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(Re)constructing Social Hierarchies: A Critical discourse analysis of an international charity's visual appeals

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ABSTRACT

A British coffee chain's fundraising practices constitute a background for this study to examine ideological discourses behind British charitable giving. The charity executes projects in coffee growing communities by providing education for children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The study takes a critical stance from a discursive paradigmatic perspective to analyse visual contents used by the charity. The applied visual critical discourse analysis was inspired by Barthes' semiotic theory. Findings suggest that the adverts' interpretative repertoires can serve ideologies that sustain the donors' social-cultural dominance over the recipients by justifying group-based social hierarchies. The chains of signifiers do not question the spectators' moral position but rationalise status quo and maintain undisturbed consumption. Findings suggest the possibility that the discourses of prosocial behaviour incited under consuming conditions do not challenge but may even justify global inequality. This finding presents challenges facing charitable organisations balancing their work within wider commercial and cultural contexts.

Keywords: visual critical discourse analysis, charitable behaviour, Roland Barthes, ideology, distant other

Introduction

In recent years, charities intending to tackle global inequality have been criticised of pulling the emotional levers of guilt and shame through a one-sided portrayal of the suffering (e.g., Hirsch, 2017). This discursive technique is symbolised by the recurring appearance of the 'starving child' and has been labelled as poverty porn based on Lissner's argument (1981, p. 24) : "The starving child image is seen as unethical, firstly because it comes dangerously close to being pornographic… [and also] because it helps to keep the myth alive that material wealth is the very foundation of a decent quality of life". Lissner challenges unreflexive charity, arguing that "good

intentions simply aren't enough if they are pursued […] with little or no understanding of what such images do to the mentality, the attitudes, the political emotions and behaviour of their audience."

However, not all charities follow this overtly negative presentation. This study investigates visual adverts of a charity supported by one of the most prominent and socially active coffee chains in the UK. The coffee chain associated with the charity is one of the largest in the UK, with a further large international presence. This related charitable foundation develops and executes projects in developing countries, in order to improve the life chances of the young population in coffee growing communities by providing the opportunity of a safe, quality education. As of today, nearly a hundred schools have been constructed and opened in 10 countries through the work of this charity, and another 16 school projects are in different stages of execution. As will be seen, the charity applies a rather positive visual narrative approach, by which it clearly challenges those fundraisers who aim to shock people into giving.

Whilst organizational logics and social conditions have motivated several humanitarian campaigns to shift from negative to positive imagery over recent decades, Chouliaraki (2013) warns that positive imagery may be just another way through which immediate concerns to help the sufferer are triggered, while long-term concerns with social injustice are being displaced. As Chouliaraki (2018, p. 254) argues, 'the narrative tropes of 'bare life' (dehumanizing suffering bodies through emaciated imagery) or 'assimilated' humanity (overhumanizing such bodies through smiling children)' both mediate the universality of common humanity, by which both negative and positive appeals are at risk of misrepresenting the sufferer in imageries of radical otherness or tamed agency (c.f. Cohen, 2001). It follows that such positive imagery mediates similar ideological narratives to the previously established practices of the suffering imagery.

Action and Representation

While global participation in donating money is 31% among the world's population, there are significant differences between countries in charitable donations. In 2014, the UK was ranked fourth in donating money, and seventh in the overall CAF World Giving Index that includes charitable giving, volunteering and helping behaviour (Charities Aid Foundation, 2015). These cultural characteristics are reflected in large UK corporations too: the level of donations made by large UK businesses has increased substantially in recent years (Campbell, Moore, & Metzger, 2002).

There is an ongoing debate about the ethical underpinnings of corporate social responsibility (CSR). A significant proportion of critical literature argues that for-profit organisations are (in principle) amoral entities (Henriques, 2005). CSR is therefore used as a strategic tool for enhancing corporate legitimacy and managing public perception (Himmelstein, 1997; Saiia, Carroll, & Buchholtz, 2003; Snider, Hill, R. & Martin, 2003; Vallentin, 2009), or such organisations strategically incorporate a humanitarian profile to improve corporate branding and formulate organisational identity (e.g. Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010). As a profit-maximising tool, CSR appears effective: Brammer, Millington and Pavelin (2006) stated that almost a third of British customers have purchased a product due to a corporation's philanthropic activities, although recent studies found that philanthropic aspects of CSR do not have the same influence on consumers' perception of brand equity as economic aspects of CSR (Kang & Namkung, 2018). Others understand CSR within the framework of social contract theory, stressing that with the power and influence being shifted from governments to private corporations so too are their responsibilities. In this sense corporations are not only obliged to adhere to justice, fairness and social concerns (Raimi, 2018) but they also have ethical obligations towards the public to create social programmes and trigger

positive social change (Garriga & Mele, 2004). In such framing, CSR is seen as a necessary redemption of the powerful to 'give back' to society in which context, their pursuit can be considered both utilitarian and ethical.

