegemony can be a “specific moment in time,” because if Foucault’s premise is correct, that media and texts are contested sites of meaning making, ones that are dynamic and fluctuate, then the power imbalances and hegemonic ideas that are constructed, can also be deconstructed and new meanings formed through alternative representations (as cited in Orgad, 2012). Just as the traditionally negative and stereotypical representations of foreign aid beneficiaries have legitimized a West and the rest hegemonic ideology, through careful representations that attempt to revert the stereotypes by depicting these same people as empowered, and through alternative framing techniques that target audience’s pro-social behaviors, a new hegemonic ideology may be constructed. Such representations may erode the existing ideology to the extent that entrenched perceptions about international poverty and our collective ability to eradicate it are reversed, establishing a solidarity between NGOs and the public that is not based on guilt and obligation, but one founded upon a sense that some of the most difficult problems facing the developing world can be resolved.

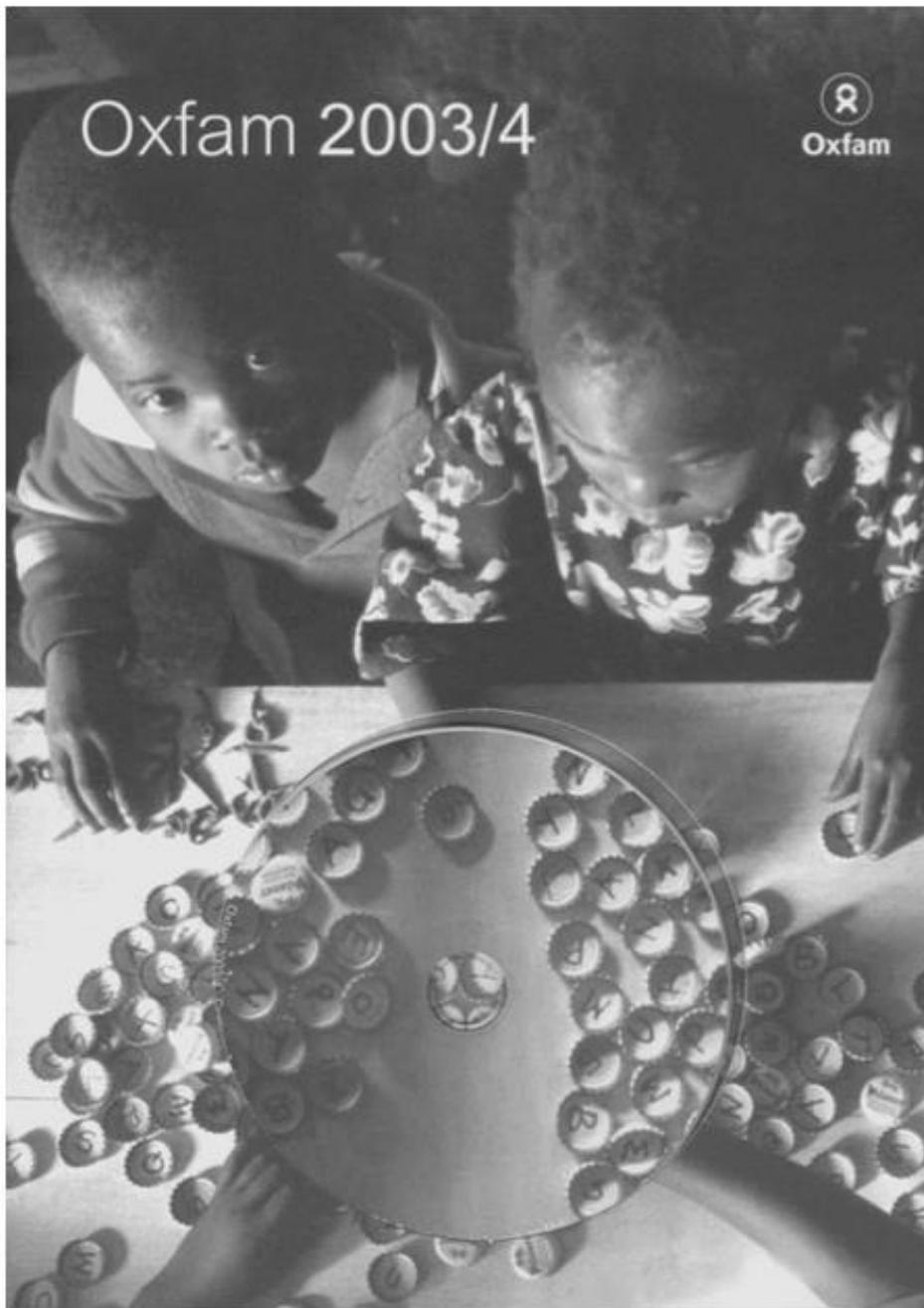


Figure 2-1. Oxfam International 2003/2004 annual report front cover. Source: Davison, J. (2007). Photographs and Accountability: cracking the codes of an NGO. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 20(1), 133-158. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513570710731236>

CHAPTER 3 A NEGATIVE AND DEVASTATING LEGACY OF APPEALS

The end of the Cold War in 1989 marked a critical juncture in the history of NGOs and their efforts to alleviate international poverty. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new international economic order took root, one that arguably put into place mechanisms that exasperated economic inequality, worsening many of the problems NGOs try to alleviate. Shankar (2014) posited that neoliberal ideology, including free trade and the embrace of globalization, was partly responsible for greater economic inequality, malnutrition, human subjugation, and illiteracy throughout the world, therefore, reducing poverty through foreign aid became a chief concern amongst Western nations. As a result, the first widespread efforts to engage the public through various appeals and advertisements on behalf of NGOs, began in the 1970's and continues into the present era in its contemporary form (Hudson et al., 2016). However, representing humanitarian aid is not a simple and straightforward matter because representations are complex constructs, and for the most part, the history of those representations has been, in the words of Benthall, "handled insensitively, generalizing, over-simplifying, and distorting, reinforcing stereotypes, and denying people of their dignity" (Benthall, 1993, p. 181).

One of the most damaging means of portraying humanitarian aid has been through framing aid in terms of beneficiary vulnerability and dependence. Most scholars that have analyzed NGO media agree that frames and discourse around aid have been stereotypical in the sense that they've reinforced notions of developing world dependency by portraying aid beneficiaries as passive and needy recipients (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004). "Development as charity" is a commonly used public face that represents a foreign other as vulnerable and in need, while Western nations are portrayed as having both the means and a responsibility to assist (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004, p. 661). Such appeals are especially common of typical child

sponsorship and disaster relief efforts. Smith and Yanacopulos used the terminology “faces,” to identify NGO framing, but other authors refer to this same tactic with varying terminology (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004, p. 657). Cottle and Nolan (2007) described the dependency frame as depicting work in the field in a way that marginalizes beneficiary cooperation and involvement. For Darnton and Kirk, dependency framing is often reinforced by the text or copy that accompanies NGO visuals, especially classic and standard terminology such as “development,” “aid,” and “charity,” as all three of those words come loaded with Western preconceptions of giver and receiver power dynamics and dependency (Darnton & Kirk, 2007, p. 9). To Vossen et al., stereotypical depictions of dependency were found to entail the portrayal of subjects as lacking agency and being helpless, thereby reinforcing the “powerful givers and the grateful receivers” narrative (Vossen et al., c. 2.1). These methods have historically contributed to an “end of poverty” discourse that has constructed a hegemonic idea that the West has a mandatory role in intervening in the global south for the purposes of development aid, thereby circulating a “poverty capital” consisting of visuals that reinforce the notions that such populations cannot help themselves and must be saved (Shankar, 2014, p. 342).

In her study of the use of melodrama in NGO video appeals, Wells demonstrated how notions of vulnerability and dependency are communicated. Wells deconstructed ads from Save the Children, Plan UK, and Action Aid organizations, three widely recognized players in the aid sector (Wells, 2013). She found all three organizations had a high reliance of depicting women and children in their ads, a tactic that a consensus of scholars has pointed out as being endemic in NGO visual communication because it effectively connotes powerlessness, a lack of agency, and innocence (Wells, 2013). Wells also noted that films did not feature beneficiaries speaking for themselves, having independent thoughts, nor any agency or control in determining their own

fate (Wells, 2013). Ideas that subtly reinforced notions of Western salvation were accompanied by the video's choice of color and deliberate musical scores. For instance, films transitioned from near monochromatic or subdued colors accompanied by somber music, to vibrant color and an upbeat soundtrack when they depicted Western intervention (Wells, 2013). In these ways, the ads employed melodrama to intentionally construct their messages in such a way as to make a viewer feel anger and/or guilt over an injustice that has taken place, rather than prompting them to consider the rational circumstances surrounding an event (Wells, 2013). Melodrama is powerful not just because it reinforces hegemony through visuals that are taken for granted as being accurate, but also because it encourages audiences to unquestioningly accept and act upon uncomplicated narratives without gaining a thorough understanding of context (Wells, 2013).

The visual tactics and frames of dependency that have reinforced the hegemonic discourse around humanitarian aid are not new, but emerged and persisted as common practice since the very first public NGO aid appeals. Chouliaraki identified themes of dependency and a reliance on stereotypical images of women and children as far back as a 1956 Oxfam ad, as well as a 1961 Red Cross campaign. Both are stereotypically negative because they are classic representations of victimhood in that they establish a maximal distance between witness and sufferer through contrasting imagery of extremely emaciated bodies juxtaposed with relatively healthy Western bodies, relying on triggering feelings of complicity, shame and guilt amongst audiences as impetus to donate money (Chouliaraki, 2010). Oxford University, which officially houses the Oxfam archives, maintains a website listing containing descriptions of all the organization's promotional ads and campaign posters they have in their possession, and many descriptions corroborate Chouliaraki's findings. Poster descriptions from the early to mid-1960's contain references to explicit use of women and children depicted as vulnerable and

malnourished. Subjects are described as “emaciated,” in obvious positions of victimhood and vulnerability such as “holding out a bowl in one hand and cradling a child in the other” (Hassan et al., 2017, A.8). Other descriptions are for posters of a “Before/After” campaign series that all featured images of women and children beneficiaries Oxfam was serving, appearing malnourished and juxtaposed against healthy individuals from the same country, which is entirely consistent with the negative appeal Chouliaraki’s research described (Hassan et al., 2017, A.8; Chouliaraki, 2010).

Featured in a blog post from Oxford’s Bodleian Library, is a 1966 Oxfam poster (Figure 3-1) that is perfectly representative of this era of Oxfam communications because it depicts a woman, who has a gaunt face that makes her appear obviously malnourished and under strain, extending her open hand as if to beg for assistance, while cradled in her arm is a small child, stomach distended, also holding their hand out and gazing with a sad expression fixated upon the viewer (Web, C, 2016). Such representations were evidently commonplace amongst the humanitarian aid NGOs at the time and all reinforced notions of developing world dependency and classic victimhood by utilizing “problematizing imagery” that included victim narratives with storylines of impoverished suffering, visuals that magnified human pain and misery, and depictions of subjects who lacked any independent agency whatsoever to do anything about their plight (Vossen et al., 2016, c. 2.2; Hudson et al., 2016; Benthall, 1993).

By the mid-1980’s negative stereotypes were just as utilized as ever before, but a new dimension, one that could be described as the mass commodification of humanitarian aid, was added to the mix. Cohen identified Live Aid, the relief effort for the 1984 to 1985 Ethiopian famine, as the model aid campaign for utilizing negative imagery to commodify human suffering and relief efforts (Cohen, 2001). Live Aid was an international campaign that used pop music

and celebrity musicians to raise awareness and funds for famine relief in Ethiopia. It was the brainchild of Irish musician and celebrity activist Bob Geldof, and it was his organization that recorded the song “Do They Know It’s Christmas,” generating millions of dollars in sales and proceeds. That unexpected popularity showed promise for pop music as a vehicle for international causes, thus becoming the impetus for the event that Live Aid is best known for, the July 1985 simultaneous US and British mega-concert broadcast to nearly 2 billion global viewers via satellite. With every imaginable pop musician of notoriety signed on to participate, Live Aid quickly blossomed into a lucrative brand. Besides the songs “Do They Know It’s Christmas,” and its more famous counterpart, “We Are World,” Ethiopia’s plight was represented by stereotypical images of malnourished and vulnerable children that were in vogue at the time. Live Aid’s official logo featured a guitar in the shape of a dry, barren, and poached African continent with a skeletal, nude Ethiopian boy gazing at it. While Live Aid did raise global awareness and money for African famine relief, it is criticized because it offered a form of commodification of humanitarian aid by allowing audiences to bear witness while simultaneously observe themselves caring in a self-congratulatory manner through the consumption of pop music (Cohen, 2001; Orgad, 2012).

Live Aid has been heavily analyzed as a case study of NGO communications efforts in part because it was so successful in constructing lasting perceptions about Africa, starvation, and the developing world in general. The music video for “We Are the World,” did not show images of African children, but in parading a seemingly endless amount of musicians in front of microphones to trade lyrics like “there are people dying and it’s time to lend a hand,” and “send them your heart so they know someone cares,” the song relied on audience’s preexisting notions of famine and vulnerable children in Africa, thereby framing “them” as victims, in juxtaposition

to “us,” the Westerners acting in the capacity of saviors (Orgad, 2012, p. 67). Twenty-five years later, when “We Are the World for Haiti” was recorded to raise funds for the Haitian earthquake, little had changed. On the surface, the most recent version attempted to put a positive spin on humanitarian aid imagery by cutting to footage of seemingly happy Haitians actively working hard to clean rubble and debris, but it is still heavy on showing children amidst destruction and living in temporary camps. By not giving Haitians an actual voice to sing along, it mutes them and relegates them to passive bystanders, while commodifying the aid experience and positioning the West once again in the hero role (Orgad, 2012). In this way, “We Are the World,” on two occasions, in two very different eras, has effectively used “stereotyping, objectification, fragmentation, fetishization and commodification to make distant others a spectacle - an aesthetic regime deeply rooted in a racialized system of representation” (Orgad, 2012). Despite going through a period of consciousness of negative representation and stereotyping, cases such as Live Aid’s representation of past and present aid campaigns, suggests that communications in the humanitarian aid sector has made little progress.

Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) issued a 2001 report that researched how far reaching the Live Aid legacy is, looking at the effects of the campaign upon people’s perceptions of the developing world today. VSO concluded that the Live Aid legacy is five-fold: that the developing world is a disaster dependent upon aid from the West; that populations in developing countries are “less than human” and are helpless victims; it left audiences with a false sense of superiority simply by virtue of where they were born; that the West has a rightful role as powerful givers to weaker receivers; and a confidence amongst the Western public that these notions are reality today (VSO, 2001). The report went on to argue that Live Aid established two dominant negative frames for developing world crises. The first is that widespread poverty

and famine are due to uncontrollable environmental factors, of which the African continent dominates public perception. The other being that war, fear, and/or political oppression due to government culpability or a lack of democracy is the root cause of a nation or region's perpetual strife, of which Afghanistan, China, and Russia are the poster children (VSO, 2001).

Most scholars writing about the generally negative legacy of NGO communications concur that the themes identified by the VSO report persist in NGO media and communications. "Problematizing imagery," is the term Vossen et al. used to label negative and stereotypical representations that convey undesirable characteristics of the other, which get reinforced in a variety of typical humanitarian aid frames that include victimization, lagging development, widespread social injustice, and bad governance, to name some of the most common (Vossen et al, 2016, c. 2.2). Other scholars have slightly differing terminology for the repetitious visual and textual themes, but they are all referring to the same hegemonic discourse by which foreign aid in countries in crisis is understood. Shankar claimed that the "developmental gaze" is dangerous because without acknowledging that representations are constructed and mediated, they become perceived as truth (Shankar, 2014, p. 344). Benthall identified the extent that this may be true when his research indicated that by the early 1990's, the British public believed that fifty to seventy-five percent of world's children are visibly malnourished as opposed to the one to two percent that actually are, that seventy-five percent of families in the world live in abject poverty, versus the twenty to twenty-five percent that do, and that ten to twenty percent of six to twelve year-olds in the world get to start school versus the ninety percent that actually do (Benthall,1993).

As recently as 2016, Vossen et al. published research that examined contemporary NGO communications from British, Dutch, and Flemish organizations, looking for frequency and

instance of “pitiful” imagery, including the depictions of vulnerable children, subjects that were visibly malnourished, and similarly negative representations (Vossen et al., 2016, c. 5.2). He found that the victim frame persisted in seventy-nine percent of British, forty-one percent of Dutch, and thirty-eight percent of Flemish NGO advertisements (Vossen et al., 2016, c. 6.1). Such relatively high frequency supports the consensus that despite the fact that there was industry-wide recognition of negative portrayals becoming problematic by the mid-1990’s, efforts to abandon traditionally negative imagery have largely failed (Benthall, 1993). Besides finding high instances of pitiful imagery that stereotyped aid beneficiaries as malnourished, vulnerable, and severely impoverished, the study also found that the predominant frame for the developing world was that the countries in need were entirely dependent upon the West for alleviating the crisis in hand and that the majority of the representations included no indication that the beneficiaries themselves had any independent agency in resolving their issues (Vossen et al., 2016).

A Growing Awareness of a Negative Legacy

NGO media normalized stereotypically negative appeals for decades but by the mid-1990’s there was a budding consciousness of the potentially negative effects of such tactics, prompting measures to reform industry-wide communication efforts (Cohen, 2001; Benthall, 1993; Hudson et al., 2016). The consensus amongst scholars is that this form of reflexivity and self-examination culminated in the early- to mid-1980’s not coincidentally, at the height of the Ethiopian famine and Live Aid (Benthall, 1993; Hilary, 2014). The 1980’s saw Oxfam and the European Economic Community issue a joint report that suggested that negative humanitarian aid imagery was having the effect of reinforcing the stereotype amongst the British public that Africa was “doomed and helpless” (Benthall, 1993, p. 180). Benthall (1993) claimed that a 1981 Save the Children poster was a tipping point that initiated an earnest questioning about the

humanitarian sector's communication practices. The poster (Figure 3-2) depicts a white hand reaching into the frame to grasp a malnourished and skeletal hand of someone who is non-white, with bold text above the image that reads "Sentenced to Death," accompanied by smaller text immediately below that asks audiences to "support our emergency aid programs for the victims of disaster" (Aid Leap, 2013). The poster targets emotions of sympathy and pity by regurgitating the starving African and white Western savior trope, commonplace stereotypes that worked to reinforce the hegemony of popular perceptions of the developing world and its relationship to the developed West.

The debate surrounding negative and stereotypical representations is said to have peaked in 1984 and 1985 at the height of the Ethiopian famine and the first steps to be taken were the recommendation of codes of conduct that NGOs were encouraged to abide by (Vossen et al., 2016). The first of these non-binding industry measures was the UN General Assembly of European NGOs adopting a code of conduct in 1989 that discouraged the use of imagery that was negative, sensationalist, and stereotypical in portraying international crisis relief efforts and aid recipients (Vossen et al., 2016). While the UN code was a step in the right direction, it was non-binding, so it effectively had no teeth, no repercussions for organizations that did not adhere to the recommendations. When in 2004 the Dochas Development Education Group revisited the code in order to update it, they researched the effects that the initial code had on NGO communications and found that while individual practitioners could not find hard copies of the code, nor could they recall specific content, most were aware of the code's existence and believed it was responsible for industry-wide awareness that representation did matter, that it was influential, had consequences, and that their decisions about representation were at least partially informed by that awareness (McGee, 2005). The report also found that most of the larger NGO

players had their own internal binding codes of conduct for representation. In 1991, Save the Children put out their own *Focus on Images*, guidelines that was more careful and less problematic than the UN code, and other big names in the industry followed suit, indicating that the newfound consciousness and awareness of practices was being taken seriously (Benthall, 1993). However, while the big names were at least paying lip service to the need for more positive representation, the vast majority of NGOs still had not adopted a code or guidelines for doing so (McGee, 2005).

