

A stylized graphic of a radiator in white and yellow. The radiator has several vertical columns and horizontal fins. The background is a solid yellow color. The text is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image.

The Radiator Report
**Challenging
The Single Story**

Design by O. Garber at Studio Garber

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“Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes.”

– Desmond Tutu, April 27 1999



Nicklas Poulsen Viki
President, SAIH



Martine Jahre
Vice President, SAIH

Desmond Tutu’s quote on the power of language forms the backdrop for SAIH’s engagement in challenging the stereotypical image that has been painted with a broad brush by aid organizations and the media in their portrayal of the African continent. Language is power – the power to define. Language can either divide and make stereotypical descriptions – or unify, clarify and create nuanced descriptions of the complex reality we live in.

The collection of articles that you now hold between your hands is the result of a collaboration between SAIH and the online magazine, *Africa Is a Country*. The report aims at raising awareness about how harmful, stereotypical images are reproduced in the work of aid organizations as well as by international media. SAIH is grateful for all the individuals that have contributed to this report. While they cover the topic from various angles, what they have in common is that they are critical towards the language that has been used to portray certain groups as mere recipients of whatever trickles down of goodwill from the western aid machinery.

There is nothing new about the way in which aid organizations today tend to portray Africans as poor, disadvantaged individuals without agency to change their own circumstances, giving the impression that they are merely waiting for their western heroes to arrive. As you can read in Emily Baughan’s contribution *Humanitarian Images and Appeals in History*, ever since the antislavery campaigns, African people have been portrayed as helpless and white westerners as their natural ‘saviours’. Further, Rafia Zakaria elaborates on how this white savior inferior is entrenched in the volunteer exchange programs offered at many universities in the US (and elsewhere), focusing primarily on the students’ learning outcomes of the exchange rather than the effect the exchanges has on the local community they visit.

What is new today, however, is that through improved access to technology and social media, it is possible for organizations to include the voices from the South in their communication work and thus let them be the narrators of their own story. We need these stories as they represents different versions of the ‘truth’. As pointed out by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” SAIH’s work in general and this report in particular, aims at meeting Adichie’s demand for a more diverse and nuanced storytelling. We believe that this is necessary in order to alter the power structures favoring the western narrative – a narrative that only allows for one single story.



Students at Home; Saviors Abroad

By Rafia Zakaria

Rafia Zakaria is an author, attorney and human rights activist from Pakistan, currently residing in the US. She is a columnist for DAWN Pakistan and a regular contributor to Al Jazeera America.

“The latrine took five sweaty, dirty hours to build,” writes Bradford Mak in the Brown University Alumni magazine of his arduous but fulfilling study abroad trip to Peru. He goes on to tell us, “As we completed the frame, one of the village men said to me, ‘You have done enough. Go rest. Now that you have shown us how to build a latrine, we will build more.’” The point is clear: Mak, the college student, is doing what the feckless inhabitants of the village have never been able to do; figure out how to dispose their human waste. Mak’s essay was written over a decade ago, but the dynamic of the American college student as savior, saving the world’s dim-witted poor from the curse of no schools or no bathrooms or no wells, endures as the number of U.S. college students rose to a quarter million in 2014. One student from Hamilton College that/who just returned from Nepal reports that he created “*longstanding*” and “*substantial change*” in his time there. Over at Georgia Tech, an engineering student boasts of having built a dry latrine system that will have a “huge global impact,” once he tests it, of course, in a remote village in Bolivia. Meanwhile, Montana college students have *transformed life for villagers* in Kenya by building a rain catchment system. These are just some of the examples from the nearly half a million American students who venture abroad on service learning trips every year.

This “Western savior” study abroad model (used by most American colleges) is deeply flawed in that it promotes colonial stereotypes by refusing to address the power inequalities that order the exchange between host communities and visiting students in the first place.

Not only are American students lording over cowed communities deprived of a real opportunity at reaching a place of shared understanding – communities are reduced to silent, suffering laboratories for their amateur dabbling. A more equitable “fair trade learning” model would account for these inequalities and adopt ethical standards that would prevent exploitation of host communities.

The Student Savior

In an interview I conducted with Chantel Daniels, Programme Manager at Volunteer Mzansi Afrika, she mentioned that one of the biggest misconceptions is that students believe that “they are coming to save us.”

This savior myth is allowing the students to believe they are the best hope for poor communities incapable of helping themselves, and this is substantiated throughout the experience. Anointed as saviors, students go in, spend a summer or a semester in this or that remote village and leave imagining it transformed, its problems of sanitation or potable water made bearable owing to their intervention. If the projects aren't as visibly successful, the stark disparities are still guaranteed to heroize; every student comes back achingly grateful for American largesse.

Their accrued stories of serving in primitive hospitals and sleeping in lightless villages will all feature centrally on essays to graduate school, invest their social media profiles with haloes of moral superiority.

Notably absent in this equation of fulfilment is the voice of the community that bears the cost and intrusion of the bumbling American student's foray abroad. Study abroad programs, enthusiastically pitched by University administrators and educators alike, rarely if ever measure the impact arriving students have on communities or whether their much-praised projects are actually successful in the long term. When study abroad programs are evaluated, they focus only on how or whether learning outcomes of the students are achieved, ignoring completely whether communities really need American students to dig wells or toilets.

This one-sidedness is crucial for myth maintenance and underscores the pretense that the American student, however unskilled or arrogant, is really saving the world.

No Shared Understanding

One of the most troubling consequences of this "Western savior" model deployed by study abroad programs is that it destroys the possibility of any meaningful dialogue across differences.

An August 2015 study by Calvert Jones published in *International Studies Quarterly* found that *the percentages of "shared perception" or the "we feeling" were lower for students who had just returned from studying abroad when compared to those who had not yet left. Returning students were also more "nationalistic" and "patriotic" than before. The results are not surprising. The "Western savior" model of study abroad programs, which focuses only on students, can but produce clannish outcomes; nothing more than a collective cry of "thank God I don't live here."*

Is Fair Trade Learning the Answer?