Allen, MacDonald and Radice (2018) argue that the perceptions of international aid are largely dependent upon the theatrical spectacle presented in the discursive practices of humanitarian campaigns. As Chouliaraki (2013) suggests, the produced imaginations of solidarity (through appeals, celebrities and news) do not only "sustain collective self-descriptions of the West as an altruistic community, […] but in fact, *constitute* these publics as moral subject at the moment they claim to address them" (p. 45). In this sense, the *representation* of distant suffering plays a key role in the production of humanitarian sensibility and the cultivation of solidarity. Consequently, the question of solidarity should not be separated from the narrative structure in which one's moral position was made available for one in the first place.

Moreover, when such constitution of the philanthropic subject is produced under consuming conditions, it invites the concept of the ethical consumer (Arnauld, 2007; Dickinson & Hollander, 1991; Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006), the neoliberal subject who triggers progressive social change through shopping, which – again - further modulates the mode of spectatorship and the meaning-making processes such campaign may trigger. Under the dynamics implied by the concept of consumer-citizen hybrid, the citizen votes with money through consuming goods that feed into good causes, by which he/she becomes a powerful agent who can shape corporate actions through his purchasing choices (Aschoff, 2015; Johnson, 2008). Johnson argues that the concept purports to satisfy "competing ideologies of consumerism (an idea rooted in individual self-interest) and citizenship (an ideal rooted in collective responsibility to a social and ecological commons)" (2008, p.232), but in reality, it largely serves the

interests of former and pays only superficial attention to collectivistic ideals. These inherent ideological tensions of the ethical consumer concept may further change the mode of connection between donors and the imagery of recipients.

Visual Discourse of Aid Adverts

Drawing on the tradition of postcolonial critique of the representation of difference (Said [1978] 2003; Pickering 2001), the common accounts of cultural imagery have been often critiqued as of racializing, infantilising, and/or stereotyping far-away others (e.g.; Hall, 1997, Wilson 2011, Dogra 2012). Chouliaraki (2013) argues that such representational practices – contrary to their ethical promise - do not create a bridge between spectators and vulnerable others but rather distancing them through their incapability (or unwillingness) to capture the difference those embody. Arendt (1963/1990) has famously critiqued the practice of relying on the imagery of vulnerability that invites tender-heartedness and an immediate concern for comforting the pain but at the same time fails to address suffering in the political dimensions of injustice.

This impotence to grasp and mediate the complexity of otherness is even more salient in the case of the visual medium through which a considerable proportion of such campaigns are distributed: photography. As Linfield (2010) writes:

> [We] don't look at photographs to understand the inner contradictions of global capitalism, […] but to discover what our intuitive reactions to such otherness—and to such others—might be. There is no doubt that we approach photographs, first and foremost, through emotions.

This is precisely what Barthes (1981) calls the stupidity of photograph, which refers to its inherent anti-exploratory and anti-analytic nature that – accepting that such imagery bears a performative force on public morality (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013) – raises

questions about the nature of solidarity it can trigger.

Barthes and the photographic paradox

Recently, visual applications of CDA - inspired mainly by Barthes' semiotic theory (1973, 1977b) and the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) - have been adapted in discursive studies (e.g., Hansen & Machin, 2008). The semiotics of the photography is regarded as the observation of symbolism used within *otherwise unedited photographs*, such as the ones used by this charity. Drawing from Barthes' semiotic theory (1973), images can denote, meaning that they depict particular people, places, things and events in order to document. Images also connote: expose things, people and events to get general or abstract concepts and ideas across.

Barthes' concept of the photograph's denotative/connotative complexity is described by the concept "the photographic paradox" (1977b, p. 19). According to Barthes, technically, the photo represents the 'literal reality'; the image does not need a language to set up a means of interpretation. However, such denotative status works as an objectivity that "has every chance of being mythical" (p. 19). The photographic paradox refers to the co-existence of the analogue message, and a connoted one, "which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it" (p 17). The connotation is "constituted either by a universal symbolic order or by a period rhetoric, in short by a stock of stereotypes" (p 18). As we apply our given language (codes) to interpret the image (as it cannot be interpreted in its pure denotative form, because denotation is 'a message without a code'), we describe the photos through our language. Because every language takes up a position with regard to things, the image finally coincides with the connotative planes of our language through the act of perceptive connotation.