The UN code was updated for Concord, which is the European NGO confederation for relief and development, in 2007 and remains in effect today (Concord, 2012). The current code has three key principles, which are: respect for the dignity of the people concerned; belief in the equality of all people; and acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity, and justice (Concord, 2012). As far as specific communications guidelines for adhering to the code's principles, NGOs are to: choose images and messaging that conveys values of equality, solidarity, and justice; attempt to depict the full context of the scenario being represented; avoid stereotypical and sensationalist images; utilize images only when participants fully agree to their likeness being used; allow beneficiaries to tell their stories in their own words; and adhere to standards of human rights and to protect the vulnerable (Concord, 2012). Accompanying the code is a 36-page PDF document entitled, *The Illustrated Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages*, which provides what to do and what not to do image scenarios for each of the guidelines mentioned above. The images (Figures 3-3 & 3-4) are illustrated, and are intended to be easy to understand across Western nations and cultures, with contrasting examples of what to do and not to do for a variety of scenarios (Dochas, 2014). In the examples that meet the code of conduct's criteria, beneficiaries are represented positively by showing them

exercising power and agency peacefully, avoiding stereotypes that they are helpless and inactive in changing their lives.

With codes such as those put forth by the UN and adopted by Concord, as well as all the guidelines and codes of conduct created and adopted internally by the largest of NGOs, it would be easy to assume the industry awareness born out of the 1980's, has given way to increasingly positive and non-stereotypical representations, yet there is no consensus of that being the case. Vossen et al., claimed that NGO appeals are generally more positive, or that they've stayed about the same (Vossen et al., 2016). Smith and Yanacopulos stated that the negative "face" of development based on the "flies in the eyes," imagery is indeed used less frequently today (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004, p. 657). However, Hudson et al., argued that the era of positive communication approaches was quickly abandoned and there has been a return to blatantly emotional appeals because they are still capable of generating more financial support (Hudson et al., 2016). Similarly, Hilary (2014) stated that, "NGOs that should know better have reverted to type, calling up disaster images from the 1970s in a desperate attempt to increase their organizational income whatever the cost." Research examining British NGO communications over a ten-year period suggested that while organizations claim to have changed tactics, in reality more than half of those analyzed showed very little statistical evidence that they had (McGee, 2005). Hilary's evidence for a regression to former methods was a 2013 Save the Children campaign that utilized stereotypical images without receiving significant pushback from the NGO community because codes such as the UN one, are non-binding (Hilary, 2014). McGee's evidence supported this claim because feedback from NGO communicators surveyed suggested that institutionalization and adoption of binding codes have been obstructed because there has been little to no incentive for NGOs to adopt and monitor the use of the codes (McGee, 2005).

Why Negative Appeals Persist

If there was awareness within the NGO communications sector that their practice was historically negative and undermined long-term objectives, what are the possible explanations for the seeming abandonment of the mid-1990's positive approaches and a regression back toward pity appeals? Scholars agreed that the persistence of negative and stereotypical approaches had three causal factors: that internal and external organizational tensions pressured NGOs into sticking with tried and true tactics they were familiar with; that in the era of ubiquitous online and digital media, NGO communications has been integrally tied to the news media cycle, which leans toward sensationalism and negativity; and that audiences have had an expectation that appeals should be negative, so they still responded to them by donating more money than they would to positive or alternative appeals.

In interviewing NGO communicators, Orgad (2013) identified intra- and inter-organizational tensions as two factors having significant influence on dictating an organization's ultimate communications approach. Intra-organizational can be understood as tensions, power struggles, and competing objectives that exist within an NGO, while inter-organizational refers to those that exist between competing NGOs (Orgad, 2013). The most common intra-organizational tension identified amongst scholars is the tension that exists between an NGO's communications specialists and those responsible for financing and fund-raising. As McGee's research demonstrated, today's communications specialists understand the potentially negative repercussions of traditional tactics that stereotype and would like to avoid them, however, they are often at odds with those responsible for generating revenue through public support because they will have a greater tendency to prefer whatever method attracts the most money, which, traditionally negative appeals seem to do (McGee, 2004; Orgad, 2013). Communications departments are typically concerned with long-term effects of communications efforts while

fundraising departments focus on the short-term, a tension that results in differing goals that leads to opposing visual preferences (Orgad, 2013). Smith (2004) found a perfect example of how this intra-organizational tension was manifest by examining two different NGO child- sponsorship appeals. In each, he identified manners by which their communications simultaneously contradict themselves by emphasizing both the need for individual sponsorship of children, which are characterized by focused, direct, traditionally patronizing views, as well as the need for supporting the children's communities through individual sponsorship, which are appeals that acknowledge development complexities and long-term work. The visuals of both are also contradictory in that in their advocacy for development they feature positive images of empowered children but then when it comes to the action portion of the brochure, viewers are met with traditionally negative imagery of vulnerable children (Smith, 2004).

Inter-organizational tensions are also cause for the persistence of stereotypical NGO media. While it is true that all NGOs benefit from their collective accomplishments in reducing poverty, these organizations compete with one another for public and government funding (Orgad, 2013). The international aid marketplace matters because it is a competitive marketplace of fundraising amongst the public, which is where traditional approaches like individual sponsorship, remain effective (Smith, 2004). Competition amongst NGOs for funding dollars means that organizations often expend vast resources to create distinct brand identities, much like a corporation might, which is antithetical to their core mission of crisis mitigation (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). Since inter-organizational tensions tend to cause NGOs to attempt to make themselves distinct from one another due to competition for public dollars, there is the tendency for organizations to rely on sensationalism in their imagery or messaging in these efforts (Orgad, 2013). In fact, it is the humanitarian aid sector's historic connection to, and their

mimicking of the international news media cycle that is arguably the most significant culprit in their reversion to traditionally negative and emotional appeals.

The media has played a key role in linking what NGOs do in the field to the public, so there has been a symbiosis between journalism and the NGO sector. Journalists have depended upon NGOs to gain access to tragedy and crisis to get imagery for their stories, while the NGOs that grant access and embed journalists can use that imagery to publicize their efforts, with the added advantage of having the press bring about awareness of the issues that they are trying to address (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Moeller, 1999). However, NGO dependence on the media for public support is a Faustian bargain because the media is driven by sensationalist, attention-grabbing visuals and storylines; can lack the depth and context necessary within the NGO sector to educate people of the complexity of international problems; and stories that do not meet the news media's criteria for newsworthiness often go unreported. News media market forces, the preferences of press editors and publications, and demand for more negative and stereotypical imagery drive a cycle of negative representation of the developing world with photographers and visual journalists having little to no power to counteract the process (Clark, 2004). Only five press agencies determine the vast majority of the imagery that Western audiences see, thus, if they tend to be sensationalist and negative and photographers are pressured to meet that demand to stay employed, then their coverage of NGO work will mimic that pattern as well (Clark, 2004).

A relatively famous example of an NGO going out of its way to seek sensational imagery took place in 1985. Famed British musician Bob Geldof accompanied an NGO to locations where Ethiopians were being rehabilitated for malnourishment and the press pool that the NGO was relying on demanded that they be provided photo opportunities that would depict Geldof

with the most visibly malnourished children, justifying the request by claiming that anything else would not be newsworthy (Clark, 2004). It did not matter that the overall malnourishment efforts had been very successful, with most of the treated patient's health restored, the media still sought out images that misrepresented the famine as being more severe than it was. The pool of photographers demanded to be taken to where only photos of the extreme cases of malnourished children could still be taken (Clark, 2004). On the flip side though, it is argued by some that the image of Geldof with a severely malnourished child, was a critical turning point in the NGO's efforts to raise public funds, as the world only started to care about the famine after that photo was released by the press (Clark, 2004; Cohen, 2001).

The news media can be a lean, reductionist process, and increasingly so in an era where social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, are designed for brevity. This is problematic for the NGO and humanitarian aid sector tasked with dealing with complex natural and man-made crises whose causes combine social, environmental, and political factors, and where gains are measured in years, not hours. This means that media efforts to cover the work of NGOs will often get reduced to formulas and templates that prioritize certain images over text, isolated events are singled out so as to not get bumped by other stories, outside mediators or translators are used, which deny beneficiaries a voice, and acceptable or easily identifiable victims and hero/savior roles according to Western standards are sought (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2007). This media cycle trickles down to, and is reproduced by practitioner conventions. For instance, photographers are competitive with their peers, are on deadlines, are trying to attract the most attention to their perspective, and oftentimes seek out the most sensational images to do so. Sometimes referred to as "rounding up the usual suspects," or "template reporting," in the case of the famine, natural disasters, and other calamities, it will yield imagery of the poor,

vulnerable, and suffering, all traditionally negative tropes (Clark, 2004). Due to these methods, any coverage of humanitarian work tends to conform to the tactics and objectives of the news media industry, not for the sake of conveying depth and context, an understanding of the root of a given issue, or what an organization is doing about it. Instead, it serves the purpose of attracting the most attention for a short period of time, until the next story comes along, objectives which run counter to most long-term NGO goals (Cohen, 2001; Cattle & Nolan, 2007).

It is possible that NGOs that deal with war and natural disaster response have greater responsibility for perpetuating the most damaging effects of negative imagery because their work will tend to rely on sensationalist imagery due to the nature of their obligations. Contrast what they do with NGOs that work to fight malnutrition and famine through multi-year agricultural and nutritional education programs implemented where hunger persists but is not an immediate crisis, and it is evident that the latter group have the luxury of being able to choose imagery that represents what they do in ways that dignify the beneficiary and are not sensationalist or exploitive. However, such NGOs tend to receive less recognition, even those that are tremendously successful, because the media cycle is fickle and sensationalist and what is not on the front pages or breaking news across a CNN scroll, does not always register as news to the masses (Dogra, 2007). So, stories containing positive or alternative imagery will likely receive less coverage. Thus, the issue, however urgent, will also get less attention, less funding and so forth (Moeller, 1999). Such trends do not bode well for alternative NGO communication approaches to gain ground or public traction as they get out competed by the negative media cycle. Unfortunately, research indicates that the public identifies news media and NGOs as their primary sources of information about the developing world, thus public perception of those parts

of the world skews negative, and so too does the aid media because the most successful campaigns play upon audience's predispositions and expectations (Dyck and Coldevin, 1992; Vossen et al., 2016).

Audience expectations have also played a role in NGOs reverting back to negative emotional appeals. While audiences polled indicate that negative appeals are contributing to feelings of compassion fatigue and they claim that they want to see alternative representations of the developing world, there is research that indicates that the public still believes emotional appeals have the greatest influence on their decision to give. Radley and Kennedy (1997) found that images of emaciated children were regularly picked by audiences as images they believed would be the most likely to cause them to give, despite being repulsed by them. Likewise, images that were judged as the most negative and disturbing were ranked by participants to be what they thought would be the best at fund-raising (Radley and Kennedy, 1997). Eayrs and Ellis discovered that British audiences in the late-1980's, preferred representations of minorities and aid beneficiaries to fit their preconceptions of vulnerability and dependence (as cited in Radley & Kennedy, 1997). Audiences, while expressing a desire to see alternative representations, have it so ingrained in their minds that emotional appeals consisting of troubling imagery are what they expect to see and what they should see, that they accept them as effective. NGOs act on that knowledge and continue to produce media that fits that expectation. Whether this is due to an inability for the industry as a whole to adapt, a decades long dependence and strong influence of the mass media cycle, or because audiences desire simple, non-complex, and sympathetic explanations for developing world problems, some NGOs are increasingly relying on the old methods of creating aid appeals because they appear to be the only means they know

of to continue to secure fund raising while increasing awareness of international crises (Cohen, 2001; Hudson et al., 2016).

Compassion Fatigue

The media environment bombards us at a relentless pace with negative, pessimistic, and depressing visual representations of the developing world. The cumulative effect of that imagery upon Western society now appears to be inhibiting attempts to address some of the world's most pressing problems. Audiences increasingly tune out and turn the page when confronted with NGO appeals because they are tired of seeing them. The repetition of the same imagery over and over again, gradually erodes the public's belief that their contribution has any ability to make a difference, a phenomenon referred to as compassion fatigue (Grayson, 2014; Vestergaard, 2008).

Compassion fatigue from a psychological perspective is understood to work through the process of repetition, normalization and desensitization (Cohen, 2001). First, the stereotypical depictions of aid beneficiaries are so repetitious that any alternative representations get overshadowed and seem non-existent. The repetition across all forms of news and NGO media normalizes such depictions to the point where audiences can become emotionally numb and unaffected by them, thereby ignoring the plea to act in the form of direct contributions. Cohen claimed that, "you can be exposed so often to such images that the impact of each subsequent one is dulled and you become too exhausted to respond" (Cohen, 2001, p. 185). Sontag echoed that sentiment when she stated that shock value has term limits, that "in a world saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images, those that should matter have a diminishing effect: we become callous. In the end, such images just make us a little less able to feel, to have our conscience pricked" (Sontag, 2003, p. 105). It is been suggested that the decreasing ability to be moved by negative imagery is possibly a human survival mechanism, the brain's natural way of coping,

prioritizing, and carrying on with life in the face of dire circumstances that humans seemingly have little control over (Moeller, 1999).

Moeller (1999), who authored an entire book on compassion fatigue, with a particular focus on the mass media's role, identified compassion fatigue as having four primary causes. First, the media do repeat the same stereotypical tropes, but importantly, they repeat the idea that Western audiences are partially culpable because playing off one's sense of guilt has proven to be a reliable impetus for fundraising (Moeller, 1999). The second cause is that representations of foreign crises are too many, and too short, as coverage jumps from one event to another, rarely providing any context of significant depth for any particular one, despite Western audiences typically only having patience for a single global tragedy at any given time (Moeller, 1999). The third and fourth causes are related, that tragic circumstances depicted often seem too permanent and entrenched for audiences to believe that their contribution can make a difference, and the circumstances and beneficiaries involved seem too remote and distanced from the audience's lives for them to care (Moeller, 1999). People can comprehend the efforts needed to help a single person, but providing aid to thousands or millions makes a potential donor feel helpless and powerless. All of these causes contribute to a sense of helplessness and nobody acts as a result (Moeller, 1999).

The most significant consequence of compassion fatigue is the erosion of the belief that aid can make a difference. Wells argued that NGOs face an uphill battle in this respect, that they are "caught between the apparent intractability of poverty in developing countries and the necessity of convincing their donors that the funds they provide will make a difference to the lives of the poor" (Wells, 2013, p. 277). In the early 1990's, it was feared that the cumulative effect of a couple of decades of famine relief imagery of malnourished masses, followed by the

exhaustive ubiquity of Live Aid, would result in a global compassion fatigue towards the continent of Africa at the very moment they needed help the most, the beginning of the AIDS epidemic (Benthall, 1993). Research on audience responses to various aid appeal approaches suggests that compassion fatigue is real and is contributing to a declining public motivation to help. In one study that polled couple's responses to traditionally negative and alternative, positive approaches, participants expressed that negative and stereotypical depictions are the majority of what they see and expect to come from the humanitarian aid sector. It is so dominant over other types of appeals that they become "immune," to their effects, and that sending money feels like "pouring it down the drain" (Radley & Kennedy, 1997, p. 448-449). Contrast that reaction to an overtly positive appeal, where they express that it is equally effective, positive, and that they would have a greater inclination to financially support its cause (Radley and Kennedy, 1997).

In a separate study, it was concluded that images and appeals that evoke repulsion are negatively correlated to donations. Thus, there are unintended consequences due to unintended emotional responses of traditional appeals that can ultimately hamper campaign efforts to raise financial support (Hudson et al., 2016). The researchers responsible for that particular study believe that compassion fatigue is today the single greatest deterrent to public support of aid.

They wrote that:

While all (NGOs) are actively seeking to engage publics in global poverty, their differing strategies and goals is leaving the average individual non-plussed about whether efforts to eradicate poverty are worth it. They may well keep giving, but the irony is that the attempts to extract ever more money from northern publics is not only contributing to compassion fatigue, but increases repulsion, undercuts hope and ultimately a belief that poverty can actually be alleviated. (Hudson et al., 2016, p. 25).

Using different terminology for the same phenomenon, Chouliaraki defined these same unintended consequences of the emotional appeal as the “bystander” and the “boomerang” effects, where in the former the audience feels so powerless by the complex nature of the situation that they are paralyzed to act, and, in the latter, the complicity and guilt makes them too miserable and guilty to do anything (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 112). All three effects can undermine an NGO’s efforts.

Where there is hope in mitigating, and potentially even reversing the effects of compassion fatigue, some researchers do not believe that it is necessarily an automatic or foregone conclusion. For starters, compassion fatigue is not denial that atrocities are actually occurring. Most viewers understand that what they are seeing is truthful, that the facts of the matter may even be well-known, it is that audiences often fail to act or sometimes even pay attention, because they have become worn down by the repetition of an undesirable truth that feels out of their control to do anything about (Cohen, 2001). It is the moral and physical distance of foreign atrocity and tragedy relative to the Western support NGOs are seeking, that Cohen believed was the single greatest factor as to why audiences tune it out. When the misfortune of people of a different ethnicity, who live within vastly different socio-political and environmental circumstances are depicted as such ad nauseam, that sense of remoteness from the audience’s own lives becomes exasperated (Cohen, 2001). Cohen also believes that frames of distance and remoteness are at least partially intentional because that serves the objectives of a globalized market and economy that depends on the exploitation of many of the populations that are most in need of humanitarian aid. It is as if the media is repeating this message that “we” as a Western society do not care because there is nothing that can be done about it, in an effort to

preserve the hegemonic ideology of dependency and geo-political power dynamics that globalization rests upon (Cohen, 2001).

Like Cohen, Moeller does not accept that compassion fatigue is an inevitable consequence of communications. The repeated trope that developing world problems are intractable, that history is doomed to repeat itself over and over again, is a result of framing, that it is “an unavoidable consequence of the way news is now covered” (Moeller, 1999). The cumulative effect of this is the public perception that people do not care simply due the fact that the nature of the media cycle does not feature success stories, positivism, or provide long-term coverage and context regarding any of their stories (Cohen, 2001; Moeller, 1999). Instead, the prioritization of negativity and stereotypes dominate, resulting in stories and frames about the developing world that play into Western expectations, leaving in its wake a sense of hopelessness (Moeller, 1999). Aid agencies understand this and they do not see compassion fatigue as much as they see “media fatigue,” or the spinning of stories about there being public apathy, as the primary obstacle to affecting people and causing them to donate to, or support a given cause (Cohen, 2001).

Not all individuals are affected uniformly by compassion fatigue. People are compassionate and empathetic and the desire to help those in need, are universal human emotions that must be tapped into and harnessed effectively. To Sontag, pathos is an ancient device, and people want to be compassionate. Thus, the key is capitalizing on the initial emotion that representations can trigger and converting them into decisive action (Sontag, 2003). Compassion fatigue sets in when there is no course of clear, meaningful action, because the notions that beneficiaries cannot be helped, that nothing ever works, that aid is futile, takes root and it is then that compassion fatigue sabotages long-term aid efforts (Sontag, 2003). Therefore,

a contemporary form of communicating aid work, one premised on positive, alternative, and empowering visuals and narratives, is needed more than ever before to prevent widespread compassion fatigue and to revitalize the public's belief that they can indeed make a positive difference in the lives of distant others.



