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IN SEARCH OF THE PITIFUL VICTIM: A FRAME ANALYSIS OF DUTCH, FLEMISH AND BRITISH NEWSPAPERS AND NGO-ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract: This article contributes to the ongoing debate on the representation of global poverty in Western media. Both NGOs and journalists are being criticized for their one-sided emphasis on the misery and dependency of people in developing countries. The objective of this paper is to measure the extent of such problematizing representation in newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements. A frame analysis was conducted of 876 articles and 284 advertisements from the Netherlands, Flanders and the United Kingdom. The results challenge some conventional assumptions. Overall, the ‘victim frame’ and ‘pitiful images’ do not dominate the discourse of NGOs and newspapers. However, British NGOs are an exception: they portray the poor as ‘pitiful victims’ twice as often as their counterparts in the Netherlands and Flanders. Furthermore, the findings confirm the conviction that the media predominantly highlight poor countries’ dependence on the West. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: framing; frame-analysis; poverty; NGOs; media

1 INTRODUCTION

From time to time, discontent arises with the portrayal of people from the global South by Western media and NGOs. An example was the awards ceremony on 17 November 2015 by Rusty Radiator, a Norwegian non-profit, for ‘the fundraising video with the worst use of stereotypes’ of Africa. The winner was Band Aid 30, an incarnation of the charity supergroup that raised money for Ethiopia in 1984. In 2014, a new group of artists

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recorded a slightly altered version of 'Do they know it's Christmas' to help fight Ebola in Western Africa. The clip begins with a shot of a half-naked, emaciated African woman, who is carried from her house by masked men in white overalls. The next shot shows the Band Aid artists entering the recording studio. The jury verdict was unmerciful: 'Band Aid30 contributed to the spread of misinformation and stereotypes of Africa as a country filled with misery and diseases'. It called the video 'highly offensive and awful in every way possible' (Rusty Radiator, 2015).

Rusty Radiator is just one of many civil society groups that plea for another image of developing countries, especially in Africa. Similar organizations include Wilde Geese in the Netherlands, CISU in Denmark, IDLeaks in the Netherlands and Common Cause in the UK. The participants in this debate are a mix of students and media and development professionals, who are driven by a belief that the representation of the global South is overly negative and one-sided in stereotyping people from the South as miserable, passive and helpless.

This study connects with the unease about the representation of global poverty. Its objective is not to dispute the arguments of critics such as Rusty Radiator. Instead, our aim is to question the underlying premise that the media indeed make excessive use of negative and stereotypical images of the global South. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine how poverty in developing countries is represented in contemporary communications, and to assess to what extent 'negative' representations prevail.

2 GLOBAL POVERTY IN THE MEDIA

2.1 The Debate on Poverty Representation

Discussion about the representation of global poverty has been ongoing since the 1970s, when images of hungry children started to appear in television news and fundraising materials of aid organizations. Already in 1981, the British magazine *New Internationalist* published a critical story that warned against the detrimental effects of using images of starving children (Lissner, 1981). It stated that the use of such images was both unethical and counter-productive in the long run. The debate peaked after the Ethiopian famine of 1984–1985 with its emotional imagery of disaster victims (Dogra, 2012). Over time, NGOs became increasingly receptive to criticisms. In 1989, the General Assembly of European NGOs adopted a Code of Conduct, which encouraged NGOs to choose images and messages that respected human dignity and to avoid sensationalist or simplistic messages (Concord, 2012).

Nevertheless, critique on image use by NGOs and news media persists (see for an overview, Dogra, 2012; Tallon, 2008). The main topic is the use of images of suffering people, especially from Africa, which have been referred to as 'the starving child image' (Lissner, 1981, p. 23), 'stereotypical starving babies' (Manzo, 2008, p. 637) and 'the dying malnourished child' (Alam, 2007, p. 60). The debate is largely fuelled by two positions. On the one hand there are those who argue that this is simply the 'reality' in developing countries and that it is important to confront the public with such images to mobilize funds for humanitarian action (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012). On the other side are the critics who point to the ethical implications and potential side effects. They argue that images of helpless victims are dehumanizing and rob people of their dignity. Moreover, they reinforce the sense of superiority of Western civilization by fortifying the narrative of

the 'powerful givers' and the 'grateful receivers'. Subsequently, such imagery underscores the difference between 'us' in the rich, advanced and wealthy West and 'them' in the poor, backward and stagnant South (Dogra, 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Manzo, 2008).