Therefore, the reader connotates meaning cognitively, by picking out signifiers that can be interpreted within his or her own culture, and perceptively, as the reader interprets the image to support an existing ideological and/or ethical stance (Barthes, 1977a; 1977b). The *ethea* or ideologies that are generated by such processes challenge the naïve assumption that aid adverts are just genres of stories representing the moment of reality *as it happened*.

According to Barthes (1977b), photographic connotations are assigned to modify reality, however, these modifications are rarely graspable immediately. Barthes distinguishes between three major connotation procedures: objects, trick effects and poses. *Objects* are known as "…accepted inducers of associations of ideas" (bookcase = intellectual; Barthes, 1977b, p. 22) that can be subjected to connotative processes. *Trick effects* are described as the faked effects of the images (any visual technique that alters reality including adjustments, colour effects etc[1].). Trick effects utilise the credibility of the images by mediating an objective denotative message that is - in reality - heavily connoted. *Poses* utilise stereotyped attitudes and they are able to signify broader ideas and identities. These procedures are fundamental and unavoidable qualities of an unedited photograph. They utilise the photos presumed realism (coming from them being representations of a natural condition of the world), and turn them into myths to present an ethos or ideology.

Based on Barthes categories, Machin and Mayr (2012) offer detailed strategies to

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[1] It is important to note that Barthes broad definition of 'trick' or 'faked' effects does not only incorporate contemporary notions of explicit photograph manipulation such familiar within 'Photoshop' and other tools for visual manipulation. Traditional photographic technique – such as shutter-speed and framing, may also come under Barthes' definition.

conduct visual CDA. For example, *salience* (focus, tone, potential cultural symbols, colour) provides central symbolic value; *individualisation and collectivisation* refer to the technique by which people are depicted in groups in order to emphasise group salience; *settings* connote values, identities and actions by communicating general ideas. Furthermore, drawing from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) suggestions, what makes an image 'real' is not simply the truth of verisimilitude but the 'sensory truth' of the image (like impressionist paintings or children's toys). In this sense, modality and certainty can be expressed through visual modality markers (e.g., degrees of colour modulation and saturation). Photos also can be analysed based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) instructions on how poses and gaze can fulfil the concept of 'speech act' in order to either 'offer' or 'demand'. Demand images acknowledge the viewer, address social interaction and require a response.

Social Psychological Theories of Donating

The visual discourse of aid adverts relates to a wider literatures of the social psychology of helping. Although a few social studies find that societies do help other nations (e.g., international aid) out of genuine empathetic concerns for others (e.g., Batson, 1995), others focus on identity and intergroup relations (e.g., Van Leeuwen, 2007; Stevenson & Manning, 2010). The latter certainly applies to charitable giving, where the primary reason for helping is understood through power/status relationships between giver and recipient (e.g., Kellezi, Bowe, Wakefield, McNamara & Bosworth, 2019).

While there are studies that attempt to explain inter-group helping through ingroup favouritism (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005; Stürmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005), they differ in identifying reasons behind that ingroup bias. For example, restoring national identity (Stevenson & Manning, 2010) and maintaining social

dominance (Nadler, 2002) have been suggested to motivate inter-group helping.

Nadler (2002) offers a model that aims to categorise the conditions in which inter-group helping is motivated. Drawing from the assumption that helping an outgroup always serves to boost the perceived value of the in-group, Nadler distinguishes between autonomy-oriented and dependency-oriented help. Autonomy-oriented help fosters the positive social identity of the receiving group by "…providing the recipients with the tools to solve their problems on their own" (2002, p. 491). On the other hand, dependency-oriented help implies that the higher status group maintains social order by "…providing the recipients with the full solution to the problem" (Nadler, 2002, p. 491). Therefore, it threatens the social identity of the aid-recipient. This perspective presumes that intergroup relations necessarily imply power and status distinctions between the helper and the recipient. Based on this presumption, it may be argued that aid-givers (typically members of the higher status group) prefer dependency oriented helping, by which they maintain socio-economic advantage and yet develop positive self-identity. Moreover, in line with system justification theory, such giving effectively rationalises the status quo of privileged groups (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).