Inequalities of power and privilege are not limited to study abroad programs, nor does their existence suggest that global service learning can never yield meaningful dialogue across difference. In a paper entitled “*Fair Trade Learning; Ethical Standards for community-engaged international volunteer tourism*,” Dr. Eric Hartman of Kansas State University outlines some best practices that can save global service learning. They include dual-purpose programming (organizing programs with both student and community outcomes in mind and including community voice and direction in the planning process. A long term vision for sustainability and commitment would mean that students are prepared and oriented before during and after the program, and community members are given a clear idea of what will be taking place. Other crucial dimensions include an assessment of economic and environment sustainability and budgetary transparency. For those who want to put the standards into action, Hartman has created an online platform at globalservicelearning.org that provides resources for students, educators and university administrators.

Hartman’s Fair Trade Learning Model is currently being deployed by a few organizations. One of the co-authors of the paper, Brandon Blache-Cohen is the Executive Director of *Amizade* Global Service Learning a Pittsburgh-based organization that runs service-learning projects around the world. Amizade’s model puts hosts communities at the center of decision-making and places deliberate effort in ensuring that students understand the contexts in which they will be serving. Particularly notable are its reciprocal programs where students from host communities come to live in the United States instead of just American students going abroad. Another iteration of “fair trade learning” in operation is *OmPrakash Edge*, an organization that pairs college students with community-based organizations around the world. Community organizations have to go through a screening process before being listed with OmPrakash. Once listed the organization itself decides whether or not they want to host the interested student volunteer. To get students ready to go, OmPrakash provides web based orientation courses that directly tackle issues of privilege and context, as well as the inadequacy of good intentions.

The Way Forward

Study abroad trips form a large chunk of \$173 billion youth travel industry; whether or not they’re learning anything other than gratitude at the good fortune of being born rich and American, students are going abroad and into communities that are often too poor, remote or beholden to whatever little they receive for hosting students to object.

If learning means truly understanding history, culture and context, it must go beyond the easy superiority of imagining the poor as stupid, and hence unable to dig a latrine or better their living conditions.

As it exists, the “Western savior” model of studying abroad functions largely as a means of reiterating old colonial paradigms that students of the West, despite being inexperienced and unskilled, are the saviors for all the rest.

The Hierarchy of Refugee Stories

By Caitlin L. Chandler

Caitlin is Inequality Editor at *Africa is a Country* and a writer whose most recent journalism appeared in *The Nation*.

Earlier this year, three hundred refugees and migrants were missing and feared dead after trying to cross the Mediterranean over the weekend from Libya to Italy on rubber dinghies. According to the latest news reports, the majority of the refugees were from sub-Saharan Africa.

Stories about Syrian refugees dominated the mainstream U.S. and Western English-language media over the past year. Reporters covered the lives of individual refugees struggling to adjust in camps and European cities, while also examining everything from the international aid response to the architecture of refugee camps.

In 2014, at least 40,000 Syrians crossed the Mediterranean to seek asylum in European countries via Italy. But approximately 35,000 Eritreans also made the voyage – a sharp increase from 10,000 in 2013. More Eritreans have also entered refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, the majority between the ages of 18–24, and a significant number of unaccompanied children under the age of 18. Young Eritreans are fleeing mandatory and indefinite military conscription and imprisonment and torture for political organizing; there are also reports of growing famine.

Yet in sharp contrast to the coverage of Syrian refugees, the Western English-language media has barely registered the escalating Eritrean refugee crisis.

There have been few in-depth stories; absent profiles of Eritreans struggling to re-build their lives abroad; and rare editorials condemning the international community for not accepting more Eritrean asylum

seekers or for failing to rescue Eritreans who are held hostage and brutally tortured in the Sinai.

There are several reasons for this discrepancy: the Syrian war has forced 3 million people to leave the country and created an unprecedented flow of people into neighbouring countries; it rightfully deserves significant and ongoing coverage. But the other reasons are about history, politics and power – the Middle East has received increased Western media coverage in the post-9/11 era. As a result, there's a media infrastructure; some of the main Syrian refugee camps are housed in countries where there were already bastions of foreign correspondents, and it's relatively easy for Western journalists to travel from Istanbul and Amman to camps along the borders of Turkey and Jordan.

In contrast, most Eritrean refugees flee first to Ethiopia or Sudan, both countries where there are few journalists reporting for the Western press. Neither country is particularly welcoming to journalists, but Ethiopia's draconian press laws mostly target local reporters, and accessing the refugee camps in the Northern Tigray region is not difficult – there are daily flights from Addis's Bole Airport.

Ethiopia now hosts more refugees than any other African country, yet most coverage of issues in the camps comes from the press offices of relief agencies.

(As a side note, the fighting in Sudan and South Sudan has recently resulted in huge flows of people across borders as well as into Gambella, Ethiopia; but these refugees also get barely a mention.)

While we're inundated with the tales of brave war correspondents crossing the border into Syria to capture the atrocities, there is an absence of stories about journalists attempting to infiltrate Eritrea on a similar mission. Eritrea, which once riveted Europe and the US with its independence struggle from Ethiopia, has fallen from the media's gaze since Isyas Afwerki began constructing his police state in 1993. Eritrea now barely registers in Western consciousness – except of course as it relates to possible support for or against terrorist movements.

The mainstream media's bias of covering refugee issues more extensively in the Middle East matters. While Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK, Sweden and Switzerland have historically granted Eritreans asylum, there are now disturbing political undercurrents as Northern European countries appear on the brink of closing their doors to Eritreans.

In mid-2014, Denmark's Immigration Service sent a team on a "fact finding mission" to Eritrea, after suspending asylum proceedings due to the increased numbers of Eritrean asylum-seekers. The purpose was to determine whether the situation was really so terrible. In Eritrea, these so-called fact finders primarily spoke to Western Embassy staff; their resulting report in October 2014 claimed that conditions in Eritrea had improved enough to conveniently tighten Denmark's asylum criteria. The report was so blatantly inaccurate that Human Rights Watch and UNHCR debunked it point by point. The sole academic quoted in the report issued a statement he had been deliberately misquoted and demanding his name be withdrawn. The audacity of Denmark's Immigration Service is notable – they clearly thought people were uninformed enough about the ongoing crisis in Eritrea to not even notice their inventions.