Since the 1980s, there has also been discussion about what the alternative should be. Lissner (1981) noted that some advertisers had tried other options, for example by 'showing Third World people as industrious and ingenious people who act intelligently within the limits of their resources' (p. 24). This alternative has been labelled as 'positive' imagery, presenting people from the South as self-reliant, productive and active (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012). Such 'positive' imagery served to counter the 'negative' imagery of passive, suffering and helpless people.

2.2 Problematizing Representations

So far we have used the common classification in the literature into 'negative' and 'positive' representations of people in developing countries. However, this terminology may be misleading, because it suggests that 'negative' representations are undesirable, while this should open to debate. Therefore, we suggest to speak of 'problematizing' representations instead.

For the purpose of this study, we distinguish three characteristics of problematizing representations that are commonly mentioned in the literature. The first characteristic is a victim narrative; a storyline that highlights human suffering and destitution. The next chapter will describe this 'victim frame' in more detail. Second, we assert that problematizing representations are reinforced by visuals that magnify human pain and suffering (Cohen, 2001; Kennedy, 2009). These are, for example, images of malnourished children in an emergency appeal of an NGO. Obviously, such images are often associated with victim narratives, but the connection is not one on one: stories with a victim frame do not always carry visuals (as in the case of written news articles or radio advertisements). And if they do, they may as well portray 'neutral' looking people. However, given the wide interest in 'explicit victim imagery' in the discussion, we consider it important to investigate this separate from the victim narrative.

Third and finally, we connect 'problematizing' with a lack of agency and helplessness. Hence, problematizing representations are strengthened by texts or pictures that emphasize the dependence of (people from) developing countries on the help or intervention of the developed world. For example, a charity appeal may state that the life of a starving child can be saved with 'your' donation. Again, this is not necessarily confined to victim narratives: texts with a more 'positive' storyline may also suggest that outside help is needed to achieve improvement.

Despite the intensity of the discussion, surprisingly little is known about the scope of problematizing representations in the media. Some studies argue that over time there has been a shift among NGOs towards more 'positive' or de-problematizing representations (Clark, 2003; Dogra, 2007). Other studies suggest that, overall, media imagery of global poverty has remained much the same (DFID, 2002; VSO, 2002). However, the extent to which various poverty portrayals are used in existing media messages is unknown. The lack of clarity is because of the fact that most studies are qualitative in nature, and many of them are limited to specific issues, countries or news events (e.g. Alam, 2007; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Kennedy, 2009; Manzo, 2008). For example, Lugo-Ocando (2015) investigated how

stereotypes of African countries are presented in the news and used Nigeria as a case study. Other examples are Campbell's (2007) investigation of visuals from the famine in the Sahel and Clawson and Trice's (2000) analysis of media portrayals of the American poor.

On the whole, this paper argues that the discussion about representation of global poverty could benefit from stronger empirical evidence. By and large, existing studies reinforce the impression that the media especially dish out images of pathetic victims, in need of our support, and not much else. As a consequence, studies may fail to capture the diversity in communications of global poverty. What is more, the literature review shows that recent findings are mainly based on British data (e.g. Dogra, 2012; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015). Hence, they may also fail to capture differences between Britain and other countries.

3 FRAMING GLOBAL POVERTY

We used a frame analysis to examine the representation of global poverty in the media. Framing, in a broad sense, refers to the manner in which a certain topic is represented in communications. In any text, a specific choice of topics, words, catchphrases, sounds and imagery can promote a certain interpretation of reality (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frames themselves can be conceptualized as metanarratives. Each narrative, or frame, tells us something about the problem at stake, the causes and consequences, the moral judgement and the possible solutions (Entman, 1993). For example, a story about a struggling farmer in Somalia who was hit by a drought refers to the narrative or the frame of the innocent victim. People do not need to be exposed to the whole frame: when they see a picture of this particular farmer, they tend to understand the moral message that she is suffering and needs help.