Such classical social psychological intergroup dynamics may also be applied to the visual appeals of the discussed CSR initiative, which operates with multiple layers of mediation not only by using photorealism as a medium but by constituting the ethical consumer who then identifies with the benevolence of corporate philanthropy through pure consumption. This latter means that the very action of charitable giving itself is transformed to a form of commodity that – as Baudrillard (1970/1998; 1973/1981) argues – is bought and consumed as much for its sign-value as its use-value, hence, the imaginary of inter-group relations become embedded in the proliferation of spectacles.

That being said, it is not the intent of this study to condemn or even criticise the

achievements of the charity in any way, rather to explore the potential of such visual language to challenge or legitimise existing social hierarchies through the generation of myths via theatrical representations. Therefore, this study takes a Foucauldian perspective, in which empowerment is seen as a social construction that is imbibed with impersonal power and exercised through normalisation, domination and the mode of subjection (Foucault, 1984). If we accept this premise, then the crucial question is whether the power that is exercised through empowerment *de*constructs or *re*constructs subject social stereotypes (cf. Chouliaraki, 2013, 2018), whether it is able to construct the ethical subject who believes that his/her actions trigger progressive social change (Arnauld, 2007), and whether it tackles or sustains existing social hierarchy (cf. Nadler, 2002) through the mode of subjection. Thus, by applying critical discourse analysis, our purpose is to analyse the power-discourse relations construed, the ideologies served, the ethical dispositions mobilised, and the intergroup relations constructed by the chosen charitable foundation associated with a larger corporate enterprise.

Methodology

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is used to evaluate visual and textual semiotic choices that have been applied as primary tools of advertisements for a fundraising organisation. CDA studies the implicit and indirect meanings in texts by focusing on practices and conventions behind language to reveal facets such as social inequality that are resisted, enacted and reproduced by language (Van Dijk, 2001).

Selection of Visual Materials for Analysis

The chosen images were accessed in November 2016. The materials were available on the official website of the charity, or on the charity leaflets in coffee stores. The images in the report were chosen out of 378 photos found under 'Projects' menu bar on the

website and the 6 photos from the leaflet, and are intended to exemplify the themes and stylistic elements through which the executed projects were documented.

Whilst the commercial organisation and the charity are separate, it is acknowledged that the corporate scale associated with the brand is part of the interpretation of any discourse. Viewers of the images are liable to be aware of the commercial setting in which the images have (partly) been produced, in particular the major national and international presence of the coffee chain as opposed to smaller-scale 'independents'.

There were common themes across the images in the charity literature. The majority of the photos (362 out of 378) show children and young adults from coffee growing communities in order to demonstrate the achievements of the charity: the characters are displayed in positive scenes demonstrating the achievements of the organisation and mediating conformity and discipline, as well as happiness, hope and belief. Short textual descriptions or quotes from the character(s) are linked to many of the photos on both the website and in the leaflet guiding the viewer's imagination and offering narratives; where such visual and textual languages complement each other, their combined meanings offer even more opportunity for CDA.

Choosing visual language as the subject of analysis refers to the assumption that contemporary communication channels are increasingly multi-semiotic: internet and television are manifest examples of the tendency that textual language is often combined or replaced by other forms of semiotic forms including images, sound-effects and music (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). Moreover, fundraising messages need to be salient and easily comprehensible, hence, primarily build upon appealing visual images and clear, brief textual messages rather than detailed descriptions of goals and achievements. Such phenomenon is in line with Elaborated Intrusion theory, claiming that visual images are internalised by the viewer, whereby they effectively function as a

motivational link for pro-social behaviour (Kavanagh, Andrade, & May, 2005).

While these photographs have an overt, explicit denotative message (to show achievements), they also rely on multiple connotators that carry implicit meanings that should be understood (even if unconsciously) by the viewers. Moreover, semiotic messages often mask connotation by pseudo-denotative visualisations. Hence, while there are meanings that are not explicitly denoted, all objects carry 'meaning potentials' that can be activated in the right context (exposed to the right subject in the right place).

Hence, by considering that discourse is embedded within sociocultural practice at multiple levels (from the immediate situation to institutional and societal levels), images - following Fairclough's (2013) suggestions - will be analysed on three levels: (1) linguistic *description* of the visual texts (subject positions; denotative access), (2) *interpretation* of the link between the text and productive discursive processes (interpretative repertoires; connotative access), and (3) *explanation* of the link between discursive and sociocultural practice (ideological dilemmas; myths).