While the Danish report is now "under revision", the Afwerki regime is already using it as propaganda. Meanwhile, the UK and Norway are undertaking their own investigations that will have implications on their asylum proceedings. Israel (which houses many Eritreans who survive the journey across Egypt) continues to imprison refugees who cross its borders or forcibly deports them, violating their basic human rights. (As AIAC has noted before, Israel refuses to even call them refugees, instead using the term infiltrators.) In a time when there are more refugees than in the previous 50 years, and as xenophobia and racism manifest in the political parties and policies of many developed countries, we need journalists who cover the lives of all refugees – not just those of geopolitical importance.

Humanitarian Images and Appeals in History **By Emily Baughan**

Emily Baughan is a lecturer in History at Bristol University, United Kingdom.

I. The Emergence of Humanitarian Appeals

Defined as the impetus to help a distant stranger, rather than a friend or neighbour – humanitarianism is a modern phenomenon, which historians generally trace to the late-eighteenth century, when new forms of print media publicised the plight of far-off peoples. During the antislavery campaign of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the first modern humanitarian cause, western activists sought to create sympathy for enslaved peoples in the Caribbean through images and narratives that focused on both bodily and emotional pain. New

ways of generating empathy for the suffering of distant strangers were created through lurid descriptions of torture and suffering. These were widely circulated due to the expansion of technologies such as the printing press, and reached new audiences due to expanded literacy. By focusing on the physical and emotional pain of slaves, humanitarian appeals highlighted the shared humanity of slaves. In doing so, these appeals created and extended empathy for distant strangers. Thus, humanitarianism has always been inseparable from its literary and visual representations.

While new humanitarian appeals centred on the shared humanity of the enslaved, they did not portray them as equal to western audiences.

The images of the antislavery campaign instead showed slaves as helpless, supplicant and grateful to their western liberators.

In the quintessential antislavery image, an enslaved man asks the viewer, 'am I not a man and a brother?' He does so, kneeling with clasped pleading hands. While attempting to overcome the most profound inequality created by early imperialism – the slave trade – antislavery campaigns also entrenched colonial hierarchies, portraying African people as helpless and white westerners as their natural 'saviours'.

Following the antislavery campaign, humanitarian appeals proliferated. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a host of newly created humanitarian organisations vied with one another to win the support of potential supporters and donors. To do so, they sought to show that the subjects of their appeals were the most worthy of humanitarian aid. While a few organisations – such as the newly established International Committee of the Red Cross – did this by highlighting the heroism and bravery of those in need of help (soldiers, in the case of the ICRC), for the most part, appeals echoed antislavery rhetoric, emphasising the helplessness and humanity of victims of war, famine and poverty across the world. In addition to helplessness, mid-nineteenth century appeals emphasised new criteria for sympathy: innocence.

Increasingly, humanitarian appeals focused on women and children, considered to be blameless, helpless and, unlike adult men, removed from the complexity of politics.

Appeals for causes ranging from the Irish Famine in the 1840s to the South African War in 1899-1902 were almost identical: they emphasised the suffering of mothers and the starvation and sickness of children. The recurrent motifs of the modern humanitarian movement had begun to emerge. Over the course of the twentieth-century, through the rise of mass media and mass marketing, these persistent humanitarian tropes would be increasingly refined and standardised, and images of

'innocent' 'helpless' women – and, even more often, children – coming to represent all moments of humanitarian crisis and forms of need.

II. The Problem with Humanitarian Appeals

The persistent use of mothers and children in humanitarian appeals has had two important effects. First, by depicting 'starving children' in humanitarian appeals, humanitarian organisations gave donors a sense of superiority over the people that they 'saved'.

They invited the white west to be 'parents' to people in need and, by extension, portrayed people and nations in need of assistance as 'childlike' – reinforcing colonial hierarchies and stereotypes.

Second, by depicting children, humanitarian organizations obscured the often-controversial politics of aid. Both now and in the past, humanitarian emergencies often emerge in the context of military conflict or political corruption. By presenting images of children – isolated from adult community members – humanitarian organisations distance the need for aid from the conditions that produce it. Donors feel as if they are giving to 'innocent children' rather than politically suspect adults. This approach has not only led to scenarios in which aid exacerbates conflict or props up bad leadership. It also – just as problematically – creates an ideal of 'non-political' humanitarianism and the recipients of aid as devoid of political ideals and agency. Three instances of extreme humanitarian crises from the twentieth century – the Russian famine of 1921, the Biafra-Nigeria War or 1967-70, and the Ethiopian famine during 1983-85 – illustrate some of the problematic effects of humanitarian appeals.

III. The Russian Famine 1921-1923

In 1921, a mass famine swept Soviet Russia, endangering the lives of 10 million people. Western aid agencies, such as the newly founded Save the Children Fund, realised that if they were to raise money for Russian citizens that they would have to overcome significant anti-Communist hostility from potential European and American donors. Just a few years prior, the Communist government had seized power in Russia and created an international outcry as they withdrew Russia the Allied effort, in the First World War issued anti-capitalist propaganda and, amongst other atrocities, executed the popular Russian royal family.

Humanitarian organisers in the West knew that, if they were going to create sympathy for Russian famine victims, they would need to obscure the political context of a famine taking place under Soviet

rule. To do so, humanitarian appeals depicted only children. Drawing on religious and romantic discourses of children's innate value and innocence, appeals claimed that the young 'could not be Bolsheviks' or 'had no politics'.

In 1921, cameras were rare. Few relief workers carried them into the field with them. The Save the Children Fund thus relied on journalists for images of starving children, and promised large payments for 'ideal' fundraising images.

They drew up guidelines of what ideal images shipped look like: they should portray children – usually girls – under the age of 10 wearing few clothes in order to show their hunger, and should not contain adults.

Mothers, it was later agreed, were perhaps acceptable, but certainly not men (who would be thought of as soldiers and Bolsheviks).

These images were an extraordinarily successful fundraising device, enabling a famine relief effort that fed three million children. But, the famine relief scheme also had unanticipated consequences. The Russian famine was not a natural phenomenon. It was caused by years of civil war, and the ineffective agricultural policies of the new Soviet Government. By feeding Russian citizens, the west would enhance the legitimacy of the communist regime; a regime that would, 10 years later, use famine as a weapon against its opponents in the Ukraine and deny relief workers entry to assist in their relief. Even when aid was portrayed as non-political it could, of course, have far-reaching political consequences.