Frames are not purely individual, but part of an organized set of values, stories, world-views and beliefs that are shared in the collective memory of a large group of people (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007). It means that many frames are familiar to both the sender and recipient of a message. Thus, stakeholders in the field of poverty communication, such as NGOs and journalists, tap from this cultural reservoir of frames to promote their version of the reality about global poverty. Likewise, recipients use the same stock of frames to interpret the message.

For the current analysis we used a preliminary defined set of global poverty frames (Vossen, 2015). These frames were inductively derived from a wide range of communications about global poverty, such as books, news articles, NGO-campaigns and political party programmes. The texts were examined for the presence of framing elements, such as specific words and underlying lines of reasoning. These elements were grouped and used for the reconstruction of logically coherent poverty frames. Each frame conveyed a distinctive explanation of the essence of poverty, its causes and consequences, the moral values involved and the potential solutions (for an overview of the applied method, see Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). In total, nine distinctive poverty frames were identified. They were labelled 'the victim'; 'progress', 'social justice'; 'bad governance'; 'the global village'; 'blame us'; 'impending doom'; 'every man for himself'; and 'chain of being'. The frequency of six frames was measured in a quantitative analysis. This paper reports on the four frames that were most prevalent.

The first is the *victim frame*. At the heart of this frame is the suffering and destitution of people in poverty. They have fallen prey to tragic circumstances through no fault of their

own. The frame emphasizes how lack of food, shelter, medical care and other basic needs contribute to miserable living conditions. The victim frame stirs empathy and pity and taps into the moral obligation of the rich to help the poor. It is this frame, with its emphasis on suffering and helplessness, which is at the heart of many critiques on representations of poverty in the media.

The second frame was labelled the *progress frame*. This frame asserts that poverty is an issue of lagging development. Poor countries are at an earlier and less matured stage of development and need to catch up. Hence, the solution lies in economic development and improvements in areas such as health care, education and agriculture. The progress frame radiates optimism: development is good for everyone; our children will have a better future. This frame is capable of contributing to a more 'positive' image of developing countries, by portraying its people as active and industrious (Cohen, 2001). However, it is important to note that the frame can also communicate about a lack of progress and stagnation. It is thus employed both in a positive and negative context.

The third frame is *social justice*, which defines poverty as injustice and inequality. Poverty in a world of abundance is a sign that societies are organized in an unfair way: people lack opportunities and freedoms to shape their lives and to provide for their own livelihoods. The moral principle under this frame is the inherent dignity and rights of every human being. Hence, it asserts that commitment to people in developing countries should be based on connectedness and mutual solidarity. Like the progress frame, this frame can highlight promising as well as problematic developments: it can depict how people successfully fight for their rights, but also how they are excluded or oppressed.

Finally, the *bad governance* frame associates poverty with failing governance in a developing country. A key figure in the bad governance story is the corrupt leader, who cares only about his own power and wealth and not about the welfare of the people. He represents incompetence, corruption, patronage and irresponsible leadership. The 'bad leader' can also take the shape of elites, rebel leaders and warring militias. The poor governance frame lays the responsibility in the developing countries themselves; their leaders and elites should behave responsibly and change their culture of patronage. The frame may inter alia be used to highlight the adverse effects of development aid, with words such as 'greedy dictators' that 'siphon off aid money' and 'elites enriching themselves'.

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the above we derive our main research question:

RQ1 How do newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements frame global poverty and which frames are used most frequently?

More specifically, our objective is to connect with the critique on problematizing representations in the media. Hence, we aim to determine the extent to which such representations are seen in current media content.

RQ2 What is the frequency of the victim frame in NGO-advertisements and newspaper stories on global poverty?

RQ3 What is the frequency of 'pitiful images' of people from developing countries in NGO-advertisements and news photos?

RQ4 To what extent do newspapers and NGO-advertisements portray (people from) developing countries as 'dependent on the developed world'?