**HOW MANY MILLIONS
HAVE TO STARVE—
before we stop counting and start giving?**

Reports from India are reaching Oxfam daily: of whole villages left empty in the hunt for food, of families who eat only once in three days, of hungry children searching for scraps in the dust. But there is no famine—yet. Because famines are measured in millions starving and thousands dead. So how many millions have to starve before we stop counting and start giving? Before we face the fact that even greater government aid will not be enough? Before we admit that *our* help—no matter how small—can be measured in lives?

Oxfam is sending shiploads of vital fertilisers for a self-help scheme to grow 10,000 acres of maize and millet—famine rations for 600,000 people for six months. **Every £1 going to this project will feed four people who would otherwise have nothing.** Another Oxfam-supported scheme is giving a daily milk ration to thousands of poor children. Funds are going for emergency feeding and medical supplies, for wells, pumps, seeds and ploughs. More money is desperately needed.

OXFAM You can't give too much or too little. Only too late.
Room 32 · c/o Barclays Bank Limited · Oxford

Figure 3-1. Oxfam International 1966 aid campaign poster advertisement. Source: Webb, C. (2016, March 7). New Oxfam Catalogues. [weblog]. Retrieved on September 2nd, 2017 from: http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/wp-content/uploads/sites/161/2016/03/millions-ad_1966.jpg

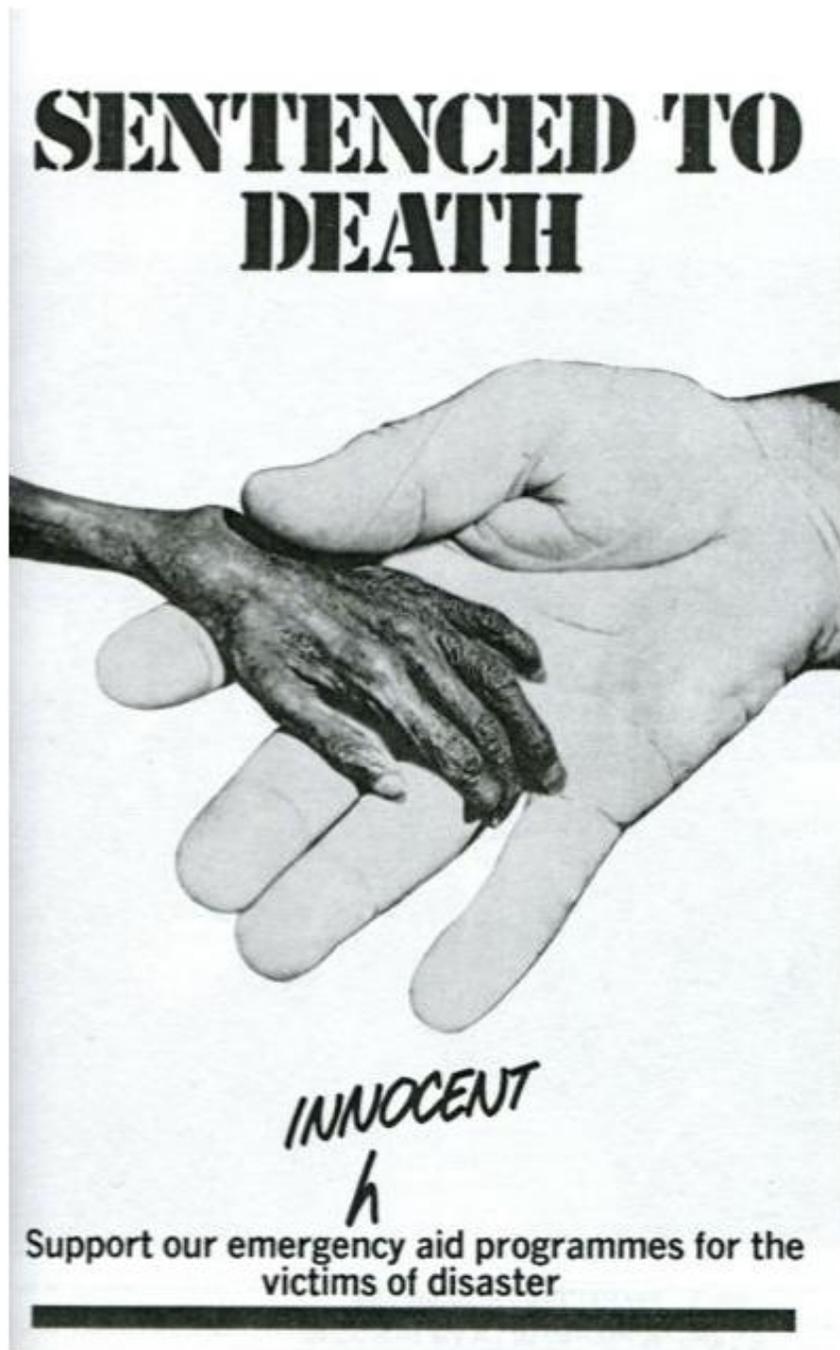


Figure 3-2. Save the Children 1981 aid campaign poster advertisement. Source: Aid Leap. (2013, April, 26). Give £10 Right Now. [weblog]. Retrieved on October 31st, 2017 from: <https://aidleap.org/tag/humanitarian-aid/>

RECOMMENDED



SAMPLE CAPTION

Angela and Thomas Okeke in an Abeche, Chad, regional hospital, where their son Malik received treatment for acute undernourishment in February 2012.

Parents who have to stay in hospital with their child receive food rations for themselves and their other children. The current food crisis was caused by extreme droughts and international food speculation. (Photographer: XY)

NOT RECOMMENDED



EXPLANATION

In this image, "Malik" is cropped out of context to exaggerate his vulnerability and destitution. The way he is being portrayed as alone, without clothes, and starving is supposed to exaggerate the urgency of the appeal and the accompanying message underlines this again.

This image would need a detailed caption to give more information about the context and causes of his situation. Even better, he could be depicted in an image that shows more context (see recommended example).

Figure 3-3. Sample illustration of recommended representation tactics from The Illustrative Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct for Images and Messages. Source: Dochas. (2014). The Illustrative Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct for Images and Messages. Dublin: Dochas. Retrieved on September 3rd, 2017 from: http://dochas.ie/sites/default/files/Illustrative_Guide_to_the_Dochas_Code_of_Conduct_on_Images_and_Messages.pdf

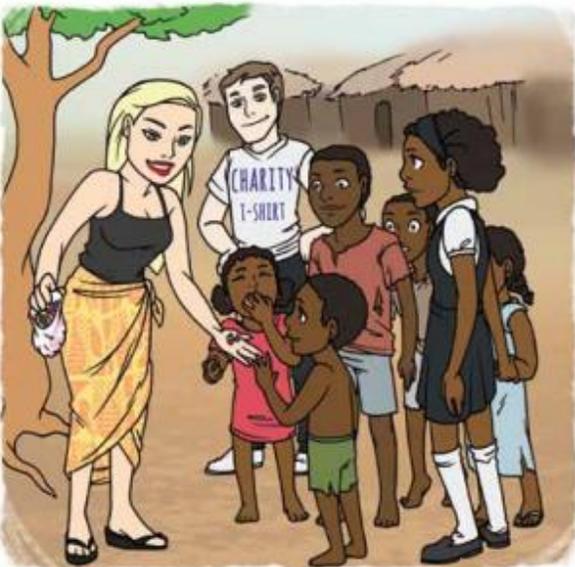
RECOMMENDED



SAMPLE CAPTION
Gladys Mhike, regional financial manager with local NGO [XY], running a workshop on microfunding with colleagues in Matobo, Zimbabwe, October 2013. (Photographer: XY)

EXPLANATION
The image shows a Zimbabwean woman working in a senior position for a local NGO and sharing her knowledge with colleagues, rather than depicting, for example, an international aid worker teaching local people.

NOT RECOMMENDED



SAMPLE CAPTION
[International film star XY] visiting children in Uganda to fight hunger in Africa.

SAMPLE CAPTION
The international film star, as well as the international aid worker, is depicted with a group of beneficiaries which can promote power imbalances and inequality. The sample caption does not provide any details about the concrete situation or the role that the film star, aid worker, or local people play to solve the situation.

Figure 3-4. Sample illustration of recommended representation tactics from The Illustrative Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct for Images and Messages. Source: Dochas. (2014). The Illustrative Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct for Images and Messages. Dublin: Dochas. Retrieved on September 3rd, 2017 from: http://dochas.ie/sites/default/files/Illustrative_Guide_to_the_Dochas_Code_of_Conduct_on_Images_and_Messages.pdf

CHAPTER 4 PAST POSITIVE APPROACHES

Since the early- to mid-1990's, when the aid sector began to acknowledge the potentially devastating effects of negative appeals and subsequent widespread compassion fatigue, various solutions in the form of alternative, positive communications approaches were experimented with. Such approaches were generally characterized as having a reliance on visuals that were non-stereotypical in that they featured happier, healthier, and empowered beneficiaries. Some approaches would keep the photorealism and visual journalism aesthetic typical of the industry, but would exclude images featuring the dire circumstances and the most vulnerable people, while using creative image and text juxtapositions to emphasize the need for aid. Some notable organizations adopted very commercial approaches, Madison Avenue-inspired branding campaigns that eschewed representations of the developing world and aid beneficiaries for trendy, abstract, and non-literal framing and visual device to attract public support. Research into these attempts showed promise with results suggesting that audiences had a strong preference to see such depictions, and even a slight tendency to make greater financial contributions in response to them. However, the industry as a whole failed to uniformly adopt any single approach or set of tactics, eventually regressing back to tried and true emotional appeals based on stereotypical imagery and framing, with the end result being a landscape of organizations with no clearly embraced set of standards, leaving behind a mixed bag of adopted approaches.

Following the industry-wide introspection of the 1990's, NGOs had the task of separating fundraising and public awareness, and to do so while representing beneficiaries with dignity (Cohen, 2001). There are terms utilized for appeals that came after this point such as post-traditional, post-humanitarian, and deliberate positivism, but the consensus amongst

communication scholars is that all the key characteristics of these approaches were representations that depicted their subjects as self-reliant, dignified, active, empowered, and possessing agency, rather than dependent, pathetic, and inactive beneficiaries whose fate was entirely at the whim of natural and man-made catastrophes (Chouliaraki, 2010; Dogra, 2007; Orgad, 2013). Cohen described this new order of positivism as an approach designed to convey notions of social justice, actual real-world complexity, empowerment, productivity, rights, and dialogue surrounding the circumstances of aid and relief efforts (Cohen, 2001). Similarly, Chouliaraki conceptualized post-traditional approaches as trying to achieve a “‘sympathetic equilibrium,’ a logic of representation that orients the appeal towards a responsive balance of emotions between the sufferer and the spectator as potential benefactor” (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 112). In this way, the positive approach solutions were still meant to target audience’s emotions, but they intended to do so by rousing one’s sense that they were supporting efforts whereby newly empowered beneficiaries worked together with organizations to pull themselves out of poverty, or to rebuild their own communities in the wake of disaster.

Three specific representation tactics that overlap a number of the positive approaches that have been put into practice include: portraying the subjects as heroes, utilizing frames of personal empowerment, and providing thorough context around humanitarian relief circumstances. The hero treatment elevates beneficiaries as the key active agents within their narrative of empowerment as a result of aid or training they received. Framing, particularly progress and social justice frames contextualize the beneficiary as moving along a continuum toward improving their own lives (Orgad, 2013; Vossen et al., 2016). The idea of including context in positive, alternative approaches is especially important because the traditional approaches lacked in that regard. With context, one can account for photorealism that depicts

dire circumstances, while putting into perspective just how rare the worst-case scenario actually is, and how it does not represent the entirety of the developing world or every humanitarian aid scenario. For example, if context accompanied certain sensationalist and stereotypically negative statements such as “famines only affect five percent of a population,” or “most conflicts are resolved by methods other than genocide,” then audiences would have the information necessary to view images and text with a critical eye (Cohen, 2001, p. 184).

The European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development, also referred to as Concord, has a code of conduct for media representations, updated as recently as 2015. Concord prescribes specific representation strategies NGOs should abide by when making contemporary appeals, strategies that echo many of the tactics found in the alternative approaches that have been tried since the 1990’s. According to Concord:

The code offers a set of guidelines to assist organizations in their decision-making about which images and messages to include in their communications to maintain full respect for human dignity. By signing the code, development NGOs commit to a set of principles, ensuring that they will avoid stereotypical or sensational images (Concord, 2012).

Specifically, there are stipulations that call for respecting subject dignity, championing equality for all, promoting fairness and justice, providing full situational context, avoiding stereotypes and sensationalist imagery, allowing opportunity for subjects to have their own voice, and always obtaining permission from the subject to use their story and likeness (Concord, 2012).

While there is debate as to what form positive communications approaches should take and what specific tactics should be utilized, there is consensus among the scholars that some agreed upon overall strategy of representation should be adopted in order to establish a counter-hegemony against the emotional appeals that have created a world filled with widespread

misconceptions about poverty and the belief that it is intractable. Explicit rules and guidelines are not necessarily needed but with the right general approach of positivism and optimism taken by NGOs, imagery can educate the public about effective development practices, thereby negating the dominant representations of the mass media (Couldry, 2008; Dogra, 2007). It is not necessary that alternative appeals be representative of absolute truth because representations can be constructive by demonstrating ideals of how things should and could be if the Western public did not give up on the developing world and turn their back on those in need (Dogra, 2007). Chouliaraki concurred, writing that a positive approach ultimately “aspires to transform the economic and political structures that can support a better life for vulnerable others” (Chouliaraki, 2010). VSO described a future that would be changed for the better by alternative representations, one that would include the following benefits: greater impact on racial tensions and attitudes toward immigration; a look toward developing world societies for values that are considered lost in the modern West; a more engaged populous with a humanitarian outlook; an interest among the public of foreign policy; as well as improved trade and international relations (VSO, 2001). Such long-term effects are but a few of the social benefits society stands to reap by NGOs embracing alternative representations and to that end, there has been some research conducted on positive approaches attempted by organizations and researchers alike since the mid-2000’s.

Post Humanitarianism Commercial Appeals

One approach undertaken by Amnesty International in 2004 avoided some of the pitfalls of traditionally negative appeals by creating a slick, Madison Avenue-inspired commercial ad campaign. Amnesty’s effort is representative of the trend of aid organizations choosing to increasingly rely on contemporary branding and marketing tactics, which according to Vestergaard, creates a “new form of legitimacy, which is not compassion based” (Vestergaard,

2008, p. 472). The TV spot is structured around nine fictional scenes with a voiceover that makes declarative statements about what the organization does such as: “they provide a voice for the silent,” “prevent weapons from falling into the wrong hands,” culminating in “see what you can do,” implying audience agency in being able to help resolve a range of human rights violations occurring across the globe (Vestergaard, 2008, p. 475). Within the nine voiceovers and declarative statements, the ad covers the core principles that define Amnesty’s organizational objectives, yet they do so in a way that is not preoccupied with the beneficiaries, or any particular tragedy or circumstance, but instead, limits itself to the action that audiences can take to aid those in need (Vestergaard, 2008).

Amnesty’s ad is what is called a meta-appeal, or a narrative that abstractly addresses aid by discussing the circumstances and conditions around humanitarian aid (Vestergaard, 2008). Amnesty avoids falling into the traditional compassion fatigue traps by not relying on sympathetic and stereotypical visuals. The imagery does not exploit subjects for entertainment or sensationalism, so it does not become sentimental and self-serving regarding aid and independent/dependent relationships (Vestergaard, 2008). Something the ad does unusually well is that it emphasizes agency, particularly the agency of the audience while fostering a sense of solidarity between viewer and the organization with repetition of “you” and “us” in efforts to provide aid through donor contribution (Vestergaard, 2008).

Amnesty’s ad is not without its problems though. It is overall dark and foreboding feel, with scenes of riots being monitored from afar, a home being secured against intruders, and hints of someone to be tortured, just to name a few, all accompanied by appropriately suspenseful music, replace the often-targeted emotions of pity and guilt with that of fear, which is not positive (Vestergaard, 2008). The dramatized scenes are also of Western domesticity, and

Vestergaard made clear that the fear being elicited is not fear for the threatened well-being of Amnesty's beneficiaries abroad, but instead, fear of the possible erosion of decidedly democratic principles at home. The underlying message of the ad is that if you give money to support Amnesty International, you will work to protect populations, and thereby yourself, from the loss of modern Western life (Vestergaard, 2008). That the democratic way of life, particularly democracy in the West, is presumed to be a universal value worth protecting, is ethnocentric and is no better than appealing to one's sense of guilt.

As NGOs have proliferated so too has their commercialization and corporate branding, which can have the advantage of allowing for the public to better identify with a cause and an NGO's core values, a factor that has become increasingly important in choosing what organizations to support. However, it is a valid criticism that such an approach can over-rely on strength of branding, with the relationship between consumer and brand identity becoming the impetus for taking action at the expense of moral justifications and/or deeper contextual understanding of circumstance (Vestergaard, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010). This is not to say that a very commercial approach cannot be done right, in a way that engages and informs viewers, while remaining respectful and giving beneficiaries dignity, it really can, but the Amnesty effort falls a little short because it presents as many problems in regard to representation and meaning making as it resolves.

Chouliaraki identified an effective alternative humanitarian appeal trend of the mid-to late 2000's as post-humanitarianism, a style that when executed effectively, separated audience action from pity, replacing that emotion with an intellectual reflexivity that allowed the audience to use their own judgment about the context surrounding aid and to act according to their conscious (Chouliaraki, 2010). The way these appeals worked was through visual, textual, and

thematic juxtaposition, arrangements that often caused the viewer to contextualize the circumstances of tragedy and aid according to the dramatic difference between the world of the suffering and the familiar everyday world of the Western domesticity. The styles that such appeals took ranged from photorealism and documentarian to abstract and conceptual, all while avoiding the tropes of negative representations that are thought to induce compassion fatigue.

One example of Chouliaraki's post-humanitarianism is by the World Food Program's "The No Food Diet" video advertisement, which contrasted vastly different Western cultural habits, such as the existence of the Atkins diet versus not having food at all, against the background of the peaceful, normal domesticity of the African hut and a mother putting her kids to bed (Chouliaraki, 2010). This particular appeal was a video that depicted documentarian visuals of Africans suffering from malnutrition, but it showed them under mundane circumstances, in their home, going about their lives, and did not exploit their situation with the familiar trope of obvious malnourishment. The subjects do not appear particularly unhealthy, but the audience comes to understand that they are malnourished by the voiceover, which is the primary form of juxtaposition on which the message hinges. The voiceover recites in English a common recipe for putting a hungry child to bed via the "no food diet," which tricks them into sleeping in anticipation of a meal when they wake, while the narration speaks to the diet's effectiveness in relation to the once-popular Atkins diet (The No Food Diet, 2005). The narration ends by stating that "25,000 people a day die from the 'no food diet,'" followed by information informing the viewer of how and where they can donate (The No Food Diet, 2005). The textual game played here is the defining aspect of Chouliaraki's post-humanitarianism, that the visuals contrast with the absurdity of the discussion of Western dieting, a luxury only afforded by an abundance of food, thus potentially prompting the viewer to question the

circumstances of such food resource discrepancies, and whether or not it is a worthwhile cause to try and resolve (Chouliaraki, 2010).