IV. The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970

In 1967, the eastern area region of Nigeria attempted to secede – briefly becoming the independent state of Biafra, and leading to a brutal and bloody civil war. Starvation was used as a weapon against the Biafran people, as Nigerian Federal troops blocked supply lines to the self-proclaimed independent state.

In a bid to secure international recognition for the secession, Biafran leaders attempted to highlight the political legitimacy of their cause. The Biafran people, they argued, had been systematically discriminated against in Nigeria, and the Nigerian state had itself only been created through the piecemeal amalgamation of culturally and ethnically distinct areas under British colonial rule in 1914. Yet these attempts to gain political legitimacy were widely unsuccessful: western public opinion was initially unconcerned, while the British and American governments continued to support Nigerian federal forces with shipments of arms.

It was not until mid-1968, when the news reports of British journalist Fredrick Forsyth beamed images of starving Biafran children onto the television screens of millions of viewers, that the Biafran cause captured the international imagination. As Forsyth himself explained, “people who couldn’t fathom the political complexities of the war could easily grasp the wrong in a picture of a child dying of starvation.” In an era when many homes were newly equipped with televisions, western audiences were forced to confront the suffering of ‘Biafran babies’ in their own living rooms. These images of starving children worked both to simplify and ‘humanise’ the conflict for a western audience, and aid organisations such as the Oxfam and the newly established Médecins Sans Frontières drew unprecedented donations to deliver humanitarian supplies behind the Nigerian blockade.

Undoubtedly, humanitarian intervention spurred by images of starving Biafra children saved lives. Yet, it has also been argued that humanitarian intervention served to prolong the Biafra-Nigeria war, ultimately leading to further loss of life.

The Biafran famine appeal also had long-term cultural implications. In the late-1960s, an era in which many African states had become newly independent, Biafran famine appeals reduced the complexities of postcolonial politics to the image of a helpless, starving child, whose future rested not upon political self-determination, but western aid.

V. The Ethiopian Famine, 1983–85

During the 1983-1985 Ethiopian famine, familiar humanitarian tropes were deployed once again to create sympathy for victims. A host of NGOs publicised the plight of Ethiopian children, who, like the Russian and Biafran famine victims who had come before them, were the subjects of graphic photographs and lingering camera shots, focusing on the pain and physical deformities that chronic hunger produced. In a series of near-identical humanitarian appeals and news reports cameras panned from helpless, hungry mothers and children to wide-lens shots which emphasised the scale of the crises (among them the song and video for Band Aid – the first of a now familiar genre of charity music appeals satirised by ‘Africa for Norway’). In these appeals, victims of hunger were reduced to a ‘mass of humanity’ as viewers were told repeatedly that the famine was on a ‘biblical’ scale.

As in Russia and Biafra, the causes and context of the famine were obscured in order to create a compelling humanitarian narrative: Ethiopians were hungry, and Europeans could ‘save’ them by making a simple donation.

Humanitarian appeals that obscure the complex political causes of disasters do not only undermine the agency and individuality of their victims. As Alex de Waal argues in his book *Famine Crimes*, these humanitarian appeals – presenting famines as unavoidable emergencies that can only be resolved through western aid, – diminish the responsibility of governments to meet the needs of their citizens. In the case of Ethiopia, de Waal argues, humanitarian appeals and humanitarian aid ultimately absolved the government of responsibility for the famine, thereby strengthening the authoritarian Mengistu regime and disempowering Ethiopian famine victims.

VI. The Past, Present and Future of Humanitarian Appeals

In the past two centuries, as technologies of mass media have advanced, so too has our knowledge of the suffering of distant others. It is through this knowledge that the new ways of generating empathy underpinning the modern humanitarian movement came into being. The desire to help others, it seems, is difficult to disconnect from representations of their need.

Yet, the nature of humanitarian appeals has had profound effects. In the short term images of suffering children have captured the imagination of the western public and allowed for well-funded interventions in moments of crisis.

Yet, in the longer term, humanitarian images have obscured the causes and political complexities of disasters, and undermined the agency of their victims – both symbolically and practically.

They have perpetuated hierarchical relationships between the global south and the west. By masking the political causes of humanitarian crises, instead offering a simplified narrative in which victims of hunger as are ‘saved’ by one off interventions by western aid agencies, – sustainable and long term solutions to hunger and poverty remain out of reach.

By looking to the past, we can begin to understand why certain recurring motifs have emerged and the functions that they have served. More importantly, we can also see what has been left out, and the effects that this has had. The persistent focus on the plight of starving children has continually obscured the complex politics of humanitarian emergencies. It has created a nameless cast of helpless victims, and heroic western ‘saviours’, while failing to address the causes of crises. In 2015 we should not be content with reproduction of the images and inequalities of the past.

A Reflection From Being On the Inside of the South African Advertising Industry

By Lwandile Fikeni

Lwandile Fikeni is a writer based in Joburg, South Africa. He is an essayist and an art critic. His work focuses on fine art, design, books, film, pop and contemporary culture.

One of the things you must accept when you work in the advertising industry is that it is made up of people who don't care much about anything (except retaining clients).

You, the reader, the listener, the audience are the least of advertising's concerns. Ironically, you are also its *raison d'être*. This schizophrenia is built into the mechanisms that make the advertising agency and the client relationship work. It is this common contempt for what marketing calls the 'consumer,' namely, you, that keeps agency and clients happy. If advertising agencies are generally condescending to the public, in most instances it is at the request of clients whom, I later learned, care even less. This is always true – and it's even more true when the imagined consumer is black.

I worked for five years in advertising in South Africa. My first job was as an unpaid intern at LOWEBULL (before it became *LOWE & PARTNERS*) in Cape Town. Kirk Gainsford was at the helm of the agency as Executive Creative Director and Alistair Morgan was his deputy, the Head of Copy and Creative Director. Alistair was a man of words. His debut novel *Sleeper's Wake* had just been released to critical acclaim, and I had read his short story "*Icebergs*" in a *Caine Prize anthology*. To work with a novelist in advertising is a novelty and during my five months of unpaid labour I was frequently in Alistair's office to pick his brain about matters related to advertising and literature. He was sensitive to prose and textual aesthetics; he was not merely an adman, he was a cultural producer and it showed. He was, after all, the Creative Director on Hansa's "*Vuyo the Business Mogul*" TV commercial, the cultural significance of which is best exemplified by the fact that years later a brand named *Vuyo's* was launched by Miles Kubheka in Johannesburg. It followed the exact narrative of the advert, with Miles starting off as a vendor selling his Boerie rolls in a mobile van, and culminating with him opening up the first *Vuyo's restaurant in Braamfontein*. Alistair Morgan, Kirk Gainsford – two white men nearing middle age – had tapped into popular sentiment (or had they been part of the engine that was creating it?). In any case, I was impressed. What had begun merely as a commercial to sell beer had exceeded its brief.