Analysis and Discussion

The organisation website images are predominantly positively toned throughout, regardless of the actual visual theme. The themes are repetitive, generic and interchangeable: newly built facilities, children captured within educational settings, recurrent emergence of tools symbolizing superficial, de-historicized and de-contextualised local/regional traditions (e.g., pictures including rituals, traditional clothing, jewellery), and captions of children having fun or engaging with the camera (the viewer). They narrate that the same integrative work is conducted everywhere from Asia to Africa, and that social differences are of secondary importance. Hence, the

discussed photos are not chosen arbitrarily: they cover the generic philosophy of the charity's visual narrative.

Subject positions and interpretative repertoires

Documentary Photography as Trick Effect

While the primary motivation of the website is to advertise, it uses the toolkit of documentary photography: the photos appear to chronicle events and report real life.

Barthes (1977a) argues that photographs have a great realism-potential as they are capable of capturing an ineffable richness of detail (being somewhat reproductions of reality). Detailed photographic scenes always contain spontaneous, or accidental things that 'just happen to be there' without directly contributing to the message, but help to naturalise the image through heightened realism. It means that the connoted cultural message of the photograph can be hidden through the denotative presence of randomly displayed visual details. However, as Barthes stresses, "we never encounter (at least in advertising) a literal image in its pure state", as any achieved naivety "would immediately join the sign of naivety and be completed by a third — symbolic — message" (1977a, p. 42). This paradox serves to bring about a transparent denotative access through naivety and spontaneity. Still, even a totally naïve photograph completes a symbolic message through its own intentional naivety, or - with Barthes' terminology - the 'myth' of naivety. Such naturalisation serves as a confirmatory modality that narrates the meaning as something substantial rather than relational through the images that pretend to be 'captured', rather than 'designed'. Within this paradox, the very fact that the images are not manipulated per se incites an illusory denotative access to the meaning of reality that is - in fact - inaccessible.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1. shows young girls during their lunch break. While the main figures on the front impart the photograph a reasonable symmetry, the orderliness is deconstructed through a number of erratic elements (the randomly situated dishes and cups, the dropped footwear). The partially covered figures on the background connect the viewer's imagination to the world that has not been captured by the photographer and imply continuity: the unseen is just as idyllic as the seen.

The optimistic settings (mediated via smiles, poses, vivid liveliness, and the constant feeling of 'togetherness') maintain verisimilitude through the mentioned documentary narration. Even if one argues that the emotional charge hurts the intended objectivity of the images, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that emotive resonance is another criterion for the truth of images besides the truth of verisimilitude. The concept of *sensory modality* assumes that when images lose the sense of naturalistic or empirical truth, they sustain their authenticity through 'sensory truth' via deep perspective, the richness of detail or the vividness of the image. Hence, the richness in colours and the thrilling liveliness (that apply to each photo in the sample) do not weaken the realism-potential, while, at the same time, they help to trigger a positive emotive response from the viewer.

Gaze

Halliday, Matthiessen and Matthiessen (2014) argue that language can be thought of as fulfilling *speech acts*: we can either *offer* or *demand* information, goods or services through prescribed 'mood systems' (e.g., commands, tone of voice, posture). Following Halliday's theory (1978), Kress and Leeuwen (1996) argue that images can

be analysed similarly as *image acts* that can realise offers or demands along with the form of address. One main technique through which images can demand is when the model is gazing at the camera, whereby it creates a form of address and requires action.

[Figure 2 about here]

Many images in the dataset, including Figure 2, fulfil the criteria of 'demand through gaze'. The model is acknowledging the viewer's presence and demanding action. The girl is looking up, which has strong metaphorical associations in Western culture: it clearly connotes power relations and dependency. The viewer's existence is grasped through his/her higher status, which invites certain associations of inter-group relations.

Models as Symbols

On both the website and the charity leaflets (displayed in the commercial stores) the models are not presented as individuals but as (stereo)types representing identities. In certain cases, these figures appear to be avatars of liberal and egalitarian dogmas: on the website, 'Heart stories' present journeys of figures who are beneficiaries of 'abolished forced marriage', improved child nutrition, and 'football & gender equality'. The following image is taken from the leaflet:

[Figure 3 about here]

Deliberate features (posture, objects, anonymity) help to evoke genericity, and textual comments articulate generic egalitarian messages explicitly. Each leaflet page presents a parable through the chain of three different discourse practices: (1) the visual display of

archetypical recipients, (2) their quasi-personalised generic textual salutations that are visually placed as 'speech balloons' to strengthen the models' subjective modality, and (3) informative bullet points aiming to culturally contextualise and generalize the 'personal' fables in a more descriptive tone (see Figure 3).