The other post-humanitarianism appeal that Chouliaraki singles out is also an advertising campaign by Amnesty International, entitled “It is not happening here. But it is happening now.” This Amnesty campaign also relies on documentarian photorealism, but does so in a creative way that physically places the imagery of human suffering and atrocity in Western city environments using a clever method that creates the optical illusion that the scenarios were occurring in real time before the viewer. For example, one of the installations is on the side of a transparent bus stop and features the image of an Asian woman seemingly being harassed and physically abused by a military or police official. The illusion is accomplished by enlarging the image so that the human subjects are life size, then cutting out the woman and the officer from the original photographic composition, before finally placing them on the side of the glass bus stop partition so that it appears as though the abused woman is sitting on the actual bus stop bench and being harassed in that location (Gurp, 2006). This is only one example as other installations of this campaign feature child soldiers, African children foraging for food scraps, and prisoners chained and bound, all placed on transparent placards amidst busy European sidewalks, on train station platforms, bus stops, and the sides of public phone booths. Each ad features the Amnesty International logo and the text, “It is not happening here. But it is happening now.” The photorealist depictions of suffering are not overly sensational or gruesome, but they are startling and disturbing in the way that they seemingly take place before one’s eyes. Human rights violations, extreme poverty, and suffering from remote locations, as if in real time, effectively juxtaposed against the trappings of European urban domesticity (Gurp, 2006). The purpose of the ads is to jar the audience out of their comfort zone and force them to

contemplate the circumstances around human rights abuses and Amnesty International's work to thwart them, and to then decide if they personally want to contribute to that cause.

Distance and proximity, specifically the distance and perceived remoteness of the developing world and its inhabitants from Western society, is said to be a contributing factor to compassion fatigue. The two post-humanitarianism Amnesty ad campaigns do an effective job of shrinking that distance through clever juxtapositions that prompt the viewer to consider how aid beneficiaries and suffering could be closer to their own livelihoods than they previously thought (Chouliaraki, 2010; Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011). In this way, the post-humanitarianism appeal becomes a process that decouples emotional appeals brought on by simple witnessing and imbues it with a complexity that causes audiences to carefully consider the broader context of suffering and foreign aid. It also streamlines the action process by closing with a clear message as to where the viewer can go online to help immediately, what Chouliaraki describes as a "technologization of action" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 117). This technologization reduces giving to easy clicks on a website, harnessing the speed of the Internet to bring about a sense of "effortless immediacy," thereby further shrinking the distance between audience and beneficiary that can cause Westerners feel powerless to help (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 117).

Potential drawbacks of this type of post-humanitarianism are the same as that of the slickly-branded efforts of the initial Amnesty International campaign, that it relies too much on marketing and brand recognition, and the fact that action could potentially be reduced to mere clicktivism. NGOs range from large to small organizations and their budgets and communications resources also run the spectrum from large to small, and the effectiveness of taking a similar approach can be highly dependent on commercial marketing savvy and financial resources. There are also those organizations that are capable of hiring out Madison Avenue

firms and promoting their brand effectively, giving them a competitive advantage versus smaller organizations that lack the funds to do so but are nevertheless competing in the same NGO marketplace. Also problematic is the fact that when an organization fosters strong brand recognition, the public can tend to support the brands they identify with without engaging intellectually with the message or cause that organization is putting out, creating the possibility that action and donation be reduced to non-reflexive and non-thoughtful contributions based solely on brand identification. That runs counter to the greatest strength of the post-humanitarianism approach that Chouliaraki identifies, that it is clever juxtapositions, visual, and textual games prompt an intellectual engagement that the simple, traditional, emotional witnessing does not (Chouliaraki, 2010).

A Critical Pedagogy

Not all positive, alternative NGO communications approaches have relied on branding and marketing campaigns. Shankar (2014) relied on a critical pedagogy in the formation of his visual narratives, one that simultaneously accounts for the media creator or author's position of power vis-a-vis a given subject, while giving a degree of power over the production and voice to the subjects themselves. The first step of Shankar's methodology involves understanding where a particular visual media (video in this case) places the audience within the poverty discourse, then to think about how much of their preconceptions have been shaped by past media they've viewed, so that he can position his dialogue to confront these embedded understandings and preconceptions (Shankar, 2014). What Shankar referred to as poverty capital is the entirety of the global NGO discourse on international poverty and poverty alleviation through humanitarian aid. It accounts for the predominant discourse by which international poverty is framed, including all of the commonly repeated themes and stereotypical visuals (Shankar, 2014).

Part of the illusion of representation is that the media creator and their hand in dictating what the audience sees, largely disappears, causing the audience to often accept what they see at face value as being accurate, whether that be masses of starving individuals or children in tattered clothing playing amidst seemingly endless squalor. However, the unmediated subject is a falsehood and Shankar's visuals attempted to be counter-hegemonic by acknowledging that there is a cameraman consciously making decisions of content inclusion and exclusion. He did this by using still photo and video techniques that made the mediation obvious, and while the result could be critiqued as amateurish at times, doing so offers a more authentic reality of how producers and subjects collaborate and share in the media creation process, forcing the audience to think about the extent that media is an intentionally constructed perspective on a given subject (Shankar, 2014).

Shankar also depicted aid workers interacting with beneficiaries in ways that emphasized their role as participants in the process. In this way, the NGO representatives are depicted as having learned and transformed alongside those they were aiding, thereby countering the common dependency frames by which Western audiences have come to understand their role in international humanitarian aid. In this way, Shankar's visuals challenge the hegemony of the idea of the rightful giver and grateful receiver dichotomy that only perpetuates power inequalities (Shankar, 2014). Another strategy that Shankar used is self-relativization, whereby aid beneficiaries themselves were allowed to be active media producers. In an example from Shankar's own work, he supplied a young boy with a camera in order for him to make images of himself to depict what humanitarian aid meant to him. The subject returned an artistic self-portrait that was made unassisted by Shankar, and that visual represented the subject in an

intelligent way that runs counter to how he would likely have been depicted within traditional NGO narratives (Shankar, 2014).

Shankar described his tactics as “using the image to present the complexity of life-worlds and use these complexities to re-think discourses like the ‘end of poverty’ without losing the possibility for action (Shankar, 2014, p. 354). They are counter hegemonic in their inclusiveness and their honesty regarding the media creation process that all too often relies on the myth that what meets the eye is reality. While there are representational advantages to this strategy, the potential drawbacks of utilizing a critical pedagogy is potentially the loss of some control over achieving a narrative with visual consistency, which can be important in delivering a powerful, persuasive, and professional message that prompts audience action. For instance, in the case of the self-portrait of the young boy Shankar cited, it is true that the portrait, which consisted mostly of the subject’s own shadow, is an authentic representation of the self, it could be interpreted as too artistic to fit into an overall producer’s narrative. A critical pedagogy, or forcing the audience to consider representational practices can be an important device to increase audience’s media literacy and to be counter-hegemonic, but it likely has more place in research and academia than as a vehicle for getting the public at large to financially support humanitarian aid causes in a competitive marketplace filled with appeals of concise, on point messages with consistently professional visuals.

NGO Reportage

Grayson (2014) proposed a communications strategy as well as outlined the emerging professional field of what she calls, NGO reportage, which is a hybrid of public relations and depth photojournalism conventions applied to documenting NGO work to produce organizational visual media (Grayson, 2014). Grayson believes that NGO media practitioners do valuable work and that by adopting NGO reportage as an approach, they can continue to do positive work while

avoiding images that turn audiences away (Grayson, 2014). NGO reportage exists as a relatively new photography field due to a variety of factors. First, a cult of celebrity has shaped mass media narratives in a way that has made depth photojournalism less desired by publications. Second, the increased ubiquity of citizen journalism providing eyewitness media has made professionals in the field redundant and often too late to a story. Lastly, the financial struggles of traditional print outlets have caused a number of journalism stalwarts that once employed photojournalists, to shut their doors. All of these circumstances have resulted in a decrease in the traditional photojournalism positions, with NGO reportage filling the void and offering jobs to experienced visual journalists who cut their teeth in the news and print industry (Grayson, 2014).

Before discussing Grayson's approach further, it is first important to identify the reportage and photojournalism conventions that this practice and emerging professional field she identifies is based upon. Kobre (1996) described the professional practice of photojournalism as what news gathering photographers do. They are visual reporters trained in conventions and practices that record and report the news through single images and/or sequences of images that convey a narrative about what happened. While they operate on a "continuum of control," which simply designates to what degree they may intervene, photojournalists generally operate according to an ethical standard that they will not intervene or manipulate a scene, that they will shoot it candidly, or strictly through third person observation (Kobre, 1996, p. 297-299). Kobre describes their role as if they were tasked with recording a live play in that they must document what happens, but not attempt to direct or stage manage (Kobre, 1996). Photojournalists are trained to utilize different camera lenses, from wide-angle scene setters, medium, or normal views that capture general action similar to what a person might see, to telephoto lenses that can better isolate details and specific narrative aspects. Sometimes an entire narrative can be

conveyed in a single image, but presented together, with the mix of visual perspectives, series of images add up to a rich and visually diverse story (Kobre, 1996). Such conventions, as well as specific framing and compositional device, lends a perceived degree of realism and authenticity to their images because if something in an image does not appear setup in anyway, that it was obtained as a subject appeared unaware of the camera, a viewer tends to believe that it is authentic. Hence, terminology like photorealism, documentary style, observational, and photojournalism aesthetic, are often used more or less interchangeably to describe the general style that photo-, and increasingly, video journalists, often record. Due to the already discussed industry reliance on the news and photojournalism industry to obtain visuals and promote their causes, much NGO imagery to this day, remains in the reportage style.

Grayson (2014) identified NGO reportage as an emerging professional field, opening up in the wake of the collapse of traditional photojournalism outlets and employers, a communications trend some NGOs are taking on to continue to represent their services in a photorealism style, but also having a greater degree of control over the final product. In this way, it is not simply photojournalism applied to NGOs, though it borrows heavily from the traditional photojournalism aesthetics and practices I mentioned, but rather, it is public relations photography where most of the visual content is obtained by documenting in real time the work that NGOs are conducting. NGO reportage is accomplished by practitioners accompanying aid workers into the field and spending as much time as possible with them and the beneficiaries they serve (Grayson, 2014). Though much of the visual content is obtained through keen observation and documentation of what organically transpires in the field, where the NGO reporter gains an advantage over photojournalists is that they may manipulate proceedings if necessary, in order to obtain the ideal image, since they are not bound by strict non-interference

ethics like traditional photojournalists are. In this way, Grayson's NGO reportage approach is best thought of as a hybrid communications practice. The aesthetics and press photography lend the strategy an aura of authenticity and photorealism, yet as public relations, the practitioner is free to intervene to whatever extent is necessary to create images that tell an NGO's story of humanitarian aid effectively.

Grayson wrote about her experience practicing NGO reportage in Africa and acknowledges that there are challenges to employing the tactics in the field, which ultimately came to bear on the imagery she produced. She identifies three ways that the circumstances were limiting. First, NGOs are large corporations with their own agendas and the organization's expectations going in were for very literal images to represent the work they were doing, which can conflict with documentarian approaches where photographers are mostly at the mercy of the circumstances before them (Grayson, 2014). That NGOs often operate like large businesses brings up questions of objectivity, but from a public relations perspective, NGOs do not share the press media's obligation to the public to be objective and nonpartisan (Grayson, 2014). Secondly, there were cultural customs that did not allow for a foreign woman to freely go where she pleased and document whatever she saw, though this has less to do with the NGO reportage as a communications strategy and more to do with differing cultural norms regarding gender roles encountered in different countries (Grayson, 2014). Finally, Grayson found herself limited by the time and knowledge of her guides, as she was an outsider dependent upon interpreting what she saw through the lens of a secondary party who were from the host culture (Grayson, 2014). I employed a hybrid public relations and photojournalist approach similar to Grayson when I worked for a few organizations documenting aid in Tanzania in 2014, and I address some challenges and advantages of the approach according to my own experience in chapter 6.

Empathy, Not Sympathy

Hudson et al. (2016) researched whether or not aid appeals that targeted empathy could have a greater effectiveness in reducing compassion fatigue while still persuading audiences to contribute financially to a cause. Empathy is being able to psychologically understand what another human could be feeling and can entail viewing that subject as an equal, while pity, which is what most traditional aid appeals target, is imbued with a sense of condescension and is rooted in inequality (Hudson et al., 2016). The hypothesis was that if communications were designed to encourage empathy instead of pity, then audiences would possibly have a greater sense of efficacy in their ability to contribute in a meaningful way, continuing their financial support at the same or increased levels (Hudson et al., 2016).

After carefully crafting experimental appeals that targeted negative and positive emotions, researchers analyzed audience response to both types of appeals. To create a traditionally negative ad (Figure 4-1), researchers employed the traditional tropes, including a prominently featured image of a malnourished child, alone, out of context, accompanied by text that read, “you can save a child’s life,” which reinforces dependency (Hudson et al., 2016, p. 14). For the alternative appeal (Figure 4-2) designed to elicit empathy, the researchers featured a smiling boy in the foreground, holding a sign that read, “future doctor,” with the background being the boy’s primary school classmates engaged in a school lesson with the accompanying text stating, “all of us sharing a little more can make a big difference” (Hudson et. al., 2016, p. 14). In the latter ad, audience solidarity is achieved through the suggestion that aid recipients are bettering their lives through a collaborative relationship thanks to the viewer’s donation, with empathy conveyed through the relatable idea that education objectives where aid is needed are the same as in the West, which is to prepare youth to be productive and functional adults (Hudson et al., 2016).

Results after testing the two types of appeals on British audiences confirmed the research hypotheses, indicating that negative appeals are undeniably effective at shaming people to donate, but also that alternative appeals can instill a sense of efficacy in alleviating poverty (Hudson, et al., 2016). While there was little significant variance between how much participants were willing to give to a cause depending on which appeal they saw, viewers did report a loss of efficacy and a sense of general hopelessness upon seeing the negative appeal, versus a reported increase in their sense of efficacy after viewing the alternative. This led to the researchers suggesting that there is little cost in targeting empathy and only an upside in doing so if an audience's willingness to donate is the same or a little higher, as it avoids the effects of compassion fatigue altogether (Hudson et al., 2016). This is evidence that a key component of crafting NGO appeals could be in targeting audience empathy for the lives of beneficiaries through actively trying to represent them as people pursuing the same goals that affluent populations in the West do, reminding potential viewers that people in general share the same primary motivations in life, even if those people exist far apart and cultural differences appear to be vast on the surface.

Aid Reframed

Perhaps the most promising communication tactics to fend off compassion fatigue involves alternative framing, specifically, using deep framing of humanitarian aid in a manner that triggers what some scholars refer to as pro-social, self-transcendental, or intrinsic values. This research is founded upon approach/avoidance and framing theories, and two complimentary research teams suggested that alternative framing could prove to be a valuable communications solution in the foreign aid sector. Each argues that presenting foreign aid and assistance in terms of values like shared community building, participatory democracy, egalitarianism, and broadmindedness, will connect to a network of related positive values and ultimately result in an

increase in public support as people respond out of shared motivations to be altruistic, rather than out of a sense of guilt (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015; Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

Darnton and Kirk (2011) are two researchers who found that values matter in establishing solidarity between an organization or cause and a given audience. Individuals with strong self-transcendent values engage in pro-social behaviors more frequently than those who do not (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). NGOs may exploit such tendencies by crafting their communications according to positive “deep frames” that connect to an assortment of interrelated altruistic values that trigger the desire to give and to participate in a campaign (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). Frames are how humans understand words beyond their surface definitions by including all the associated concepts and ideas about a particular word (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). Some frames contain predominantly negative or stereotypical associations with foreign aid and international poverty, due in large part to decades of negative representations in the media. There exist sets of positive frames and value associations that can be used instead, frameworks that could be counter-hegemonic by associating with altruistic ideals and redefining the dominant perceptions the public holds about aid and the alleviation of international poverty and its repercussions (Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

Darnton and Kirk single out four specific alternative deep frames, which are embodied mind, shared prosperity, participatory democracy, and non-hierarchical social organization (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). Each of these four frames have an opposing frame that is contradictory, but which have traditionally dominated NGO communications and have formed the conceptual backbone as to how the West has come to perceive foreign aid. For instance, the rational actor frame is juxtaposed with embodied mind, free markets with shared prosperity, elite governance with participatory democracy, and natural moral hierarchical order with non-hierarchical order

(Darnton & Kirk, 2011). All of the positive deep frames are connected to networks of related associations, or surface frames, such as open mindedness, compassion, empathy, community, and altruism, and by designing communications that actively trigger these positive associations and connect to these deeper frames, it is possible to persuade audiences to act based on shared altruistic motivations (Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

Deep frames need triggering through surface frames, which offer a more specific, contextual, and situation based means of discussing ideas. They identify the traditionally negative ones as consisting of such terms as charity, aid, development, corruption, and aid effectiveness, all terminology and part of the established aid discourse that has been taken for granted as harmless (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). However, each one of those terms connects to a network of commonly held cultural assumptions that are negative and reinforcing of the hegemonic conceptions of existing power dynamics, as well as notions of entitlement and deservedness. However, each of these traditionally negative surface frames have opposite, positive frames that they are matched with, such as justice and fairness, mutual support and partnership, well-being, freedom and responsibility, and good and bad governance (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). All of the surface frames in these sets, good or bad, can be conveyed through corresponding visuals or text. Through framing's associative power, surface frames may reinforce traditional ideas of aid such as beneficiary dependence and futility, which only contributes to compassion fatigue, or if the positive ones are triggered instead, then associations with community egalitarianism, growth, progress, and community building should cause like-minded donors to contribute financially.

Darnton and Kirk acknowledged that a fully committed and sudden industry-wide shift to strictly positive framing and targeting self-transcendental values would likely result in a

noticeable short-term decline in public support because emotional pity appeals remain a reliable source of income for NGOs, especially in the wake of sudden natural catastrophes (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). A partial shift in framing tactics though could change public perceptions and long-term giving behaviors from being transactional and shallow, to long-term, participatory, and founded upon a deeper relationship between organization and supporter. They predicted that in time, this would result in a broader shift in public values that accepts aid as a legitimate and viable solution, thereby increasing the potential pool of public donors (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). The latter outcome is their desired endgame and it is believed, is possible if the NGO sector adopted the positive framing tactics they outlined.

Darnton and Kirk did not prescribe any specific communications template, rather, they suggested a gradual adoption of broadly defined strategies that begin by substituting some of their pre-identified positive surface frames for traditional ones still common in NGO communications. For instance, where a surface frame of charity is used, a better frame would be aid for social justice or fairness because that terminology and imagery connects to positive frames of equality, rather than one based upon unequal power dynamics between giver and receiver (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). Likewise, framing organizations as charities could instead be organizations as movements because that connotes shared involvement and collaboration between provider and beneficiary instead of the unequal superior/inferior relationships. Organizations are still encouraged to continue to use the transactional approach that typically relies on negative framing for those times when immediate relief in the wake of a large-scale crisis is needed, as it is still a reliable tool for garnering a lot of needed funds right away (Darnton & Kirk, 2011). With all other non-immediate response communications, practicing positive deep framing would allow greater emphasis to be given to concentrating on long-term

aid objectives, gradually changing perceptions of the industry and people's giving behaviors by establishing organization/supporter solidarity by communicating how aid helps to build societies around embodied mind, shared prosperity, participatory democracy, and non-hierarchical networks (Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

In 2015 Common Cause Foundation put out their own reframing research, including recommendations that compliment Darnton and Kirk. In it, authors Crompton and Weinstein (2015) divide communications into two categories, those which frame NGO work according to extrinsic values, so those founded upon ideas of social status, prestige, popularity, and wealth, versus communications that frame according to intrinsic values such as broadmindedness, social justice, community feeling, and creativity. Their identified extrinsic values coincide with Darnton and Kirk's negative deep frames and associations that have traditionally been used in emotional, pity-based appeals, while their identified intrinsic values correspond with the authors' alternative, positive frames (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015). Five primary intrinsic value categories they believe should be utilized include: benevolence, affiliation, self-acceptance, universalism, and community. These values connect to surface frames and networks of similar values like loyalty, honesty, helpfulness, efficiency, choice, freedom, and so on (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015).