I moved from LOWEBULL and went to *JWT* to work with Conn Bertish who was and is an activist, artist and surfer. He didn't possess the literary qualities of Alistair, but he had the unpredictability of a visual artist and he pushed for work that pressed against boundaries – especially those set by clients. We were working on a new J&B campaign, with him being adamant that there was a way of selling the brand without appealing to the lowest common “I have arrived” denominator, which was endemic in advertising, at the time. When he left to join Quirk advertising, I stayed behind to finish the campaign. I had been thinking about Vuyo a lot and the how in that single advert black aspirations were bottled into the single, simplistic, superhuman rags to riches narrative of *'magical blacks'*. I worried that the ad threatened to engulf every sphere of black social life – everyone was a Vuyo in the making, pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and sneering at those who seemed trapped in the doldrums of poverty. Vuyo had made his way into my work as well. The challenging new *J&B advert* I had started writing with Conn, which would introduce a new way of viewing what it is we're talking about when we talk about 'being made' was, by the end, just another rags to riches rag. I will admit that when it came out I was depressed, but the show had to go on. This singular narrative, this social engineering project, which we churned out with unfettered abandon, slowly unspooled, at least for me, what the post-South African state would be hinged on. It made it clear that the entire premise of our democracy, like all democracies I suppose, was self-interest. And as we all know, self-interest is always at the expense of someone else. *Unfortunately, in South Africa, we know very well whom that 'someone else' is right down to his most minute demographic detail., and instead of speaking of ways to dismantle the oppressive structural organisation of power and privilege that would set him free to enjoy his country's democracy, we insist that he becomes a Vuyo and pulls himself out of his bad situation without his country and state doing the work of undoing the terms that produce and reproduce his particular situation, namely, without dismantling the socio-economic structure that maintains white privilege.* If we were honest with ourselves, we would surely accept Vuyo as a lie meant to bamboozle instead of empower South African blacks.

A month or two after Conn's departure I received a call from Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town. This was after my own advert had been aired. I was still anxious about Vuyo's granny's exaggerated “Big! Big! Dreamer!”

“Hi, Lwandile. It's Chris.” Chris Gotz, the Chief Creative Officer of *Ogilvy South Africa*.

It was 2013 and Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town was the number one ad agency in all of Africa. A call from Chris Gotz meant that you left whatever it is you were doing and took his meeting. A few weeks later I was

in his creative studio. And a few months later, I left the ad industry all together.

By the time I arrived at Ogilvy & Mather, I had become less interested in selling brands and more invested in the politics of representation in commercial images.

I wanted to think about the extent to which advertising is a reflection of the society, or of particular articulations of society's anxieties, and when it became a vehicle that socially engineered people's aspirations and tastes. I wanted to think about how much of it was selling brands, and how much was it was the manufacturing of images that ill-served the people for whom they were intended? I'd sit on Chris Gotz's couch in his office and we'd talk about books, politics, art and literature. He was an English major in varsity, but took up History in his post-graduate studies. He went to school with Eric Miyeni and Victor Dlamini, he told me one day. I don't recall the conversation much, but it was something about upward social mobility and bourgeois blacks. I had become in some small or big way complicit in the way in which white corporate spaces were talking about blacks, rich or poor, partly because of how I emphasised my proximity to them (by virtue of pain and position in the post-apartheid socio-politico-economic drama) and partly because of how I tried to distance myself from them (by occupying nearly every conceivable elitist white space and consuming only the best of elitist culture). Owing to his wit, I'd always regarded Chris Gotz – privately – as the Noel Coward of South African advertising, without the characteristic hyperbole. I had never really regarded myself as anything in advertising, really, other than someone whom the industry created not out of want or desire but rather, out of the necessity to keep BEE scores on par with policy requirements.

Chris was happy when I resigned, I think. He saw that my heart was not in it anymore. Gradually, we'd stopped talking about the work and we talked about transformation and racism. Secondly, he knew that it was impossible to be a solitary voice of critique in an incestuous industry, which is unable to look itself in the mirror. Black creatives are in the industry, but they are in the minority and their voices are highly attenuated. At Ogilvy & Mather I was paired with a brilliant art director and illustrator from P.E.. He would leave 2 months after my early retirement from the advertising industry to become a freelance illustrator, just as I would become a freelance writer. I feel now as though we both got sick at the same time by the same disease in the same place. We had been working to pay the rent, and then Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town produced that "*Feed a child*" TV commercial and I lost any illusions I had about my industry. The infamous Black Twitter has become incensed.

It was enough that whites were arrogant and racist, they went as far as creating an advert that depicted a black child as a dog, thus rubbing the salt into the open wound, which has refused to heal with time, for time hasn't changed their socio-economic circumstance and their servitude to white masters.

Now, in his office we talked about the internet backlash. He was genuinely surprised by it. He had workshopped the idea with some black Joburg creatives and they had found nothing untoward in the advert. Then I had wished he had consulted my colleague and I, but it was too late. The damage was done. And it was for the best that things happened the way they did. At last I would be free of the position of explaining black pain to white indifference.

Although I had worked with inspiring minds in advertising, they were still white minds that thought through white bodies. Being white doesn't automatically make one automatically racist, but white culture in South Africa is defined and sustained by racism: spatial racism, cultural racism, linguistic racism, economic racism, and every other form of racism imaginable. Chris asked me back then to write something about the advert and I had reluctantly agreed. But I knew I wasn't going to do it. I thought this was the opportunity for the South African ad industry to ask itself some serious questions and to look at the way in which it curates and produces images and how its character narratives offend those it hopes to attract to the brand or brands and companies it represents.