The models carry ethnic and economic signifiers (e.g., 'African', 'black', 'poor'), hence, the primary message would be that of tackling global inequality. However, the source of the problems is explicitly moved from economic to cultural dimensions and attached to the local community's suggested politico-ideological immaturity: the charity 'is changing [bad] traditions', replacing them with 'good ones'. The signifiers can be easily identified and associated with ultimate liberal values, such as tackling ableism, ageism and misogyny (see the models on Figure 3), whereby the source of injustice is relocated from *global* (in which the privileged West is part of the discourse, hence part of the problem) to *local* levels (inequality grow from *within* the communities). The 'traditions' are never contextualised or explained: they are narrated as an elusive power through passive verbs ('young girls are being forced' or 'girls are not allowed to talk to men'), which invites Chouliaraki's concept of ideological realism: the ideological contrast between "Western humanity [...] and an alien cultural disposition beyond (Western) rationality and civility" (2006, p. 139). The agency disappears in the use of passive voice or it becomes a locative ('in some communities') by which direct cultural confrontation is avoided. Such non-disclosure carries out the programme of political correctness, while still implying cultural hierarchy. It also interacts with Nadler's (2002) distinction between autonomy-oriented and dependency-oriented help. It becomes unclear in which of these two categories the work of the charity is operating, are recipients of charitable aid developing autonomy or facing continued dependence on external support? Such ambiguity does not challenge the hierarchical framework of

group relations.

Collectivisation

Most of the images on the website capture people in groups. This works to homogenise individuals and helps create the impression that 'they are all the same'. Even single models are depicted as generic types representing the collective (affording social categorisation cf. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, their individualised visual presence only there to ease and counterpoint the overt homogeneity that the classroom scene mediates on Figure 4.

 [Figure 4 about here]

Obedience and conformity are tangible in this image. The vertical camera angle allows the viewer to *look down* on the pupils. It does not only clarify the hierarchy of power but provides the viewer with the chance to take the teacher's position (who passes on the knowledge), implying cultural superiority and higher social status.

Accepting Barthes' (1973) suggestions that poses are able to signify values, identities and perceived behaviours of the figures, then poses depicted here do not imply individual freedom and empowerment. Rather, they connote total success of disciplinary power: all pupils wear white (symbolising purity, light, goodness, knowledge and sterility) and raise their hands (signifying positive attitude, engagement and compliance): there is no sign of defiance or dysfunction.

[Figure 5 about here]

Another type of collectivisation is formed through a more spontaneous, playful setting seen in Figure 5. The absence of regulatory symbols and poses counterbalance the rigour depicted on Figure 4. Models are depicted here through their 'childness'. Such objectification helps to emphasise qualities that are universally attributed to children: playfulness and purity. The background is completely removed, whereby societal context is taken away, and the smiles on the children's faces mediate presumed universal human qualities.

Settings

Settings also can be looked in ways they inform us of underlying general ideas and values (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Images that are taken outside of educational facilities often depicted within the nature versus civilisation dichotomy.

[Figures 6, 7, 8 about here]

What these settings sell to the viewers are not simply documentations of achievements (Figure 6), or banal representations of the beauty of Nature (Figure 8). Rather, Figure 6 offers the connotative association of the success of civilisation over nature through the act of enclosure. Inside the facility, the objects are in order and the subjects are regulated, which implies total control over nature both extrinsically (over the environment) and intrinsically (through the control over the individuals). It may connote the triumph over the pre-industrial human habitat associated with the myth of primitive society that can be stereotypically seen through the lack of infrastructural and technological sophistication (Kuper, 2005).

On Figure 7, the central figure on the left occupies the unstructured *space* and visualises

the human *place* that will emerge. Such message is told through the postural language of the model, whose hands behind the back connote confidence and intellectual effort, and whose salience is also emphasised by his enhanced size (due to perspective), and the gaze of the other models, who seem to look at him waiting for direction.

On the other hand, conventional landscape photography that captures the environment as untouched by human action connotes post-industrial awareness and the importance of environmental sustainability (Figure 8). Such image aims to counterbalance the negative connotations one might attribute the other images: namely the negative environmental impacts of civilizational growth.