Crompton and Weinstein's recommendations are based on research that demonstrates the potential persuasive power of targeting intrinsic values. They reviewed a variety of communication framing experiments that suggested people who hold intrinsic values are more socially and environmentally responsible and have a greater likelihood of participating in civic action, which are the types of people humanitarian aid NGOs want to attract and build sustained long-term donor relationships with (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015). In one such study, goals of

the World Wildlife Foundation were framed intrinsically and extrinsically and audiences indicated they were more likely to contribute financially to the organization based upon the intrinsically framed samples (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015). Another study found that attempting to appeal to a person's pre-disposition toward intrinsic or extrinsic values also did not matter, that with both types of audiences, the intrinsic value based appeals resulted in the greatest amount of support from both types of audiences (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015). Neither did an organization's sector matter, as results indicated that regardless of whether organizations advocated for the rights of people with disabilities to championing environmental causes, intrinsic value framing was always the most effective means of attracting public support. For these reasons, they believe that NGOs and humanitarian causes should not be any different and the fact that other sectors have done this successfully means that foreign aid NGOs would have a healthy precedent to draw inspiration from and follow suit (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015).

Imperfect Positivism

While the aid industry has experimented with everything from big budget commercial campaigns to positive reframing, it is never agreed upon any single communications approach or any set of regulatory conventions to abide by. Even if there were a standard communications strategy that was unanimously adopted, there would be no magic bullet solution applicable to all situations, or one that could stave off compassion fatigue entirely. Positive aid communications have their own unique drawbacks, everything from the subjectivity of what makes up a "good" representation or image, to issues with positivism lacking perceived authenticity.

One criticism of the approach is that positive depictions of aid work and beneficiaries can oversimplify the nuance, power relations, and ideologies that are embedded in any representation (Dogra, 2007). Aid work and geo-political circumstances that make countries unequal and ultimately precede aid, can be very complex, and representations have the ability to skirt around

the complexity and convey dangerously hollow sketches of tragedy and crises. Another criticism is the subjectivity of what makes up a good or bad image. After all, it is not only the bad and stereotypically negative imagery that is loaded with ideology. Deliberately positive images are just as produced and loaded with their own ideal about how the rest of the world and the foreign other should be, which will never be consistent with everyone's viewpoints. Chouliaraki suggests that positive representations simultaneously empower and disempower beneficiaries by "appropriating their otherness in Western discourses of identity and agency" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 113). In other words, it represents a gratitude for help that reinforces notions regarding roles of patronage and self-satisfaction on behalf of the West and perceived obligations of the beneficiaries. Simply labeling various tactics, imagery, and communication approaches as good or bad is inadequate and most imagery used by NGOs is likely somewhere in the middle of such a dichotomy after accounting for subjectivities and meanings embedded in visuals (Dogra, 2007).

There is also the problem that many NGOs are large businesses, and though charitable, the largest of them are operated akin to large corporate entities, each with their own agenda, and that entails its own set of ethical issues when it comes to objectivity and the representation of the poor and vulnerable (Grayson, 2014). For instance, who is to prevent an NGO's corporate interests in a competitive marketplace from superseding their mission to provide aid and to represent beneficiaries in the most accurate and respectful manner possible? When it comes to the slick branding tactics discussed previously, large organizations like Amnesty International or the Red Cross, have expansive budgets for advertising relative to smaller NGOs. Whether they are positive and empowering or not, employing large commercial campaigns to attract public support can lead to the commodification of the aid industry and effectiveness being dictated by

corporate branding more than an organization's actual results of delivering aid and resolving the issues they seek to address (Chouliaraki, 2010).

Positive imagery is also not immune to causing compassion fatigue. Ironically, this can occur because positive depictions of beneficiaries succeeding and children that appear healthy and malnourished can lull audiences into a sense that things are actually satisfactory in the rest of the world and that their aid and contribution is not needed (Chouliaraki, 2010). In fact, scholars argue that images that could be interpreted as negative are often important in instilling a necessary sense of urgency for a particular crisis situation, an urgency that can be effective in prompting swift public financial support, something that potentially would not occur if all imagery were of a deliberately positive nature (Benthall, 1993; Orgad, 2012). Positivism can also lead to compassion fatigue if audiences do not accept such imagery as being realistic, and therefore reject the appeals outright on the grounds that they are somehow fake because they do not support their preexisting beliefs about how a certain group or nation should be (Chouliaraki, 2010).

There are a range of critical thoughts regarding humanitarian aid imagery from too negative and dehumanizing on one hand to overly-positive and commodifying solidarity on the other, making the task of effective representation a hard balance to strike for any NGO.

Chouliaraki best summarized the dilemma by stating that:

The former animates the affective regime of guilt and indignation to lead us into action, but such negative emotions tie action to our own complicity in global injustice and run the risk of fatigue and apathy, while the latter animates the emotional constellation of gratitude and tender-heartedness to persuade us to act, but such positive emotions tie action to a view of development as a gift, which glosses over asymmetries of power and runs the risk of denying the need for action on the grounds that it may be unnecessary, or even unreal" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 114).

Despite the inadequacy and subjectivity of trying to define positive versus negative imagery, as well as the unique challenges that positivism presents, this thesis is premised upon there being communication methods that serve beneficiaries better than past tactics, so it fully accepts that any positive approach is not without its unintended consequences and that those consequences are worth the potential of gaining a more engaged and compassionate public. In the next section, I single out some of the tactics outlined in these approaches that I believe could contribute to a better overall strategy, and I provide examples of where some NGOs are employing them successfully in today's media environment.



Figure 4-1. Negative experimental advertisement targeting viewer sympathy and guilt through the utilization of stereotypically negative aid representations. Source: Hudson, D., van Heerde-Hudson, J., Dasandi, N., and Gaines, N. (2016). *Emotional Pathways to Engagement with Global Poverty: An Experimental Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University. Retrieved on September 3rd, 2017 from: http://ncgg-new.princeton.edu/sites/ncgg/files/hudson_representationemotionsdevelopment.pdf

DONATE NOW or TEXT "give" to 76492 to donate with your smartphone

PLEASE GIVE

LIVING CONDITIONS ARE IMPROVING AROUND THE WORLD,
BUT OVER **ONE BILLION PEOPLE** STILL LIVE IN **POVERTY**.

FUTURE DOCTOR

ALL OF US SHARING A LITTLE MORE CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Families in poor countries work hard to provide the same things for their children as we do. We all want to be able to look after ourselves and our families.

Amadi's parents want him to grow up happy, healthy and go to school. Amadi, like so many other children, wants to be a doctor when he's older.

Please donate and together we can educate the next teacher, farmer or doctor.

j a a g o
foundation

JAAGO Foundation is a registered non-profit organization. Established in 2007, we work in low income countries to improve living environments and social conditions.

Figure 4-2. Positive experimental advertisement targeting viewer empathy and altruism through the utilization of non-stereotypical, positive aid framing and representations. Source: Hudson, D., van Heerde-Hudson, J., Dasandi, N., and Gaines, N. (2016). *Emotional Pathways to Engagement with Global Poverty: An Experimental Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University. Retrieved on September 3rd, 2017 from: http://ncgg-new.princeton.edu/sites/ncgg/files/hudson_representationemotionsdevelopment.pdf

CHAPTER 5

A POSITIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A suitable contemporary communications strategy tells an NGO's story of humanitarian aid with visuals and copy that are guided by intrinsic values and obtained by production practices that combine the candid photorealism of NGO reportage with pre-planned visuals common to a public relations approach. People respond to good stories and effective communications are increasingly reliant upon digital narratives that play across a number of traditional and new media channels. NGOs are no different and if they expect the public to buy into their cause and to effectively compete for public funding in an increasingly crowded media environment, then they will need to tell an effective story about who they are, what they do, and how the public can help. Thankfully, with the proliferation of digital technology, especially still and video image capture, along with the explosion of Internet technology making distribution easier, telling an engaging story has never been more accessible and affordable.

I have presented evidence that suggests that intrinsic values matter to the altruistic audiences most likely to provide NGOs with support and using such values to guide the type of visuals NGOs should pursue in telling their story is essential to ensuring that the cycle of negative and stereotypical imagery of the past does not continue. Public support does not need to be derived from a sense of guilt, but rather, out of a sense that one's contributions are valuable and meaningful to a truly collaborative cause. Imagery that triggers pro-social and self-transcendent values should be obtained by adopting traditional photojournalist documentation practices for coverage of pre-identified success stories, with some allowance for setup photography, such as for empowerment portraiture or images that authentically re-create essential elements of a narrative. This photorealism inherent in journalistic-style photography and videography lend a sense of perceived authenticity that can be important in persuading

audiences to give. Digital storytelling driven by intrinsic values and wrapped up in photo and video journalism aesthetics form the basis of a visual communications approach that can be dynamic and engaging, effective in garnering public financial support, and relatively easy and affordable for organizations large and small to produce and distribute.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling too often feels as though it is a catch-all term for a wide variety of marketing and advertising tactics that companies and organizations use to persuade audiences to spend money or act in some desired way. Couldry (2008) defined digital storytelling as a “whole range of personal stories now being told in public form using digital media resources” (p. 374). Humans are social animals and long before mankind could write, history, culture, and knowledge was passed on through oral tradition, which is why today, in its contemporary form, be it a series of still images, a video, or even a narration, a good story still resonates. Digital storytelling is ubiquitous in daily life from large corporations selling their brands to private individuals expressing their identities through personal stories across their social media including Facebook and Instagram. Digital storytelling, when employed correctly, can be powerful because people are already so accustomed to it in their everyday lives and effective communicators can take advantage of this by matching the self-transcendental organizational values with those that are already meaningful and resonate with their target audience.

An NGO first needs to identify an overarching story of its organization, developing a cohesive and compelling narrative of who it is, what it stands for, what its lofty ideals are for alleviating international poverty and its consequences, and how it embodies that narrative through the work it is doing. After establishing a sense of what an organization is about, that essence should be delivered to the public through contemporary multi-media stories that contain imagery and copy that are based on some of the intrinsic values and positive, self-transcendental

surface and deep frames already identified. NGO communications staff need to determine content by prioritizing success stories where beneficiaries have become empowered in some way due to the aid, education, or training they've received, and then send dedicated photographers, videographers, and writers into the field to record that content.

Key to ensuring that the visuals in this approach will be positive and will trigger intrinsic values, will be pre-determining what stories will most likely yield visual and copy that fit Darnton and Kirk's deep frames of embodied mind, shared prosperity, participatory democracy, and non-hierarchical social organization (Darnton & Kirk; 2011). This is going to be achieved by documenting aid beneficiaries actively engaged as equals in the aid transfer and receiving process. Perhaps this means that they are photographed or filmed when they are engaged in some activity that is industrious, or when they are visibly prosperous as a result of whatever form of aid they have benefited from. It is conveyed when they are clearly acting as leaders to others in their community, working as equals with aid providers to accomplish some task, or when represented as healthy, happy, and able provide for others. Anybody tasked with planning communications will need to become familiar with where an NGO's efforts have been successful in these regards, even if it is not the reality at all times and is only an ideal, and then set about documenting such scenarios as they occur, possibly recreating or staging specific elements as needed. The aim here is to avoid classically stereotypical representations of beneficiaries as passive, dependent, and disempowered.

NGO communicators and practitioners in the field should also go out of their way to find success stories that feature beneficiaries that appear well-nourished, in relatively clean and orderly environments, and wearing unsoiled but still traditional and/or daily clothing. This is not to deny the reality of the situation, as developing nations are visibly less prosperous and their

populations, many of which are smallholder farmers, are poor and regularly engaged in expectedly dirty labor. It is simply a recommendation that wherever possible, media practitioners in the field do their best to avoid any scenarios that would be perceived as stereotypically impoverished, scenarios that are generally the extreme cases, rather than the norm. Doing so is counter-hegemonic because it works to revert the false perceptions established by aid media of the past that are responsible for the widespread belief that all populations receiving aid are sick, severely impoverished, and living amidst squalor. Where there is exception to this rule is if an organization such as the Red Cross must make public appeals in the wake of a massive calamity that has left a country in ruins and large sums of money must be raised in the immediate aftermath.

Photographers, filmmakers, and writers that will be going into the field to gather the raw material for these positive visual narratives should go prepared to record professional still and video imagery, as well as written, interview-based stories of beneficiaries and NGO representatives. Doing so will ensure that all the necessary content that could be needed to produce contemporary, narrative-driven, multimedia print and/or online stories gets collected. Gathering that media should be done according to the NGO reportage practices laid out by my discussion of Grayson (2014) and Kobre (1996), combined with some setup scenarios where necessary, such as when something that occurred in the past needs to be recreated for story consistency, or when an empowering environmental portrait of a beneficiary could be arranged in a way that portrays the subject as proud, independent, and heroic.

Regarding visual narrative specific practices, Kobre (1996) explains how photojournalists, and by extension, NGO reportage practitioners, can convey a cohesive narrative with just images. For the purposes of this approach, few stories would be told in a single image,

therefore it is most important to understand how visual journalists can use a series of images to tell a story. All visual narratives are centered around a complication, obstacle, or something that the subject must overcome, followed by a resolution, or the change in circumstance that enables the subject to do so (Kobre, 1996). In a lot of NGO circumstances, such a narrative outline already exists in the lives of the aid beneficiaries and how NGO intervention enabled them to enhance their lives, and/or that of their community. As previously, conveying such a narrative in imagery with reportage techniques relies upon the practitioner honing a key sense of anticipation for what is about to happen, then utilizing the variety of camera lenses and perspectives, from wide-angle, to normal and telephoto, to create a visual diversity showcasing the variety of story elements that formulate the sum of a given narrative (Kobre, 1996). Wide angle views for example are necessary scene setters that orient a viewer to how a subject relates to their wider environment (Kobre, 1996). Normal views, usually obtained with 35mm to 50mm lenses, replicate what the human eye might see, thus is a “normal,” perspective and is great for conveying the bulk of general activity that occurs in a story (Kobre, 1996). Telephoto lenses, or close up perspectives of isolated details of a story focus a reader’s attention on individual elements (Kobre, 1996). To maintain consistency, all images should clearly have the same primary subject in them, or at least some significance to the subject as it pertains to what an individual image depicts (1996). With human subjects especially, portraiture is generally a critical part of a narrative as readers want to know who a subject in a story is, and a photographer can reveal that through a variety of different portrait treatments from environmental, which showcases how the subject relates to their lived environment, to hero depictions, which elevates them to empowered individuals with agency (Kobre, 1996). If applied to circumstances and aid work where intrinsic values are present, then knowing how to successfully utilize all of these

conventions, many of which translate to video documentary as well, will aid any would be NGO media practitioner in creating effective visuals.

The media practitioner will need to travel to where the beneficiaries work and live and spend enough time with them to develop a rapport and trust that will allow them to authentically document their lives like an embedded visual journalist would for something like a long-form newspaper or magazine feature. In the best-case scenarios, all the dynamic, engaging, and positive imagery will be obtainable through hands-off, professional visual journalism of the humanitarian aid and/or the beneficiary learning and adaptation process. In those cases where the visual journalist must intervene to setup a particular visual, having a guide on hand that is native to the country and people being recorded, is essential. This way, if the media practitioner is a contracted cultural outsider, common when Western NGOs hire specialists from the NGO's country or region of origin, the local guide may act as a linguistic interpreter and cultural advisor. These professionals may become valuable assistants in giving directions to subjects in their native language, and most importantly, acting as a cultural interpreter to ensure that any social norms are not violated and that beneficiaries are in no way exploited or grossly misrepresented in the process of gathering their story content.

Written story content can be as critical to these digital storytelling endeavors as the visuals and wherever possible, field media and communications practitioners should plan on collecting primary accounts from beneficiaries speaking to how humanitarian aid has positively impacted their lives. Such empowerment stories are often short and generally follow a basic template that personalizes foreign aid by introducing the beneficiary, some problem or obstacle they faced, the form of aid or educational opportunity provided to them by the NGO to overcome that obstacle, followed by their newfound personal empowerment and transformation as a direct

result of NGO intervention. All of this information can be gathered in interviews with the beneficiaries that allow them to speak for themselves and their community, in their own words, something that traditionally was not done in past NGO communications approaches. In order to achieve this, interviews should be designed around open-ended questioning that allows the interviewee to elaborate with long, descriptive answers. Vivid description of human subjects is important as well, as the interviewer must capture enough details to reveal a beneficiary's persona, presenting them as fully-realized people, with similar interests and motivations as the audience. Doing so counters the one-dimensional stereotypes that plague representations of poverty and infuse the story with a sense of humanity that audiences may be able to better empathize with. Finally, color and flair, elements that are in any good story, details that are descriptive, set a scene, and put the reader in a location, are all elements that should be included in any written content that could accompany NGO storytelling media. Story elements generally reserved for feature writing and journalism, and not traditionally found in NGO communications are tactics that the NGO sector can look toward for inspiration and emulation in order to better engross a reader into a beneficiary's world and success story.

This digital storytelling communications approach I have identified is best conceptualized as a three-pronged approach that utilizes still imagery, video, and written components that are complimentary. While any three of components can be used effectively on its own, the most complete and fully realized effort puts all three together simultaneously, and they all frame aid efforts according to intrinsic values. Dissected into its three primary components then, the strategy resembles the following:

1. Visual - Still Imagery

- Still imagery is obtained mostly through traditional photojournalism/documentary/reportage/observational conventions. Subjects are willingly followed, observed, and their lives/actions as they pertain to NGO participation is documented through photography.
- Photojournalism narrative storytelling is implemented through: using multiple perspectives (wide angle scene setters, standard shots of the primary action, and close up/detail shots), using low/high perspectives, intentional composition/framing to draw attention to subject, and utilizing natural and interesting frames.
- Images necessary to a story that cannot be obtained through photojournalism conventions can be setup or arranged when:
 - a.) it is necessary to replicate something that happened in the past but is integral to the story
 - b.) negative stereotypical depictions of beneficiaries or their circumstances can be avoided (example: beneficiaries working/living in unusual conditions of squalor)
 - c.) setup, camera-aware portraits are needed, including: environmental, hero, or traditional head/bust representations
 - d.) abstract, conceptual art, and/or studio imagery that compliments a story is needed
- Intrinsic value framing accomplished by beneficiary subjects being represented visually as independent, in roles of leadership, doing/being active, appearing content and healthy, participating in their community, and capacity building with others amidst visually egalitarian relationships.

2. Visual - Video

- Video story components should resemble story-driven mini-documentaries that include:
 - a.) subject/beneficiary introduction (who is this person/community/population?)
 - b.) obstacle/dilemma faced
 - c.) NGO-provided aid/training/assistance received
 - d.) a resolution of personal empowerment or rehabilitation and being able to overcome initial obstacle/dilemma as a result

- Video structure should mix observational/documentary B-roll footage of subject lives/actions as they pertain to NGO participation, with interview footage of the subject/beneficiary speaking personally about their experience and/or empowerment.
- Videos should be short in length, approximately 2-3 minutes per story.
- Contemporary filmmaking device and style should be utilized wherever possible, including: diverse and interesting angles, camera movement, quick cuts of 1 to 3 seconds per clip, and drones for aerials/scene setters where allowed or applicable.
- Intrinsic value framing should be accomplished by documenting the same themes of empowerment as with the still imagery, but with the inclusion of the subject personally speaking of values like embodied mind, community participation, independence, personal empowerment, participatory democracy, leadership, etc., in their interview footage.