My hope for common sense to prevail was misplaced in any case, for the advertising industry continued as though a poor black child had not been recently produced as a dog in our televisions; as though "Eugene" that Nedbank advert with that exasperated white narrator isn't mocking and condescending toward our erstwhile protagonist who can't seem, for the life of him, to make the "smart" choice with his money; had it been his own conscience speaking back to him the story would've been different, but then it would not be as entertaining to the white world had it not pandered to the god complex of white supremacy and its messianic tendency to manufacture the native as an unthinking subject who needs to be rescued from self-destruction.

To see the attitude towards the white and black consumer from a creative perspective within the advertising industry, one only needs to look at KFC adverts. A special consideration is made when the advert has white characters in it, while all sensitivity is discarded if the same advert has black characters instead. Black lives are not allowed to have nuance. Instead, we are laughing, singing caricatures of real human beings, our diverse aspirations contained in the swill of rags to riches. We are all kind and obsequious and forever willing to lend a helping hand. Are we not cynical and unkind and indifferent to the

world around us. Why is it that nearly all black characters in adverts appear more deliberate than necessary, as though they had a grotesque deformity and therefore had to be treated with the most pitying gaze by the camera?

I have often questioned the validity and legitimacy of this communication industry, in particular, whose primary producers of information

(the ad agencies and creative departments) could not be more different (read: white and privileged) and more removed from the realities and existential anxieties of those for whom their messages are intended. This distance is one of the reasons South African advertising industry produces offensive work, at best. Thankfully for the ad industry, clients are equally removed (read: white, male and privileged) from South African reality and they consent to the work. Here I need to note there is also the other phenomenon, the black representatives from the client side, who are too ashamed of their own blackness and its discomfiting narrative and want the agency to produce work that plays to the white gaze, even when they are presented work that potentially restores black dignity in the way in which black South Africans are depicted and scripted in adverts. I met a few in my five years as a creative in the ad industry. There are also many black creatives without a hint of self-awareness who do not understand the first thing about the content and social impact of their work, to themselves, first, and to others. I've found this to be prevalent among black creatives who enjoy being tokens in the world of advertising. And there are many. You might see them on billboards of their own work; many aspire only to grow out of the advertising industry, to write books of rags-to-riches-esque themes as an extension of their advertising work. And some have done so. During the weeks leading to my departure from the industry, I tried to imagine South African advertising having the kind of creative revolution that happened in Latin America. There, in the mid-to-late 2000s, the work took on a very distinct cultural slant, as did the work out of South East Asia. Both then tended to win big at international advertising award ceremonies like at *Cannes*.

But this is South Africa, a country that works best in denial. It would probably require someone to spend 27 years in prison before the players in the ad industry would be spurred to do a proper analysis of the missteps and implement remedial action to transform the industry. Actually, that would not be enough. Knowing the industry as I do, they would probably make room just for him, market his remarkable story of perseverance and overcoming the odds, and then award each other prizes for their contributions to transformation.

Voices From the Field

By David Girling

David Girling is a Lecturer and Director of Research Communications in the School of International Development, University of East Anglia, UK. His main research focus is on social media and international development.

Last year I interviewed the founder of a small charity in Uganda who fundraise for an orphanage. She said that as a privileged, educated, middle class woman how was it possible for her to ever understand what it must be like growing up as an orphan in her own country.

It made me think long and hard about humanitarian communication, and how the majority of the images we see of developing countries are via either NGOs or the media. I wondered to what extent I have personally been influenced by these images and how this has affected my perceptions of distant others.

NGOs have become one of the key messengers of knowledge about global poverty and their campaigns help us visualise the lives of distant others. John Berger explores imagery in his seminal text *WAYS OF SEEING*, saying that the way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe, and that the way we look at something is based on a set of personal assumptions. Over the years, the imagery used by NGOs has alternated between hope and guilt. Both strategies have received criticism from the media who, ironically, have been equally guilty of misrepresentation. Recently the photographs of emaciated children with flies in their eyes, otherwise known as 'poverty porn', have been replaced with positive imagery and success stories. This deliberately positive representation also has its critics and has been labelled as 'sexy development' or 'post-humanitarian communication'. Can we really categorise an image as just positive or negative when everybody will have different interpretations of the same image. So what is the answer? It seems that NGOs have become the scapegoats in the war on poverty, they can't do right for doing wrong.

In August this year, it was announced that one in seven people on Earth used Facebook that day. The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way many people communicate. It has also changed the media, relationships, businesses and even toppled governments. Social media was soon embraced by NGOs as a way to engage with the public to create awareness and fundraise, but how has it changed the way that NGOs talk to their audiences? Let's start with the negatives: the continued use of stereotypes and over simplification of stories.

KONY 2012 is the blatant example of how an NGO can get it so right, but so wrong.

We can't deny that their hard-hitting, cinematic production and carefully planned seeding strategy targeting celebrities and key policymakers was effective. After all it was the fastest growing viral video of all time, until it was usurped by Gangnam Style. But on the flip side, the video was slated by the mainstream and alternative media as incorrect and insulting. As a result, the producer ended up having a nervous breakdown, Invisible Children folded one year later and ultimately Kony was never found and brought to justice. On the positive side there have been some brilliant social media campaigns such as The Most Shocking Day by Save the Children and Thea's Wedding by Plan International that have told the stories of distant suffering through a western lens. Similarly, campaigns such as the #Icebucketchallenge and #Nonmakeupselfie were worldwide phenomena raising awareness and money for charities globally.

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic global increase in the availability of information and communications technology (ICT), especially via mobile phones. 79% of the African population now have a mobile phone account.

The marketing and communications departments of NGOs have embraced ICTs and social media as new sets of tools to inform their publics of distant suffering.

It's a pretty fair assumption that the majority of NGO workers are passionate about the work they do. So why do they often get it so wrong? Communicating about poverty and inequality is possibly one of the most important jobs an NGO can do. Poverty is extremely complex and highly political and is so much more than access to resources. This has been highlighted by the Rusty and Golden Radiator Awards.

Another issue is how many NGO workers have the experience to tell the stories of the recipients of aid? How can some of the people even start to begin to understand the lives of the people they are representing in their communications? This is why I was extremely pleased to hear about WaterAid's new Voices from the Field (VFTF) programme. The initiative was designed to bring WaterAid's supporters closer to their project work through a steady flow of up to date communications content. In 2012, WaterAid recruited specialised local staff in Nepal and Madagascar whose specific remit is to gather still and moving images of their work and ensures that images are captured with dignity and respect. This is a highly effective way of meeting the ever-increasing demand for supporter communications content that is distributed in a variety of materials.