The viewer's subject position

Through the 'Heart stories' of the website and the leaflets fables, the viewer is not only invited to participate but has been already positioned as the benefactor of the parables, not only through gaze, but through explicit subjective modality markers (e.g., '*Thank you* for helping/giving/teaching'; 'it means that *I am* able to get the job/achieve more/go to school; Figure 3). Hence, not only the models are generic, but so is the viewer. The ads do not only ask the individual for donation but invite the all-time viewer to internalise social identities and form an in-group by identifying themselves with the roles invited by discursive techniques (gaze, vertical angle, facial expressions and speech acts): the European, the educated, the egalitarian, the altruist, etc. It does not mean that all identities are adopted by everyone: rather than the polysemous images (cf. Barthes, 1977a) offer a chain of signifieds from which one can pick some and ignore others.

As the children are constantly depicted as vulnerable, dependent and having an inferior social status, they do not encourage the viewer to identify with the models, even though

positive emotional connection is created. Thus, the egalitarian denotative message is constantly overridden by the connotative associations that sustain power relations.

The absence of negatively charged depictions shows that the charity does not use the tool of guilt appeals (cf. Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997) to incite prosocial behaviour. This may relate to corporate logic, where customer satisfaction and self-integration are of primary importance, negatively charged pictures might be able to cause cognitive dissonance in the viewers by conflicting their behaviour (consuming) with their confidence (that this is 'right'). Instead, the optimistic tone works to confirm the idea that sustained consumption is morally right.

Ideological dilemmas

Legitimizing Myths: Education and Liberalism.
The chains of signifiers continuously reconfirm social dominance and guarantee that dependency-oriented intergroup relations remain salient throughout. Therefore, the central message of the campaign (empowering the socially excluded by providing education – Nadler's (2002) autonomy-orientated help) is continuously challenged through subject positions and interpretative repertoires that signify older notions of dependency (c.f. Kuper, 2005; Žižek, 2016).

While the organisation narrates the success of newly built educational settings all around the world, it does not specify what is meant by 'education', and how it is accomplished. The textual elements (supported by straightforward visual educational symbols) often use the word 'quality education' and 'knowledge' without explaining the worldviews and the cultural belief systems (the ontological and epistemological presuppositions) behind it. The absence of explanation functions as a purification of the terms; it gives them an eternal justification through uttering them as a statement of fact

that does not require further explanation. In this discourse, education is presented as something natural, something that goes without saying. Such discursive technique, as Barthes says, "transforms history into nature" (1973, p. 129). It does not lie, rather it distorts reality by abolishing the complexity and the contradictions involved, and allowing viewers to superimpose their existing understandings of appropriate intergroup relations.

The same action is taken, when the appeals mediate politically accepted liberal dogmas explicitly (tackling ableism, gender inequality, social exclusion and ageism). As these ideas are presented (and presumably accepted by the spectators) as unquestionable, self-evident values, they appear to carry universal meaning. Such naturalisation creates the illusion that liberal dogmas are not ideological, and those most obvious connotations that are associated with them are just as natural.

In line with assumptions of SDT (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), these mythic representations work economically: they simplify social complexity and allow donors to accept the overt portrayal of dominance that is seen through the 'ideology glasses' (cf. Žižek, 2011) of liberalism and empowerment.

De-historicised Reality

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

The distant others' cultural dimensions are never related to real social-economic facts and historical order, but only to commonplaces, which - together with idyllic depictions (smiles, togetherness, harmonic coexistence with nature and each other) - mediate ease and innocence. These innocent depictions transform history into folklore: rites, dancing, traditional clothing (Figure 9) – all are there as aesthetic peculiarities and

not as artefacts of culture and history. Such discourse invites the moral imagination of the West: the concept of 'Enlightenment universalism' that is described by Tomlinson as a utopia "largely untroubled by concerns over cultural difference, […] populated by orderly, rational, cooperative moral agents who had transcended all cultural particularity and shared the same broad liberal-humanist, secular values" (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 355).

Hence, exoticism with its romantic banality ignores the complexity historic perspective would imply. The Other (the recipient) is eventually removed in its difference, and his/her 'sameness' connotes the myth of 'we are all the same eventually' (or rather, that 'they are just as us'; c.f. Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013). It mythicises global injustice, whereby it immunizes spectators against any responsible content: it helps them to preserve self-integration and justify their own social-economic dominance by "…maintain[ing] expropriative relationships between dominants […] and subordinates" (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001, p. 41).