3. Written - Text/Copy

- For short and long narratives, a repeatable narrative template should be utilized, such as that listed in the video section.
- Literary device such as color description of subjects and locations, as well things like interesting and creative leads should be utilized, as they can effectively immerse audience members into a story and setting. Look toward writing styles and structures common to feature writing for techniques to replicate.
- Intrinsic value framing of empowerment and personal agency should be done by:
 - a.) avoiding traditional terminology such as development, aid, and charity, and replacing them with terms and ideas that do not connote inequality
 - b.) representing subjects/beneficiary actions and circumstances as the result of real world complexity (embodied mind) and not simply the result of poor decision making, poverty, or poor health (rational actor model)
 - c.) representing subjects as supporting or being supported by community and shared prosperity within a community, versus purely free market/capitalist motivations
 - d.) representing subjects as realizing their rights and being active in self-governance within a democracy
 - e.) representing subjects as acting outside of rigid and inflexible social hierarchies and overcoming social strata and barriers to empowerment

There are huge advantages to gathering media in the field according to this approach due in large part to the quantum leap in digital image capture technology that has occurred since early 2000's. Digital still photography and professional video capabilities have become possible on increasingly smaller and more portable devices. On the visual distribution front, online website creation technology has become increasingly user friendly and affordable to the point that nearly anyone with Internet access and a computer can disseminate content to the entire world at very little cost. These technologies have given rise to the backpack journalist, an all-in-one media specialist that can carry everything they need to produce professional, high quality, broadcast standard photo, video, and written content in a small, lightweight setup. With the traditional print journalism outlets as viable employers having shrunk significantly in the wake of the rise of online media, there are now new opportunities for the backpack freelancer with a visual journalism background in the wide array of international NGOs who are increasingly turning to digital storytelling to communicate their brand and goodwill to the public at large (Grayson, 2014). For instance, in 2014 I produced visual media and stories for NGOs in rural Tanzania and I was able to take three professional cameras, each one with the capability of producing high resolution stills and high definition video, an assortment of lenses, an audio microphone, a travel tripod, and a laptop for editing and distribution, in a single protective briefcase that satisfied airline carry on size requirements. Only a few short decades ago, in order to get all of that media capture ability, even at much lower quality, would have taken multiple large cases and a team of people to utilize them on location. Now, thanks to these advances in technology, small NGOs with little to no budget can employ a single visual practitioner to create their stories with a level of professionalism that is equal to that of larger, wealthier organizations.

Some NGOs are embracing multimedia storytelling more or less as I have outlined above in order to communicate to audiences how they are combating international poverty. Surveying the websites, stories, and linked video media of some of the world's most recognized NGOs and NGO funding organizations concerned with poverty alleviation reveals that while variations of this approach exist, it is never embraced fully by any single organization, nor is it employed uniformly across the sector. This next section will delve into specific examples, which I believe, most thoroughly realize effective NGO reportage and multimedia storytelling.

Methodology: Selecting NGO Storytelling Examples

In finding examples of effective NGO storytelling, I sought to include organizations whose media satisfied some or all aspects of the approach I outlined in the preceding section. I chose to exclude organizations like the Red Cross, whose primary mission is addressing disaster relief and catastrophic crisis, not because this type of storytelling could not be applied by such organizations, but that given the nature of their work, they generally have little choice but to predominantly rely on disaster imagery to raise emergency relief funds. Non-emergency relief NGOs on the other hand, have the luxury of being able to pre-conceive strategic communications to conform to an alternative positive approach because their efforts are targeted toward populations that are in need but relatively stable. Therefore, I focused my efforts upon finding examples from the NGO sector that targeted solutions for systemic poverty and/or malnutrition reduction through economic growth and development, agricultural capacity building, and health education.

To find examples, I listed organizations that I was already aware of, simply through their general notoriety, as well as those that I might have encountered while working as a visual media producer for NGOs in Tanzania in 2014. That gave me a list of NGOs and/or major NGO funders that included: Raleigh International, Oxfam International, USAID, and the United

Nations (UN) World Food Program. In addition to that list, I visited NGO Advisor online, an independent Swiss media organization that reviews the global NGO sector, whose 2013 list of the top 20 NGOs in the world is the most recent that is publicly available (“Top 100 NGOs,” 2016). NGO Advisor was founded by journalists, and in their mission statement they claim to understand the traditional tension that can exist between the media’s search for the truth and NGO media needing to report to their constituents, giving them an expertise from which to conduct independent reviews of NGOs to determine their ultimate impact and effectiveness beyond what appears in NGO financial statements (“Methodology,” 2016). Of their 2013 list, I reviewed all 20 entries and eliminated those organizations that primarily dealt with disaster relief or conflict, leaving me with a select handful of NGOs that met my criteria of working in the area of economic development, capacity building, and food insecurity. Out of that list, only Mercy Corps satisfied my criteria in employing digital storytelling in a manner that I thought representative of the communications strategy I proposed. Combining my initial list then of independent NGOs, funding providers, and government initiatives I had existing knowledge of, with Mercy Corps, I surveyed the online media and messaging of these organizations to identify the following examples of what I believe is effective NGO multimedia storytelling that empowers beneficiaries, offers a positive and hopeful alternative image of humanitarian aid, while simultaneously having the power to appeal to the public at large by triggering intrinsic values.

Many of the organizations I have examined for this research have content-dense websites, some of which are not clearly organized, and therefore require a lot of searching to identify stories and to make an accurate assessment of their approach to visual communications. They also change visuals frequently, update news stories, and have changed and rotated through a lot

of content in the eight to ten months I have now been periodically surveying their media as I conduct my research, so it is possible that some organizations may have drastically changed their tactics and web presence during the during this period. By no means do I believe that this list is comprehensive of all the efforts in the humanitarian aid sector to utilize contemporary multimedia storytelling, nor do I intend it to be interpreted as such. I am certain there are many other stellar examples of NGO reportage and storytelling that exists that I have not included here, but showcasing them all was not the point. I concluded my search for examples when I found enough to thoroughly demonstrate all of the empowering storytelling tactics that my approach advocates for. This is why I believe it is most valuable to highlight the individual examples I have selected that feature specific instances where these organizations have effectively implemented a strategy, or specific elements of a strategy, such as the one this thesis proposes, versus debating whether that organization's overall approach is positive, negative, effective, or ineffective.

The World Food Program

The World Food Program (WFP) was the first organization I looked toward in order to find examples of a contemporary, positive, narrative-driven communications approach. In browsing the diverse assortment of online media available throughout their website, I found that the organization's use of imagery remains a mixed bag of positive and traditionally stereotypical representations. While featuring clean and relatively healthy individuals in most cases, some of which are smiling and very content in their appearance, there still exists an abundance of images of predominantly women and children, appearing isolated, inactive, and dependent. Refugees are pictured waiting in long lines or in dense crowds, arms extended, grasping for emergency food aid, which further entrenches popular preconceptions of humanitarian food aid as handouts. That being said, the WFP, while acknowledging that they have long-term aid and capacity-

building initiatives, does identify itself as a leading emergency aid provider, which, as I have previously stated, may slight any of these organizations toward predominantly negative visuals due to the nature of such missions (“Overview,” 2017).

An example of a WFP basic photo essay of empowering NGO-reportage styled storytelling is their feature entitled, “See WFP’s Food Assistance Projects in Gaza (“See WFP’s Food Assistance Projects,” 2016).” The feature consists of a slideshow of mostly photorealism, news-style, candid documentary, with some setup empowerment images of female entrepreneurs benefitting from a variety of individual WFP programs. The subjects are all being industrious in ways that appear to give them quite a bit of autonomy in taking control of some of the uncertainty in their families’ lives. In the photo series, subjects are depicted doing more traditional activities such as shopping for necessities using a voucher program, gaining the skills to run a dairy and sell its products, to learning computer skills in preparation for a new career (“See WFP’s Food Assistance Projects,” 2016). Where there is some departure from the NGO-reportage style visuals is where some limited setup photography has permitted the photographer to reposition the subject slightly to draw attention to the newfound confidence gained from the aid and training they’ve received from WFP. This example fits my proposed communications strategy because, while it is telling a broad story of a number of aid programs, it presents a straightforward visual narrative of the success that WFP is having on women in Gaza, and by showing them as industrious and actively taking control of their lives. They are represented according to intrinsic values and frames such as embodied mind, social justice, choice, freedom, and shared prosperity.

The video story entitled “WFP’s electronic food vouchers in Lebanon” is fitting of empowered storytelling in video form. It plays like a mini-documentary about an e-card voucher

program for small businesses and local farmers. It is narrated predominantly by the Western perspective of the WFP, but the individual beneficiaries are given the opportunity to speak about their own empowerment in their language through interview excerpts. Children speak of what they hope to become, while their father explains how the program has enabled him to provide and strengthen his family (WFP's electronic food vouchers in Lebanon, 2016). The family is also depicted making their own decisions in stores about what food to buy, rather than just being given rations, and they are shown smiling and happy while eating together within their home, while the narration connects the well-fed children to their ambitious dreams of achievement. The video story concludes with a text overlay that states, "by investing in the World Food Program, you can nourish families like Hussein's, and transform entire communities with the most basic building block of life, food" (WFP's electronic food vouchers in Lebanon, 2016). As is the case with WFP's photo essay about the women of Gaza, numerous intrinsic values are targeted here in this story about increased prosperity.

Another promising digital storytelling endeavor from the WFP is their recently launched "Storytellers," project. Initiated in the spring of 2017, the project is a media production course for male and female Sudanese war refugees who have been relocated to the country of Chad and are beneficiaries of WFP services there (Magnien, 2017). The course teaches them how to utilize smartphone technology and basic editing techniques to create visual stories about their own lives and experiences as well as their future aspirations (Magnien, 2017). As of June 2017, the first cohort of 35 participants has wrapped up and since mid-May, WFP has released their stories periodically on a Facebook page dedicated to the program. The posts range from basic empowering environmental portraits accompanied by hopeful stories of who the subjects hope to become, such as the May 26th introduction to Abdallah Abdelkarim, an aspiring journalist and

broadcast radio host; to brief video clips that explain an aspect of Sudanese culture that is being preserved in the refugee camp (World Food Program Storytellers, 2017).

This storytellers program is still in its infancy, but it is doing a lot of things right in creating dignified representations of beneficiaries. It features visuals of refugee life in camp, not as we have come to expect them, but under conditions that replicate clean and peaceful livelihoods, not under the pressure of war or famine, but simply going about daily life where people attend school, learn, and are trying to rebuild lives. The accompanying images in the WFP blog story about the program, as well as the Facebook images and videos, all feature positive depictions of the Sudanese refugees, including the empowerment, or hero depiction environmental portraiture (Magnien, 2017; World Food Program Storytellers, 2017). Most importantly though, WFP Storytellers puts most of the narrative of these particular WFP beneficiaries in their own hands by making them the principle media producers, thus giving voice and expression to them with minimal interpretation from a Western mediator, similar to the critical pedagogy approach Shankar (2014) advocated for. WFP Storytellers is still very new, but it is on the right track, and if it eventually puts the participants' work into a series of fully-fledged visual narratives, it will be a successful implementation of contemporary storytelling for other NGOs to replicate, one which gives voice to beneficiaries, represents them positively, appeals to intrinsic values, all while teaching them valuable technology and media literacy skills.

Oxfam International and Appealing to Intrinsic Values

Like the World Food Program, Oxfam International is another one of the major global players in international aid and capacity building. Surveying their organization's web presence reveals that they rely heavily on photorealism and photojournalism aesthetics to communicate to the public what they are doing internationally. In a lot of cases, visuals are top-notch, very professional, and are befitting of top quality news and news magazine photography. As is the

case with WFP though, Oxfam addresses long- and short-term international crises and challenges, thus, their professional visual journalism and documentation runs the spectrum from traditionally negative depictions of suffering, to deliberate positivism, all depending upon the nature of the story and aid being delivered. One area where Oxfam remains very consistent is in framing their aid work according to intrinsic values. Scattered across their site is visual and textual reinforcement that effectively frames their aid as collaborative between the organization, the donors, and the beneficiaries, suggesting an egalitarian relationship between all the parties involved.

Oxfam's "Oxfam by Oxfam," video, which is prominently featured atop their "What We Believe" webpage, is a good example of a positive mission statement video that deliberately targets intrinsic values. The video consists of multi-national Oxfam volunteers speaking in their native languages directly to the camera while walking through public environments, presumably in the countries that the Oxfam representatives are from or destinations the organization works in (Oxfam by Oxfam, n.d.). They take turns repeating the text of a message that is written in English over the visuals, each making a statement concerning how much of the world is plagued by poverty and what Oxfam is doing to combat the issue. Statements such as: "mobilizing the power of the people against poverty," by "finding innovative ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty," by enabling "the voices of the poor to influence the local decisions that affect them," and by "working alongside the vulnerable women and men to end the injustices that cause poverty" (Oxfam by Oxfam, n.d.). All of the dialogue and copy appeals to intrinsic values of equality, social justice, helpfulness, responsibility, and community. The video ends with each speaker in the video pleading with the audience to "join us today for a brighter tomorrow,"

emphasizing that successful aid also includes the public donors as part of a collective effort (Oxfam by Oxfam, n.d.).

The “Oxfam by Oxfam” video is also a good example of effective messaging that can be achieved on a low budget with relatively unsophisticated imaging technology. All the Oxfam volunteers appearing and speaking in the video record themselves on a phone camera affixed to a selfie stick, with the camera facing toward them. While it is not a video that showcases and obvious aid beneficiaries, it is something that any organization could replicate by sending specific instructions to agents in the field to record messages on their own phones, then sending those videos back to the NGO for editing into something coherent, all while maintaining a simplistic and consistent visual style. There is virtually no budget required for such a production because presumably most volunteers would have access to a similar smartphone, could readily come up with a selfie stick or an approximate, and follow instructions on how to film themselves speaking in a similar style to similar themes, before submitting their footage to the organization. A number of NGOs and aid organizations have videos in place of their mission statement, but all too often they play upon the sympathetic visual tropes of the past, yet the Oxfam video accomplishes the same task, communicating the core principles of what the organization values, while keeping the footage positive, non-stereotypical, and avoiding the pitfalls of sympathetic imagery.

A good example of how Oxfam utilizes intrinsic value framing in their written text can be found on their “How we fight poverty” webpage. The page only consists of a single image along the top of the page, which is of a happy, leaping African child, depicted candidly in a photojournalism style, and below it, a brief descriptive list of the organization’s six over-arching strategies to combat poverty (How We Fight Poverty, 2017). The very first strategic point

begins with the line “when people have the power to claim their basic human rights, they can escape poverty.” The second addresses women’s empowerment and links their increased agency with stronger communities and enhanced political action. It states, “development is driven by empowered women,” and that, “we work to help them speak out and demand justice and assert their leadership” (How We Fight Poverty, 2017). Such copy is common throughout the Oxfam webpages and it demonstrates an understanding that beneficiaries claiming their human rights is a positive, agency-oriented frame appealing to intrinsic values like responsibility, equality, social justice, and participatory democracy, all frames that are altruistic and appeal to like-minded audiences.

Oxfam also has a couple of features that take positive still photography a step further than what I outlined, while still serving as good examples of what is achievable for an organization that thinks outside the box and seeks non-traditional means of visual storytelling. “We cry for peace” is a portraiture story in partnership with an organization called Dear World, in which the photographer, Robert Fogarty, takes stylized portraits of Sudanese men, women, and children that have been victims of the ongoing war in South Sudan, which Oxfam has provided humanitarian aid to. The portraits go beyond what a typical heroic environmental portrait would entail in that the subjects are photographed with a simple but relatively sophisticated location lighting setup not common to run-and-gun NGO reportage field work. In the series of photographs, each refugee writes something prominent on their body in a black marker that makes a personal statement about their feelings or how they’ve been affected by their displacement. Statements such as “I forgive,” or “peace will give us our home back,” and numerous others are boldly displayed across the hands and limbs of individuals that appear stoic, proud, hopeful, and even happy, all in a stylized, punchy, almost fashion photography treatment

against the context of their starkly foreign African environment (We cry for peace, 2016). This particular appeal urges readers to click on their “speak out” link, which is an online petition hoping to affect a US government-led arms embargo on South Sudan (We cry for peace, 2016). Such use of portraiture gives voice to the aid beneficiaries and victims of war through their written statements scrolled across their arms, it plays upon the hero representation by featuring the subject prominently in the frame, standing tall, sometimes viewed from a slightly lower perspective looking up, and all with confident, strong, and hopeful expressions, the opposite of the stereotypical victim portrayal.

“The Blue Sky of Home” is an Oxfam photo essay that effectively tells the story of humanitarian assistance and speaks for beneficiaries while eschewing traditionally negative visual tropes. The premise is photographing personal possessions of Syrian refugees in owners’ hands with accompanying copy that tells what the object is and what its significance is using the refugee’s own words. In each image, the viewer only sees the hands of a refugee holding an item, never seeing their face or body. In this way, the visuals do not distract viewers from the primary subject, which is the item itself and how powerful its symbolism is to the lives of refugees in their time of crisis. For example, there is an image of a gold watch in a woman’s hands and in the accompanying text it is explained that the watch belonged to her deceased son, best friend, and confidant, who was lost to war (McCabe, 2016). In another photo, a man’s hands hold a stainless-steel rod that is said to be a falafel mold, representative of the individual’s labor and occupation in Syria. He now holds onto the prized possession with the hope that he may rebuild his life and once again take pride in the only work he has known (McCabe, 2016). This is a great use of creative visual journalism that gives voice to aid beneficiaries in a way that attempts to relate their lives, hopes, dreams, and general humanity to that of the audience reading

the story in a way that does not rely on images of poverty, vulnerability, or negative stereotypes. While this form of visual storytelling goes beyond the basic NGO reportage documentation and empowerment portraiture I describe, creative visual tactics like it and the dramatic portraits of the “We cry for peace” series, fit with the communications approach I have proposed, pushing it even further and enhancing its potential to engage and effect audiences.

Raleigh International’s Egalitarianism and Sustainability

Raleigh International is a British NGO that sends volunteers overseas to work on sustainable developmental aid and capacity building projects. Raleigh remains one of the most consistent organizations in their commitment to delivering empowering visuals and copy that represent their efforts as an egalitarian and cooperative process between beneficiaries and organization volunteers. The emphasis on collective empowerment and the tone for the organization’s visuals is established from the outset on Raleigh’s homepage in the statement, “We believe that when local communities and young people work side by side to create positive change, it empowers them. And it is the energy and motivation of empowered people that creates lasting change” (Raleigh International, 2017). The organization’s vision of empowerment is stated numerous times directly in text and the accompanying banner image across the top of the page features Raleigh volunteers interacting and engaged with a crowd of beneficiaries. From there, the organization’s copy and visuals follow suit, doubling down on the collective, egalitarian aspects of the work they do. Egalitarianism and an organization working hand in hand with beneficiaries are critical intrinsic values and by triggering them repetitively in imagery and text throughout Raleigh’s web presence, they effectively frame their aid work according deep pro-social frames that resonate with audiences that are most likely to want to give and establish meaningful and lasting donor relationships.