Alison Gentleman who manages the initiatives in Madagascar and Ethiopia said; “What really gives the VFTF Officers the edge is their passion for the cause, their local knowledge and the fact that they speak the local language. Straight away, huge barriers are broken down and communities, partners and WaterAid staff are happy to share their stories. What these VFTF Officers have is a knowledge of different worlds. They can relate on a local and global level.

“They understand the communities they visit but they also understand the supporters on the other side of the world. This is a unique perspective and I think that is key to the programme’s success.”

In July 2015, I visited Antananarivo, Madagascar to spend three days with Ernest Randriarimalala in the field to see how his work is being used in campaigns back in the UK and in other overseas offices. Ernest spends approximately two weeks of every month in the field collecting information and imagery, the rest of the time is spent back in the office editing films in FinalCut Pro, uploading images to the data bank, captioning images, ensuring all the meta data is accurate and refining the language on case studies. Managing workloads is dependent on the stories needed by various departments. Sometimes stories are explicitly requested from the UK office and Ernest will ascertain specific needs via email or a Skype call. Other times stories will be collected organically and the case study details will be shared to staff across the world via Yammer, which WaterAid use for internal communications.

In three years, Ernest has taken nearly 30,000 photos. He estimates that he collects two to three case studies for every trip and between 30 to 60 minutes of video rush footage. These images are used in WaterAid communications all over the world – in posters, websites, adverts, leaflets, newspapers and social media. One piece of footage captured on a GoPro camera has also been used in a TV campaign.

By having a locally based communications officer, it overcomes many obstacles such as misinterpretation through translation, cultural differences and sensitivities to local political and economic issues.

It does not guarantee more authentic storytelling, but is more likely than the alternative of recruiting western photographers with little to no knowledge of the communities they are documenting. The VFTF programme is about building long term relationships with communities, documenting progress and creating case studies to inform donors that their fundraising efforts are making a big difference to people’s lives.

Every year each of the VFTF officers is also invited to the UK for training and advocacy work. In June this year, Ernest spent three weeks

in England. Part of this time was spent with colleagues in the London Head Office, but he also visited a fundraising ball in Durham organised by WaterAid supporters and attended the Glastonbury Festival where he gave a talk alongside the CEO of Oxfam. At these events he showed images of the toilets and access to clean water that have been installed, and more importantly the people who benefit, as a result of fundraising efforts. When he returns to the field, he is also able to tell beneficiaries about meeting the many people who have organised balls, raffles, cake sales, sponsored runs etc., all to help communities they are unlikely to ever visit nearly 10,000km away. Ernest said, "I'm not a professional public speaker, but people seemed to enjoy my talk as it was from the heart. I just told them what I have experienced with my own eyes. Like many of the beneficiaries of WaterAid's work, I grew up without access to clean water or a toilet. I was often sick when I was young due to poor sanitation and missed lots of school. I am so happy when I meet all the people who fundraise and sign petitions to help people in my country. It is great to tell them about all the positive work we are doing and how we couldn't do it without their help."

The Voices from the Field programme is both innovative and inspirational. It is a relatively simple and cost effective solution to help overcome many of the criticisms of the imagery used in humanitarian communication. I'm not saying it is easy or that the role is without its flaws, but I applaud WaterAid for persisting with this initiative and to paraphrase one of their recent campaigns "Making it happen". I hope that other NGOs around the world will see this programme as a model of good practice and implement their own voices from the field.

Everybody Wants To Be A Hero

By Øyvind Eggen

Øyvind is the Policy Director of the Department of Evaluation in Norad. Throughout the years, he has been a visible voice in the debate about Norwegian and international aid, and has a private blog "Innvikling", where he posts articles about Norwegian and international aid. His blog and the following article express his personal views, and not those of Norad.

Disclaimer: This article builds on stereotypes. Ironic, since stereotypes are what the Rusty Radiator tries to fight. However, the stereotypes are not of the poor, but of Rusty Radiator fans. Perhaps not more fair and precise than stereotypes about the poor, but using stereotypes is still the easiest way to communicate in few words.

Ask about poverty and how to alleviate poverty, and you will receive different answers depending on whom you ask.

It is not only individuals that hold various truths about poverty alleviation; this also goes for the organizations dedicated to alleviate poverty. In international development discourse, there is a range of various narratives available to frame the fight against poverty.

Acknowledging that all are overly simplistic, consider the five alternative narratives about poverty alleviation below, which can all to some degree be said to involve a 'true' story about poverty alleviation – meaning that they can be credibly justified. Which of the stories do you agree to the most and think deserves to be most widespread?

- A• Poverty is the result of lack of development. Development starts with growth, which requires capital and skills brought in from the more developed countries, primarily via private sector investments.
- B• Poverty is the result of poor governance, bad politics and bad leaders, and/or incompetent or lazy people in the countries concerned. There is little we can do about that except to make sure that none of our money goes into the bad leaders' pockets.
- C• Poverty is maintained by post-colonial relations in which well-meaning Western aid and development policies form part by distorting democratic accountability, promoting misguided policies (e.g. civil and political human rights before economic growth), and fostering corruption.
- D• Poverty is the result of a complex web of social, political and economic national and international dynamics, ultimately rooted in a history of asymmetric relations between rich and poor, North and South that have always favored the North. Thus, poverty can only be eradicated by addressing and challenging these complex dynamics.
- E• There is little you can do about poverty at large, but at least you can help one! We can make sure your monthly donations will be used effectively to help this particular child and her community.

Consider, then what each narrative tell about agency:

Who are the groups that take on the role as the main actors in the fight against poverty? Who are the 'poverty heroes' in each narrative?

No surprise if the narrative you favored the most, was the narrative in which you could take a leading role. For the Africa for Norway fans – stereotypically assumed to be people with higher education

predominantly in social sciences, politically conscious and perhaps slightly leftist in political orientation – that would be option d. above.