Consumer Identity

The visual discourse does not challenge the viewers' moral position; it does not intend to interrupt consumption. Therefore, instead of demanding immediate help, it mediates a success story through exclusive positive framing: the message that 'the change has already been happening'. It creates a more passive, withdrawn role of the donor who fails to take collective responsibility as a citizen (c.f. Johnson, 2008) and becomes a pure spectator in the process of 'giving', a process which has already transformed into something that is self-serving par excellence: consumption. It reinforces the narrative that more consumption is better for everyone eventually (you enjoy your coffee, whereby you successfully tackle inequality). At the same time, it sustains the myth that poverty grows *from within* poor neighbourhoods rather than being inherent in socio-economic structures. As Baudrillard argues, "the sacrifice of useless

millions in the struggle against what is merely the *visible phantom* of poverty is not too high a price to pay if it means that the myth of growth is preserved." (1970/1998, p. 56)

Eventually, the altruistic organisational practice supports the idealist narrative that all negative phenomena (dysfunctions, social exclusion, poverty) are deplorable, but residual and remediable side-effects of the industrial system, and that global inequality can be tackled *through* profit-oriented companies and not against them. This idealisation of markets as the primary guardians of the public good echoes the promise of the neoliberal mode of social reproduction that, as Johnson describes (2008, p. 263), "occludes the importance of non-market measures and democratically accountable states to provide for needs of citizens".

As spectators are addressed in the midst of their consuming practice, they are not challenged but reinforced through everyday and oversimplifying discourses. Such neoliberal commodification of charitable giving replaces the ethos of solidarity (giving without any return) with self-centred consumerism in which no attempt is being made to grasp the difference of the distant other. This resignation from the need to approach human vulnerability as a question of injustice invites Rorty's (1989) ironic spectator: the subject who does not believe that there is a hope to change the circumstances of suffering. These discursive motives are in line with theses of system justification theory (Jost et al., 2004), as they rationalise status quo on (1) intra-subjective (ego-justification through inciting consumption), and (2) macro levels (system-justification through the myth of education and liberalism and the disavowal of global injustice).

Concluding Remarks

The emerging discursive techniques imply a rather paradoxical ideological narrative, in which egalitarianism and cultural domination, emotionally loaded

emancipation and disciplinary power, colonial instincts and post-colonial empowerment are presented simultaneously through a de-historicized post-modern saturated framework. The visual discourse, while implementing politically correct ideas of multiculturalism, empowerment and equality, advocates that such qualities become available through neoliberal social reproduction and the assimilation of the distant other. Therefore, these findings exceed Nadler's (2002) assumptions on dependency-oriented help, as they demonstrate that even explicit autonomy-oriented messages and tools can serve to sustain global inequality through enhancing the spectacle of in-group superiority, and the provision of such help to a passive recipient.

The seemingly contradictory motives and depictions successfully resonate with people who are found in the midst of their consuming self-actualisation. Within the post-modern consumerist condition (Baudrillard, 1970/1998), where people self-actualize through goods and commodities, such de-historicised pseudo-cultural simulacrum works effectively: socio-cultural privilege and politically correct superficial liberalism - all are offered as commodities.

Reflexive Account

The applied normative standpoint is in line with premises of critical discursive paradigm (Fairclough, 2013). CDA rejects the possibility of 'objective science', and considers scholarly discourse as influenced by, and part of the social discourse (Van Dijk, 2001). However, the political and ethical stance taken was not a simple consequence of the chosen method. As Van Dijk argues, "The critical element of CDS [Critical Discourse Studies] characterizes scholars rather than their methods: CDS scholars are sociopolitically committed to social equality and justice." (2009, p. 63).

Being critical implies that social theory should be capable of changing society beyond explaining it. Hence, the goal was to "produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7).

This paper aimed not to commit to a particular interpretation of CSR and not to take a stance on the nature of corporate intentions in this example. Instead, we focused on the applied imagery, which constructs its own social space: a force that does not simply function as an assemblage of communicative and persuasive semiotic elements, but viewed as power which - irrespective of the client's intentions - controls the viewer and dominates social relations.

Yet, the owners of the copyright material emphasize the fact that the photographs have not been manipulated and that they have been chosen exclusively to share the true story of their achievements. The owners disagree with the implied narratives suggested in this report and declare that findings are not in accord with the firm's intentions and views.

It is hoped that this evaluation contributes to a better understanding of the challenging and potentially paradoxical nature of charitable giving by revealing dilemmas and complexities that both potential donors and charitable organisations face through the presentation of their sustainable practices. That is, the present work aims to provoke consideration of discourses in charity literature by offering an alternative to our naïve perception that charitable giving simply stems from genuine empathy towards the oppressed.

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