A survey of Raleigh's visuals indicates that they rely upon an NGO reportage, photojournalism style of photorealism documentation, but with a careful and deliberate intention to include visuals that depict their work in the most egalitarian, community emphasized way possible. If physical labor is depicted, such as in constructing walls, moving masonry, or digging, Raleigh is careful to include images that have volunteers and beneficiaries doing the same labor together without any obvious division of hierarchy. Virtually all of the visuals that include beneficiaries feature them candidly smiling, happy, and engaged in whatever activity they are undertaking. Despite the reality that most of the communities that Raleigh works in are impoverished and underserved, they are careful to exclude imagery where any extreme poverty is apparent in the form of environmental pollution or clothing appearing overly soiled and tattered. In all, it is a consistently upbeat and positive visual representation of seemingly very productive, and fruitful youth volunteer based development aid.

Raleigh also features a webpage of "Community Stories," where they effectively communicate the organization's work through personal stories about individual beneficiaries. The stories are good examples of the communications approach I recommend because they rely on simple NGO reportage narratives and are visually and textually consistent with Raleigh's focus on empowerment and sustainable community development. For example, "Ruth Carolina" is the story of the an 18-year-old Nicaraguan seamstress who learned how to start, grow, and maintain a sewing business in her town (Ruth Carolina, n.d.). The story is mostly told through Ruth's own words as she articulates what she learned from her Raleigh-provided training as well as her visions and goals for her business's future and how she wants to strengthen her community by employing other women and similarly marginalized individuals. Ruth is quoted as saying:

The course in Somoto has also been helpful in teaching me more about marketing my business and about the different activities I can do here in the community. I hope in the future to be able to employ a few people who would work with me to make clothes, especially someone with disabilities and less working opportunities” (Raleigh International Ruth Carolina, n.d.).

Reinforced with images of Ruth sewing, being industrious, and happily interacting with Raleigh volunteers, Ruth’s story is a good example of how a short, image-driven beneficiary story can be positive, empowering, and appeal to audience’s intrinsic values, such as personal empowerment, responsibility, and community.

Raleigh could be criticized as misrepresenting the realities of international aid work by going out of their way to depict the organization’s work as cooperative at all times, but I see it as an effective strategy to remain consistently positive. In focusing on framing according to a few core intrinsic values such as community, efficiency, sustainability, shared prosperity, and non-hierarchical division of labor, and then matching NGO reportage style imagery to those frames, the organization is simply reinforcing their ideal of what cooperative aid work should be. The overall effect of such a tactic is one that could be very effective in serving as a counter-hegemonic form of NGO communications because if the public saw only such depictions, it could potentially leave audiences with an impression that foreign aid and development is effective, that beneficiaries are eager to learn and collaborate with providers, and that benefits are lasting and self-sustaining. Such an outcome would be desirable compared to the hegemonic perception that there is a general futility of foreign aid due to the legacy of less deliberate, stereotypically negative, and more traditional representations of aid work.

Mercy Corps and the Simple Empowerment Photo Story

Mercy Corps was identified as a top 10 NGO in 2013 by NGO Advisor, and while their web presence does not include much in the way of multimedia appeals, their use of simple,

positive, empowering still imagery accompanying short textual beneficiary success stories is a fitting example of contemporary NGO reportage in the photo essay form. The “Latest Stories” section of their website features a variety of image driven stories that are centered around beneficiary empowerment and very professional positive visuals. Selecting any of the stories links to a subpage where there is a written story about a beneficiary in one of the countries they work in, accompanied by expert photojournalism style reportage photography. Each of the stories fits the same basic template with the first part being a lead that effectively pulls the reader into the life of an individual aid recipient with a detailed color description of what it is like to be that person amidst their daily circumstances. This is followed by introducing a problem that they, their family, or community regularly faces, followed by how whatever aid, education, or training Mercy Corps has provided has helped them better themselves and become more equipped to grow stronger and overcome those challenges, finally becoming leaders and agents of change for others to follow. The copy for each story is long enough to engross the reader and to allow them to empathize with the subject by providing an accurate representation of what that person’s life is like. Peppered throughout the story are quotes translated in English that allow the beneficiary to have a voice and to personally speak to how they’ve become empowered. Mercy Corp’s visuals are some of the highest quality amongst NGOs and they borrow heavily from newspaper and magazine reportage styles. For the most part, every subject, be it a Guatemalan farmer who has been trained to implement basic, affordable, crop tracking technology that meets the requirements for his product to be exported to the US; to a woman in Niger who went to an agricultural school and became a successful farmer and entrepreneur; almost all the images represent these beneficiaries as healthy, industrious individuals applying their training and skills

in a non-staged manner (Technology Connects Snow Pea Farmers to Success, n.d.; Halstead, 2017).

Mercy Corp's still visuals are classic photojournalism in that they utilize wide angle scene setting images that provide environmental context, normal or standard view shots for the bulk of the action or depiction of what the subject does, as well as a scattering of close up or detail shots that fill in the gaps in the story. All of these visuals are taken from a diverse set of angles from low to high, with visual device such as creative and dynamic framing and established compositional techniques, all revealing a degree of professional photojournalism proficiency and lending the stories the right amount of professionalism and engaging imagery that audiences would expect to see reserved for notable newspapers and magazines. In these photo essays, the obligatory camera aware environmental portrait is included but it is not elaborate or highly stylized, yet they feature the subject appearing powerful, happy, and full of pride in their work. These visual techniques combined with a perfectly appropriate length of text and copy that appealing to intrinsic values, is the ideal implementation of Grayson's NGO reportage in photo essay form. It should be noted however, that while Mercy Corps executes near perfect empowerment photo stories, it is only one kind of story they regularly publish, and those are featured alongside numerous other stories, that while maintaining the same quality of reportage visuals, report on crises, starvation, and subjects that dire and immediate, where empowerment and positivism are not part of the narrative.

USAID Stories

USAID is the United States government agency responsible for funding America's global humanitarian aid effort to combat poverty and strengthen developing democracies. According to their "What we do" webpage, they "invest in ideas that work to improve the lives of millions of men, women and children," in sectors that include: agriculture and food security; democracy,

human rights, and governance; economic growth and trade; education; ending poverty; environment and global climate change; gender equality and women's empowerment; global health; water and sanitation; and finally, working in crisis and conflict (What We Do, 2017). Though not technically an NGO, but rather, a funding source for NGOs, USAID is one of the most significant and recognizable global players in the humanitarian aid industry, and they happen to utilize the most complete realization of a positive, multimedia storytelling communications approach according to the one I am advocating for in the form of their "USAID Stories" collection.

USAID Stories is set apart from, but accessible through the organization's primary website. USAID Stories is an image-dominated site that is currently the launching point to view 35 personalized success stories derived from a diverse assortment of NGOs and aid organizations they fund, which administer aid according to the organization's prioritized initiatives in developing countries worldwide. The stories serve as fully realized examples of the communications approach I have defined because they bring together all the necessary elements I have discussed in the other examples within a single, replicable format. Each story remains consistent in structure and style, despite being produced by multiple photographers and videographers. In regard to format, the stories are all based around an approximately five-hundred word written story about an individual or a group of beneficiaries overcoming an obstacle or challenge due to the aid or training they've received, transforming into empowered individuals capable of helping or providing for others in the process. The story text is accompanied by a photojournalism style, still image essay that scrolls vertically down the page, resembling a blog. Each image appears to fill the width of whatever monitor the story is being viewed on, with brief excerpts of the story text between photos. Immediately below the title

image atop each story page, which is often an environmental portrait that depicts the subject as happy and empowered, there is an embedded short, mini-documentary video of approximately two to three minutes in length that activates automatically upon scrolling past it. In this format that combines NGO reportage with some setup portraiture, short, digestible but positive, text about personal and communal empowerment, and accompanied by a brief video, each one of the USAID stories utilizes familiar media formats to tell quick success stories about USAID's efforts to eradicate global poverty and malnutrition.

“Hapsatou for Senegal's Health” is one such story that offers a perfect example of this storytelling format. At the very top of Hapsatou's story webpage, there is an image of Hapsatou sitting cross-legged, hands in clasped in her lap, on the floor of what is presumably her home. She is wearing bright, colorful, but clean traditional African attire, and smiling wide toward the camera/viewer (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). The image is an empowerment portrait showcasing her in her home environment. The vantage point, looking slightly up toward her connotes strength and importance, her happy and exuberant expression makes her appear confident and at ease. The portrait could have been staged, yet it remains casual, almost candid feeling, and blends seamlessly with the photorealism aesthetic that makes up all of the other NGO reportage imagery that rounds out her story.

Scrolling down to the very next image reveals a play button in the center of it to indicate that it is the video component of Hapsatou's story, and it begins to play automatically as soon as the image centers on whatever screen, phone, tablet, or computer monitor, it is being viewed on. The video is about two and a half minutes long and filmed in a documentary style that cuts between personal interview footage with Hapsatou speaking, and candid, B-roll footage of her teaching others in her community and taking a role of leadership due to the training and

education she received from an NGO (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). The video's audio is predominantly a narration taken from an interview with Hapsatou that allows her to describe her own words, how her newfound skills as a community educator and leader has allowed her to play a significant role in reducing instances of malnourishment in her village (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). English subtitles appear at the bottom of the screen since Hapsatou speaks in her native tongue, and a soft, but uplifting piano soundtrack can be heard in the background (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). The story is formulaic but simple and effective in that Hapsatou presents a problem, that of a lack of basic nutritional and farming knowledge in her village that resulted in perpetually under-nourished children, followed by her being trained to be a community facilitator in the areas of nutrition and farming education, her subsequent training the community, and the ultimate result being a near eradication of local malnourishment (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). Hapsatou's story is framed around intrinsic values. There is the value of community in that the story focus is not so much about Hapsatou's personal benefit of being able to farm and better provide for herself, but she is now trained to educate others in her village, who can in turn become agents of change. This allows for healthier children and potentially generations of local growth and development. All of these elements are used effectively to target the audience's altruistic values.

Continuing to scroll down below the video, there are seventeen additional images that complete Hapsatou's story. All of them are captured in an NGO reportage style documentation of Hapsatou's community leadership. The remote Senegal village and some sparse interiors of earthen homes are backdrops against which all human interaction takes place, yet this setting is featured in a way that excludes the stereotypically obvious signs of extreme poverty (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). Fellow villagers are all dressed in their traditional attire or farming

and work clothes, they are depicted working hand in hand together, yet they seem eager to learn, industrious, with no signs of malnourishment or vulnerability. Visuals in this way remain positive throughout, emphasizing community belonging, and appealing to intrinsic values.

Finally, the copy that appears between images and makes up the written text portion of Hapsatou's story differs slightly from, but is consistent with the video narrative in that it presents the problem, then a solution, followed by a positive and empowering resolution. Each passage of the story is led by a bold statement, which taken together, outline the gist of the story. Each statement is followed by a brief paragraph consisting of a few sentences that elaborate on the lead. For example, the very first statement above the first story image says, "A healthy start in life begins with healthy food," followed by a brief explanation over two to three sentences concerning the malnourishment problem facing Senegal's children (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). From there, the story unfolds with a series of empowerment statements that emphasize Hapsatou as the heroine of the story. Statements like "Someone had to lead," "Hapsatou is a mother," Hapsatou is a farmer," Hapsatou is an entrepreneur," and "the expansion of abundance," complete the narrative of Hapsatou's journey to becoming an agent of change within her community and a solution to local malnutrition (Hapsatou for Senegal's Health, n.d.). The explanatory text remains upbeat throughout, harkening on intrinsic values of individual and community education, personal empowerment, and improved health and happiness.

Hapsatou is only one example from the USAID Stories initiative, but all of the others follow this same basic template, whether it be about grieving parents coming together in a program that attempts to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians in "Our Power Is Our Pain," to more traditional forms of humanitarian aid, such as training Bangladesh smallholder farmers how to improve their rice yields in "Twice the Rice (Our Power Is Our Pain, n.d.; Twice

the Rice, n.d.). The formula established is particularly effective because it tells a positive, visual story that is relatively short, easy to understand, and utilizes all three primary forms of media, including, text, still imagery, and video, making it mobile friendly and appropriate for the way society consumes media and becomes informed today. The format is also one that can be replicated by most NGOs by hiring a single backpack journalist with experience in writing and photo/video production, making it an affordable and accessible solution for organizations large and small.

A final example worth mentioning is a USAID and Feed the Future video entitled, “Evodius from Tanzania Tells His Story.” Unlike Hapsatou’s or any of the others from the USAID Stories website, this one has no accompanying written or still image component. However, it serves as an achievable example of what a slightly advanced video narrative could be, in that it takes the basic template from the USAID Stories videos and adds a few sophisticated and contemporary video production techniques, such as camera movements, drone footage, and graphical text overlays, which augment the narrative by engaging the viewer to a greater extent, while providing a little more information in the form of factoids and statistical information about the aid being showcased.

The video begins with basic documentary/reportage scenes of a traditional Tanzanian rice farmer working in a field. Evodius narrates over the visual in Swahili, the subtitles at the bottom of the screen translating his dialogue into English as he expresses the difficulties Tanzanian rice farmers face in Tanzania (Evodius from Tanzania Tells His Story, 2013). In the very next scene, only thirteen seconds into the three-and-a-half-minute video, Evodius himself steps up to the camera from a blurred and diffused background of an agricultural setting, holding a wooden implement, and introduces himself. He stands proud, confident, and dressed in a clean bright

orange shirt. The next scenes are a series of shots of his village, while he continues to narrate about the difficulties of his livelihood (Evodius from Tanzania Tells His Story, 2013). From there, a sequence of shots introducing the viewer to rural Tanzania and the Evodius's village. The shots have slight camera movements that move slowly from one side to the other, as well as rack focusing where the camera operator goes from one subject in focus in the foreground, to another that is in the distance. The third type of shot is a drone shot that goes over the main street of a bustling village, and dynamic text overlays appear over certain elements on the ground, text that gives statistical facts regarding how many farmers have been trained by USAID (Evodius from Tanzania Tells His Story, 2013). The text that overlays the footage appears as if it is fixed to objects on the ground and it disappears as the camera sweeps over it. In later scenes, text appears anchored to objects people carry, or to certain people's movements. All three of these creative video techniques are common to cinematic video and film, yet they are employed effectively here and repeated throughout the Evodius's story. The inclusion of these elements distinguishes this particular production from much of the field of NGO reportage, surprising the audience with a level of sophistication unexpected from the aid sector.

Evodius's story is framed according to intrinsic values because it is not simply about his empowerment, it is also about how his personal growth resulted in great benefits for his community. Evodius did not just learn how to plant and harvest rice more efficiently, through the USAID training, he realized where some inefficiencies plague the local farming practice and came up with a solution. Evodius devised an affordable weeding tool, one that could readily be reproduced across Tanzania, and afforded by most farmers. USAID further funded Evodius to bring his invention to fruition and to the wider market (Evodius from Tanzania Tells His Story, 2013). Some of the intrinsic values that frame this story are Evodius learning and gaining

independence intellectually and financially, exercising leadership, and participating in and elevating his local community through the aid, training, and assistance he received. These values are complimented visually by hero portraits of him and his family, framed looking up from a slightly low angle, with the subjects in bright, flattering natural light, standing proud, confident, and happy. When Evodius is demonstrating the creation of his device and its benefits, he appears motivated, industrious, and participating with others in egalitarian relationships.

Though it contains some relatively sophisticated visual production and presentation devices, “Evodius From Tanzania Tells His Story” advances the already effective video narrative structure I singled out in USAID Stories. All the methods used, though slightly advanced, are still very replicable by single NGO practitioners in the field. The camera slider movements, while once requiring the transport and assembly of rail and cart systems, can now be replicated in small, packable portable rails that are specifically made for the small, professional mirrorless still and video cameras journalists are adopting today. As of 2017, there are at least two drone models that are no larger than a camera body or professional lens, which produce professional visuals, and that any practitioner can carry with them in their travel production kit. The dynamic text overlays are created in consumer and professional software such as Adobe After Effects, and while that can take time to learn, it is not inaccessible to anyone that might be producing this type of NGO media. Utilized effectively, in a way that does not overpower the story content, these elements can only further engross audiences while instilling productions with a degree of advanced professionalism that can impress viewers and could be the difference in why they choose to support one cause or organization over another.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The news media in 2017 overwhelmingly depict global affairs in a dire state. Leading headlines are cause for one to believe that war, draught, famine, and climate change-induced natural calamity, are mainstays in poor nations especially, a perpetually threatening, and seemingly insurmountable state of affairs. Western NGOs that have historically provided humanitarian aid and assistance to nations seeking to rebuild after some shock or tragedy, provide health and nutrition to citizens, or set upon a path of stable nation-building and economic development, have served as a bridge between those most in need, and the citizens of the developed world who desire to alleviate the causes and consequences of war, poverty and inequality. For decades, appealing to an audience's pity of, and guilt for, the conditions of the poor was effective to raise the necessary funds for assistance, or bring about widespread awareness and support for causes. However, that communications legacy, combined with the ubiquity of news media sensationalism, has led to the current state of compassion fatigue amongst the audiences most capable of acting through their financial contributions. In this contemporary media environment, NGOs face a daunting challenge to turn the tide of public perception and counter the imagery and stories that have solidified the notion that rehabilitation is a lost cause, that the world's poor are doomed to an infinite loop of disaster, disease, malnutrition, poverty, social strife, and instability.

The good news for NGOs is that many of them do great work abroad, and are effective in empowering individuals and entire communities. The stories of success and empowerment already exist, but they will have to be communicated through alternative strategies and tactics than what is been implemented in the past if they are going to

overcome the public's increasing compassion fatigue. As Moeller (1999) claimed, compassion fatigue is not a given result of news or NGO media, it is only a product of how those institutions communicate. This literature review has discussed the history of NGO communications that has led us to this point of widespread perceived futility of the humanitarian aid sector, but it is also put forth a contemporary, digital storytelling strategy based on telling real stories of beneficiary empowerment. It draws from some positive, alternative NGO communications tactics that have been experimented with, and uses those influences to outline a strategy that is a hybrid of conventional visual journalism and public relations, and is guided by intentional framing of aid according pro-social, self-transcendental, intrinsic values. If multimedia digital storytelling is more than a contemporary communications trend, than it will increasingly play a larger role in how all organizations, public or private, large or small, communicate their messages, services, and/or products to the public across a number of online and mobile distribution channels. If that is the case, then alternative communications methods such as the one I have proposed, will need to be devised and adopted by practitioners, as well as researched and taught in colleges and universities. The following discussion addresses some of these broader implications.

Implications for NGO Media Practitioners

One of the reasons I chose this thesis is due to an experience I had in 2014, working as a media specialist for one USAID-funded initiative, as well as an independent NGO in Tanzania, Africa. Those experiences introduced me to the world of NGO media and communications, and over a four-month period, I gained valuable experience as a visual and written story producer. IAGRI, or the Innovative Agricultural Research Initiative, was a USAID-funded, Feed the Future Initiative program that offered masters

and PhD scholarships for Tanzanian agricultural professionals and students alike who would earn their degrees through one of a handful of leading agricultural institutions (the University of Florida included) by conducting agricultural and food nutrition research that was immediately applicable to Tanzania's most pressing nutritional and agricultural needs. The Tanzanian Agricultural Productivity Project, or TAPP, was an independent NGO under the umbrella of the Fintrac global organization, and it provided agricultural training and capacity building resources to Tanzanians. For IAGRI, I had a four-month stint with duties that required me to head up their own story telling initiative, where I would create personal stories of their student beneficiaries, the research they were conducting, as well as the benefit to Tanzania, in the form of mostly photojournalism, long-form written stories, and a few brief promotional videos. For TAPP, I was given a contract for a single week, provided a driver and interpreter, and then ferried around the country to document their success in agricultural efficiency training and capacity building.