The narrative about complexity delegates the leading role in the fight against poverty to an academic and political elite (or younger people aspiring to become), as it requires good understanding of the complexity, rejection of stereotypes, and quite sophisticated thought that is not for everybody. Moreover, since it insists on the international dimensions of poverty it delegates leading roles to Northerners (even if the same Northerners always insist that Southerners need to take the lead). After all, the Northerners are closer to the global powers, and have more knowledge of well-functioning societies – and in particular, the open and liberal democratic societies about which Northerners take pride and insist on as necessary paths out of poverty for others.

This role is exclusive to the elite. Ordinary people's role in the fight against poverty are primarily to vote for the most responsible political parties, to accept that tax money goes to official development aid and to share some of their income with politically correct NGOs.

Coincidence? Perhaps.

The academic and political elite have spent more time than others trying to understand poverty and are therefore more likely to choose the narrative about complexity and dismiss simple analyses.

But let us for a moment think that this is not the only reason. For the same narrative is also the narrative that reinforce the leading role to the elite and marginalizes ordinary people to having only supporting roles. And when choosing between different narratives about poverty – all carrying some truth – the one narrative that assigns to ourselves the leading role in the fight against poverty is too good to be questioned even by critically minded intellectuals. Conversely, we tend to put some extra efforts into questioning narratives saying that we are part of the problem – or delegating the main role to business people, which our political segment tends to dislike.

If so, which one of these narratives you hold as the 'truth' is not just reflecting your understanding of poverty alleviation, but moreover it can tell us something about whom you want to be assigned the role as the hero in the narrative. And it is worth pondering upon whether the truth about poverty alleviation held by Africa for Norway fans (in the stereotypical version used here) can be ascribed to their own self-identification as being part of a political and academic elite, assigning them a special role as heroes in their chosen poverty alleviation narrative.

The narrative that ‘you can make a difference at least for one poor person’, on the other hand, would intuitively deserve some attraction as it delegates more or less equally to all of us a role as a hero in the fight against poverty (as all can share some from their pockets). But it undermines the exclusive role of the academic and political elite since they cannot do much more than others. Because it depends on a narrative that builds on and reinforces simplicity and stereotypes, which everybody can relate to, neither does it delegate to academics any exclusive role in understanding.

The overall arguments are simplistic and not fair – and they build on stereotypes about Africa for Norway fans that are probably not more true than stereotypes about the poor. Nonetheless, I think it is worth considering. Partly because there may be some truth in it, and because it does not hurt the academic and political elite (or those aspiring towards) to become more modest in their view on their own role in development processes going on in other countries and/or other population segments. Partly also because it can explain why Africa for Norway and similar initiatives do not reach as far as their supporters feel that they deserve. That may be, if non-elite people in the target group feel that there is some elitism involved in this game and therefore choose to opt out. Or perhaps simply because the non-elite won’t easily give up a narrative about development that gives them a key role, only to adapt another narrative placing them in the role as extras to the main actors at best. After all, it is not a tempting offer to be an extra in the superman show when you can choose another truth that gives you the role as a hero on equal terms with the elite, saving the lives of African children at the mere cost of a few take-away coffees per month.

Our Solutions to Their Issues?

By Nita Kapoor

Nita Kapoor is the Director of FK Norway, a Norwegian NGO that is organizing exchanges between organisations and institutions in the South and in the North.

In a changing, multi-polar world, countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are playing an increasingly larger role on the global scene. This affects us now and will increasingly do so in the future. Previously we could – paternalistically and at long distance – define the world’s problems and prescribe our solutions for people lacking the possibilities we had. Our solutions to their issues. Separately.

The world is at our doorstep. These days, a new influx from the world into Europe and to Norway is displaying all its challenges, despair,

hopes and capacities. This is a shared existence, in which distance is no longer relevant. Some may think this is a short-term phenomenon; however, we are certain that this is a lasting reality. The image of otherness and of others struggling with their issues far away is obsolete. We need to come to terms with development as a common challenge, shared across countries and continents, based on mutual interests and equity. Together.

Norway has never been as homogenous or isolated as stated by our national narrative. Even though we may be led to believe that the current situation is extraordinary, in a larger perspective, the situation in Norway is nothing but ordinary. Through time immemorial, we have been interconnected with the outside world politically, culturally, and socially.

Colonialism, migration, trade – and gradually, tourism, the internet, media and other impulses have shaped our society and the way we think.

The only thing that may be new about today's changes are perhaps the speed in which they occur.

Through centuries, we have grown accustomed to a reality where we, the West, have been dominating the rest of the world. Increasingly today power, money and influence are spreading geographically to countries, regions and actors that were previously weakened by western imperialism. Every day, decision-making in Africa, Asia and Latin America affects our lives through social processes, economic development and climate change.

Norwegians have a self-image of being the well-doers, for helping people all over the world, preferably to do so on our own, and in our manner. And not to mention; of "helping" people far away in their own home areas! This constitutes part of the Norwegian people's national identity, and how we understand our own role in the global community. Good-hearted Norwegian missionaries, curious sailors and well-meaning development workers have through decades reported back images from Africa, Asia and Latin-America of deprivation and misery. Our media, art and literature, trade and marketing have reflected the same. Over time perpetuating orientalist, spectacular, alienated perspective of others, and at worst racism as well as stereotypes of countries, people and cultures in "the South" which have little root in reality. Not only do they wrong the majority of the world, but such stereotypical thinking blocks our own culture and growth as a society.

Young people today, no matter where they grow up, face a chaotic, intertwined world in which all possibilities are known, yet hard to access. The opportunities for employment, economic growth and social security that our little country up north can provide us today and in

the future, are shaped by events taking place in what we, for lack of a better word, lump into the term “South” or “developing nations”.

The way the world changes, and the challenges and opportunities we stand in together, forces us to realise that we face a common, shared reality. Not us and them any longer, but rather one, big us.

It demands us to listen emphatically and seriously understand the voices and opinions from the Global South. Because those voices are our most important tool for understanding our times and what to expect of the future.

The voices from the South are numerous and heterogeneous, and we need to make room for them, on their own terms. We need them all over Norway: in debates, in the media, in education and in the many organisations and businesses where people work. These voices will make us better suited to learn and understand our own society, the world and our place in it.

Listening to these voices will enable us to surpass the old divides based on donor-recipient and traditional images of poor and rich, of developed and under-developed. They will compel us to recognize that we are all developing nations and peoples. Ultimately, these voices will empower us to feel, think and act on the basis of mutuality and shared humanity.