Though I had yet to begin this thesis research and was unfamiliar with the budding field of NGO reportage, what I was doing was exactly that. Neither organization gave me steadfast rules, only that I was to use my photography expertise, as well as some feature writing training, to craft positive and visually engaging stories that the organizations could use to report their successes and progress to stakeholders, including principle funders, as well as the public. What follows are some of the challenges, solutions, and practicalities I encountered while employing some of the multimedia storytelling devices that I endorse in the approach I have defined. Much like Grayson's (2014) account of practicing NGO reportage in the field, this section serves as guide for NGO communicators deployed to challenging environments and foreign cultures with the

explicit task of collecting the raw visual and written material to create positive and engaging stories of humanitarian aid and capacity building endeavors.

One of the key advantages of the strategy I am advocating for is the fact that a single adequately equipped and trained individual can serve as writer, photographer, videographer, and editor of content. However, there is a caveat to this rule. In some instances, a small support team acting in capacity of a translator and/or fixer, is often required to pull off this type of work if the hired media specialist is from a country and culture that is different from the one that is the subject of the media being produced. For instance, without personally having any functional knowledge of Swahili, having a native speaker on hand was an absolute must for me to be able to accomplish what I did in Tanzania. Also, as a cultural outsider to Tanzania, I found that I needed some help in navigating important cultural differences that can impede media production in places where media and journalism are perceived differently and are generally conducted according to differing conventions.

Both IAGRI and TAPP provided me with the support crew I needed. Such arrangements can generally be expected when working for the larger NGOs or humanitarian aid organizations, but for the very small outfits with limited staff, it may be necessary for a media specialist to hire their own reliable personnel. In the case IAGRI, my help consisted of a single driver/interpreter/fixer, who was responsible for getting me to and from remote research locations where I would conduct interviews with the student scholars, photograph what they were doing there, and document their research and/or training and education of locals. Because IAGRI's primary beneficiaries were Tanzanian students who were well-versed in the country's unofficial second language, English, I only needed the IAGRI driver to physically take me to the students and to arrange

accommodations for overnight stays in places I was unfamiliar with. Any discussion or interpretation necessary with locals, for whom the student beneficiary and my story subject had to interact with, was interpreted by the student/subject. For TAPP, they provided a team of two, a Tanzanian driver that worked full-time for the NGO and had some logistical and technological knowledge of their operations, as well as a second individual who worked strictly as an interpreter.

Navigating a culture's contrasting perceptions of journalism and media production, including photography and video, is one of the more critical functions of an interpreter, particularly one native to the culture the media is being made in. They will be the most adept at understanding differences and being able to convey those to the practitioner so that they can act in a manner customary and appropriate to the culture in question. In Tanzania, it was explained to me that though the culture has a general understanding of the role of media as a watchdog and voice of the people, they often associate the visual technology of the profession, still cameras and video, as tools of espionage. Therefore, they are very suspicious of, and sometimes hostile to those wielding cameras and taking photos. The origins of such suspicions are derived from a number of causes, but for me, it meant that I had to gain an understanding of when it was or was not appropriate to take pictures and video, and I had to have a greater reliance on my interpreters to adequately explain to my subjects who I was and what I needed to make visual documentation for. Working for TAPP, there were few instances where I could have simply approached my subjects, taken out my cameras, and started recording. I learned this lesson early on when, despite having all production gear secured in a nondescript bag and having an interpreter approach and explain beforehand what our intentions were document a group of farmers selling goods at a small village market, they

reacted aggressively to the request and vehemently denied us the ability to record or conduct interviews on the grounds that we were commercial producers who desired to profit off their likeness and goods. No amount of explaining or credentials in that circumstance could have gotten us the permission we needed. Those men were simply too suspicious of our intentions, and had I presumed that I could work in that environment and simply started documenting, an already tense situation could have potentially become very hostile and unsafe.

Even when a group does fully understand one's intent to produce media and gives approval, their idea of what professional imagery is, it may be in stark contrast to the imagery styles and conventions of the practitioner's country. Therefore, having cultural sensitivity and personal communication skills are necessary in employing a communications approach and getting desired visuals. For example, in Tanzania, as well as in China and southeast Asia, I have found that when it comes to photographing people, there exists a cultural perception that they must always be prearranged in rigid groups according to a strict social hierarchy, and that they should always be camera aware. There was very little expectation of the candid, photojournalism, photorealism, and documentary approach to recording visuals in those countries and regions. Understanding this ahead of time, I sometimes had to placate the subjects of the photo by taking the images they thought were appropriate visuals first, then have an interpreter explain Western reportage and visual customs, and only afterward, was I able to proceed as I was accustomed. Likewise, many locals that would be depicted in a candid fashion as they farmed and went about their daily practices, had to have the interpreter explain to them why this was necessary and sometimes needed to be reminded a few times before they relaxed and went about their lives as if I were not present.

Another instance where differing cultural attitudes toward photography manifests itself is in the beneficiaries' preparedness to be photographed. It is common that there is relatively little familiarity with candid, documentary styles of photography in many parts of the world, so subjects who are expecting to be photographed will sometimes dress in the very best clothing they own, regardless of the circumstances they are to be photographed in. So, even if it is a smallholder farmer who must be depicted doing the type of farm labor that they are accustomed to, they may choose to wear a nicer shirt or suit jacket than they would otherwise. On one hand, this can be a positive for a media practitioner, as they do not have to worry as much about the subject's attire being tattered or overly soiled, circumstances that can potentially contribute to negative stereotypes. On the other hand, a farmer planting in business attire can be problematic in achieving a sense of photorealism. In such cases, an interpreter who understands the differences in cultural perceptions, can be invaluable in getting an individual to dress appropriately and to explain the need for it without embarrassing or shaming any individual.

In regard to social hierarchies, they are generally more rigid and paid much greater deference to in the non-Western countries that make up much of the developing world where NGOs regularly operate. In practice, this means that before one can meet with and record aid beneficiaries, sometimes all of the higher ups in a local hierarchy must be seen and acknowledged prior to gaining access to the primary subject of documentation. In Tanzania, working for both IAGRI and for TAPP, this was very common in all but the larger cities. I would first have to go with my driver and interpreter to a local government office, where we would have to meet with the local town administrators, even if they had had nothing to do with the media or stories being made and were entirely removed from the NGO's work. In most cases, this was just a

formality, customary where hierarchies are rigid and permissions to do anything are top down and must go through that sort of approval process.

With all of these cultural customs, it is critical any media practitioner who will work in developing countries become versed in differing customs either through independent research, or through having discussions with interpreters or support staff, prior to producing any media. Doing so will increase the likelihood of avoiding any negative violations of customs that would at best inhibit production practices, and at worst, break unfamiliar laws. The drawbacks to relying on others to conduct NGO reportage in the field can be a loss of control. However, if one becomes adept at navigating cultural sensitivities by working to first actively accommodate their host's desires while explaining one's needs and pursuing them only after establishing positive rapport and mutual understanding, in my experience, adequate leeway and freedom to produce the type of work needed will gradually be granted. Grayson (2014), in her account of practicing NGO reportage, came to a similar conclusion, that by satisfying the needs and expectations of her hosts first, trust was established, and she eventually gained greater power and agency over the creation process to the point where she could adhere to the practices she was accustomed to, regaining control over the outcome.

Aside from the challenges associated with different cultural perceptions of media and media practice, there were a few notable practical challenges I encountered in Tanzania. For starters, there is the issue of time, or the lack thereof. The communications approach I am advocating for is derived from long-form photojournalism tactics, specifically, the candid nature of visual documentation that presents itself when a photographer and videographer spends a significant amount of time living with their subject. With the NGOs I worked for, I had a very limited time to

employ such techniques. With TAPP, there was the logistical challenge of getting to projects that were scattered nationwide, and to document as many as possible in only a week. This meant that there was only time to arrive, meet the subject, speak or interview them briefly to get a gist of what they do and how they had benefited from humanitarian aid, then photograph them in the field before needing to move on. Thus, everything about the NGO reportage process was highly compressed.

Under such circumstances, I found that pre-planning a formulaic approach was essential in getting everything I needed. I understood going into every shoot that I would need time to photograph the gist of the story of how the subject had become empowered since receiving the aid in the form of agricultural or nutritional health training. To get a full visual story, I knew I needed wide-angle scene setter shots, a variety of normal shots, detail shots, and a few different environmental portraits. So, upon arriving I made a mental checklist and pre-determined where I might get such shots based on the little information I had for each subject prior to arriving. As I followed them around recording their work, I made sure I was covering all four types of shots I needed, as I would not have a visually complete story till I had.

With IAGRI, I had a written component based on interviews I conducted with each student researcher in addition to the visuals I recorded. So, I would always follow the same routine to make sure that I worked through each subject getting what I needed systematically. I devised an interview template with open-ended questions, one that I modified according to what I could read about their research prior to my visit. I would conduct the interview first as that would inform some of the visuals that might be possible as well to bring me up to speed regarding what it was the subject researched. I also stuck to the same basic story formula that I tweaked slightly from subject to subject.

I would often begin with a lead that personalized the subject, offering personal insight into their motivations behind their research, or I would use a color description of a location setting to pull the reader into the environments that the research was being conducted in, followed by an explanation of what the research was, how it would improve the overall well-being of Tanzania, and so on. Having a slightly adapted but repeatable template was essential in not having to reinvent the wheel for every new subject and story, but also to maximize what abbreviated time I would have to work in field for each one.

I also found when working for TAPP, that due to the infrequency of site visits and contact from the program administrators with some of the beneficiaries, some of the remote sites were not what we expected. Thus, the visual opportunities I anticipated would not be possible and I would be forced to think and adapt on the fly. In one such instance, we traveled about four hours along barely passible back roads and field tracks to visit a bell pepper farm where rudimentary drip irrigation had been employed and the farmer was reportedly benefiting from higher yields as a result. We lost a good amount of time getting to the site en route to other sites and my driver and fixer were left upset and disappointed because they had supposedly communicated with the farmer subjects ahead of time and were assured that they would be there and that the field was actively kept up. Upon arriving, I quickly surveyed the field and understood that I could not shoot wide-angle shots that represented a healthy crop here, nor could I take any setup environmental portraits of empowered farmers because there was nobody present on site, and it had not been maintained. However, since drip lines were still in place and there were rows and green pepper plants growing in them, I was able to weed small sections, tidied up a dirt row or two, and then take useful detail photos that were close ups

featuring just the plants, the drip line, and how individual plants were getting water. Taken out of the context of the otherwise unkempt field, the images still illustrate the agricultural advancements that the aid beneficiaries had utilized at one point. The lesson here for any field practitioner is to not panic when site visitations do not appear as expected, because there could be aspects of the site or circumstances that can be selectively documented to meet one's communications objectives.

Adaptability, not just to think quickly and make the best of a non-ideal situation but to have the patience and wherewithal to problem solve and adapt to any challenge, is the single most important skill that an NGO visual communicator can have in the field. Any practitioner must understand that aid and development often occur in places where the basic amenities and infrastructure that allow for certain efficiencies to be taken for granted in the West, are largely absent from the developing world. Therefore, someone working for an NGO, be it a communications specialist, a program administrator, right down to a volunteer, must understand this and adapt their tactics and expectations frequently. Patience is especially essential in order to maintain composure and not get impatient with beneficiaries whose customs and expectations may differ drastically, and are often at the mercy of socio-economic and/or political circumstances that are out of their control. This is why having routines and conventions that can be readily adapted to changing circumstances, and then having the willingness to change them as needed, is essential to being an effective international and intercultural communicator working in the field.

Implications for Teaching

What I discussed in the preceding section, the challenges, solutions, and practicalities faced in the field when implementing aspects of this or a similar alternative,

empowering communications strategies, has potential implications for academic instruction at colleges and universities. In her research describing NGO reportage, Grayson (2014) identified the practice as an emerging professional field. I have used Grayson's NGO reportage label throughout this thesis to describe the practice that my own approach best resembles, but as an expanded version, one that takes the visual journalism aspects that Grayson's is founded upon, but also emphasizes where it can diverge from the strict confines of journalism ethics, straying into more setup public relations conventions where necessary to create to intentional imagery. My research accepts the premise that this type of NGO reportage will be part of the larger aid industry storytelling endeavor that we will see a greater number of NGOs utilizing to tell their story. If that is true, and hybrid visual journalism and public relations media production strategies are adopted to create such media, then colleges and universities should begin to seriously consider devoting curriculum development for training students that would potentially be interested in entering this field as a viable alternative to the shrinking opportunities traditional photojournalism offers.

A curriculum for preparing students for the field of NGO reportage and visual communications would borrow from academic disciplines and programs that would conceivably already be in place at institutions with an established communications and journalism department. Since NGOs seem to have a preference for the visual aesthetics associated with photojournalism, be it due to their legacy dependence on the media, or an innate preference for photorealism when it comes to their visuals, the foundation for teaching students how to produce this type of imagery, should be based on existing photojournalism instruction. With the approach I advocate for, most of the visuals that would tell an NGO story, would ideally be obtained through non-interference,

observational-based, photo documentation. Therefore, knowledge of how visual journalists see and anticipate narrative images and/or sequences of images using an assortment of lenses that simulate varying perspectives and which isolate or emphasize certain visual elements, is an essential skillset. Since some aspects of NGO reportage require some pre-meditation and setup, then knowledge of how to use basic portable flash equipment, employing it in field, posing other human subjects, and some basic technical instruction for operating cameras and artificial light together, should augment any photojournalism curriculum. The combination of photojournalism and public relations, or more setup/studio photography practices, would give students the necessary technical knowledge of how to craft engrossing stories through mostly observation and documentation, with the added knowledge of when to intervene in order to setup appropriate visuals that cannot be achieved through purely photojournalistic practices.

Since this digital storytelling approach incorporates multi-media, including video and written stories, then it is also necessary for any would be practitioner to acquire a working skillset of video/documentary production and narrative story writing. NGO video stories are typically brief, relatively formulaic, and resemble mini-documentaries. Since professional video and still image capabilities have merged into single, portable devices, a media specialist can get more than enough quality to produce all necessary content on one device that can be with them at all times. This means that it is not necessary for a practitioner to know how to produce a full-fledged feature film, but rather, how to simply translate their photojournalism training into simple but effective video shorts, something that is already a part of many college and university photojournalism curriculum due to convergence in the journalism industry. As for the written component of this strategy, some basic coursework in journalism that would

adequately prepare a student to successfully interview and acquire all the necessary factual elements from a source would be a necessity, possibly combined with some creative feature writing instruction in order to be able to write, contemporary, engaging stories that draw a reader into the lives of a story's subjects. Personally, I found the most applicable value for what I did for IAGRI in Tanzania, came from a graduate level magazine feature writing course I took. It provided me with an understanding of story structure and some go to approaches for writing the personal stories that accompanied my photo essays.

Finally, and perhaps the most important part of an NGO reportage specific curriculum, is intercultural communications and media studies. As I discussed in the previous section, when I employed aspects of this approach in the field in Tanzania, there were a number of cultural barriers that inhibited me from simply traveling around and shooting and recording whatever I desired. I was adequately prepared to encounter such obstacles, and had the patience and training to deftly navigate those challenges only because of my extensive past experience of working in foreign cultures and due to intercultural communication coursework, I completed in this graduate program. Many parts of the developing world are vastly different from the West culturally, and have many different customs and media conventions, and any practitioner has to be prepared to handle and negotiate cultural difference in a manner that remains respectful to the foreign culture in question. While not a substitute for the real world, college level intercultural communications training is an adequate precursor.

Media studies compliment intercultural communications, as it allows the media practitioner to gain an understanding of the potential power of media representation. As this research has demonstrated, representation is a conscious decision and a constructed

product, and the way that an entire industry has traditionally represented their work, has led to very negative consequences that have shaped global perceptions of the developing world and its inhabitants, and we are only now trying to counter these damaging, deeply rooted, and often inaccurate perceptions. Only with a proper foundation of media studies coursework, and the ability to understand how conscious inclusion and exclusion decisions work, how framing works, can an NGO communicator intentionally produce multimedia stories that simultaneously empower their subjects while fostering a sense of solidarity between an organization and the public.

Conclusion

The positivism and multimedia storytelling this research and communications approach promotes is not a magic bullet that can prevent compassion fatigue from taking effect. NGOs and the media they produce are only one voice amongst an increasing cacophony of visual and textual information and misinformation about the developing world and the challenges it faces. For decades though, the approach that NGOs took in informing the public of international crises and what the public could do to help alleviate them, only added to the negative perceptions of the international poor and established a hegemony of thought that made possible for the maintenance of the status quo of global geo-political and economic inequality that perpetuated those circumstances, and were some of the root causes of global inequality. The industry's awakening to the potentially destructive effects of its communications legacy in the mid-1990's, led to some soul searching, some experimental attempts at deliberate positivism, and some non-binding international codes of conduct and strategic communications recommendations, but no approach was ever fully embraced, and today's landscape of NGO media that mixes traditionally negative stereotypes with some alternative and empowering tactics, is proof

that there exists a lot of room for growth and improvement in the sector's communications efforts.

Deliberate positivism has its potential drawbacks, such as a lack of perceived authenticity amongst the public, as well as unintended consequence of convincing audiences that international problems have been solved and that no further aid is necessary. Despite the possibility of such outcomes, the little research on NGO communications that is out there suggests that there is real potential for alternative communication methods to attract public support for causes at a greater rate than emotional pity appeals do, and the media and technological landscape is such that multimedia digital storytelling is currently an affordable and accessible vehicle for NGOs of any size to effectively tell their story and attract increased levels of public support.

The ubiquity of seemingly bad news streaming out of the developing world would have us believe that the world is ending tomorrow and that the tide of international crisis and misfortune is irreversible. I understand that is not the case, as I have personally witnessed NGOs contribute to both individual and communal good abroad, and I have been fortunate enough to have played a role in crafting some of those success stories myself. Further research, experimentation, and development of positive, empowering, intrinsic value-based, digital multimedia storytelling approaches should be pursued, but the need for global humanitarian aid is plentiful, and some NGOs seem to be communicating that need with the gradual adoption of positive digital storytelling. By adopting a visual communication strategy such as the one I am advocating for, NGOs may begin to reverse the notions of futility associated with foreign aid, and in time, just might be able to establish a new hegemony of thought, one that represents the developing

world not as it is currently believed to be, but one that imagines it as it could be:
prosperous, nutritionally and economically self-sufficient, healthy, and equal.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tyler Jones is a graduate of the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Mass Communications. In the fall of 2017, he received a MAMC. Mr. Jones tailored his graduate curriculum to his area of interest in international and intercultural communications, particularly that of international aid and humanitarian work.

Mr. Jones's professional interest in international work began in 2001 when he completed his AA with a foreign study in immersive Spanish language at the University of Salamanca in Spain. From there, he transferred to the University of Virginia, where he continued to pursue foreign studies, and in 2004 he received his BA in international relations.

A year-long stint in China following his undergraduate studies rerouted Mr. Jones's professional ambitions from state department work to that of visual storytelling and communications. In 2006, Mr. Jones began working as a photographer for the University of Florida, responsible for creating and archiving the still imagery that represents the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) research, teaching, and extension efforts throughout Florida. In his tenure as IFAS photographer, Mr. Jones's work has been published by the New York Times, the Washington Post, and National Geographic. In 2011, Mr. Jones enrolled part-time in the graduate program at the University of Florida, continuing to fulfill his full-time duties as UF/IFAS photographer. A 2014 internship as a visual storyteller and media producer for the Innovative Agricultural Research Institute (IAGRI) in Tanzania, Africa, further solidified a professional interest in NGO and foreign aid communications, a field Mr. Jones intends to explore further.