For the purpose of our study, two additional points need to be taken into account. They both have to do with the question of *who* exactly contributes to certain poverty portrayals. The first point concerns the *source of information* about global poverty. People identify the news media and NGOs as their main sources of knowledge about developing countries (European Commission, 2011; DFID, 2002; Dogra, 2012). The current study is interested how each of these information carriers contributes to the framing of global poverty. However, those information carriers have very different roles. The media aim for balanced coverage of newsworthy events related to global poverty, ideally reflecting many aspects of the reality in developing countries. The objective of NGOs is much more specific. Their communications are aimed at raising funds for their projects or creating awareness about social issues. Many assert that dramatic stories and visuals are most suitable to persuade people to donate money or to take action (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008). Hence, our expectation is that NGOs publish more problematizing stories and images than newspapers.

H1 NGOs are more likely than news media to display problematizing representations of global poverty.

The second point concerns the *country* where the message is coming from. Existing studies into poverty representations are mainly based on British data (e.g. Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). Hence, they may fail to capture differences between Britain and other countries. The current study therefore compares data from different countries to measure whether the findings are country specific. To this end, we compared Britain with the Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. This choice was partly made for practical reasons: because the investigation into frames is highly language sensitive, the country selection was limited by the languages that were spoken by the researchers. However, the choice was also motivated by presumed cultural differences between these countries. For example, the media culture in the Anglo-Saxon UK differs from that in the continental Netherlands and Flanders (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); British newspapers are more often associated with sensational news and dramatic stories to arouse their audience than those in continental Europe. We ask:

RQ5 What are the differences between the representation of global poverty in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders?

5 METHOD

5.1 Data Collection

We selected articles that paid attention to poverty in developing countries from seven Dutch ($n = 289$), four Flemish ($n = 230$) and five British ($n = 357$) newspapers.¹ The articles were published from January 2011 to December 2013. The selected papers are a mix of large national, regional, 'popular' and 'quality' papers, which reflect the media landscapes in each of the countries. The search was done with LexisNexis (for Dutch and British

¹*The Netherlands*: Volkskrant = 73; NRC = 88; Telegraaf = 48; Regional papers (Brabants Dagblad, Dagblad van het Noorden, Noordhollands Dagblad, De Gelderlander) = 80. *Flanders*: De Morgen = 91; De Standaard = 72; Het Laatste Nieuws = 39; Gazet van Antwerpen = 28. *United Kingdom*: Guardian = 127; Daily Telegraph = 74; Times = 91; Sun = 35; Daily Mirror = 30.

newspapers) and Mediargus (for Flemish newspapers). Search terms were obtained from the frame descriptions, such as 'poverty', 'development', 'hunger', 'trade', 'aid' and 'dictator'. The search not only generated stories that problematized poverty, but also stories that focused on the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living conditions and rights of people living in poverty. After a manual removal of irrelevant articles (for example, about sport or the illness and death of Nelson Mandela), 1580 Dutch, 1063 Flemish and 1984 British articles remained. From these, a random sample was drawn of respectively 289, 230 and 357 articles (total $n=876$). A total of 421 of these articles were published with a photograph; 403 photos were retrieved (119 Dutch, 112 Flemish and 172 British) via the websites of newspapers, image libraries and the Dutch National Library.

In addition, we collected 284 advertisements from 43 Dutch ($n=169$), 14 Flemish ($n=42$) and 24 British ($n=73$) NGOs that were published or broadcast between January 2011 and March 2014. Our focus was on messages in the mass media, such as TV-ads and advertisements in magazines, which the general audience comes across without making a deliberate effort to do so. The NGO-umbrella-organizations in each country (UK: BOND; the Netherlands: Partos; Flanders: 11.11.11) provided a list of the largest NGOs, which served as a starting point for the collection of material. Some of the material was sent or given by NGOs. The rest was found through the internet, for example through organizations' websites and YouTube channels. In addition, clippings from newspapers and magazines were collected. The majority of the messages (69.4 per cent) had a fundraising purpose. Other messages aimed to raise awareness (18.0 per cent), to increase NGOs' brand recognition (10.6 per cent) or to thank donors (2.1 per cent). The material did not constitute a representative sample of all advertisements of Dutch, British and Flemish development organizations: unlike newspaper articles, no such database exists. However, given the size of the collection and the diversity of the organizations, we expected the dataset to give a good impression of the recent NGO messages in the mass media of these countries.

5.2 Coding the Texts

Coders received a detailed description of the frames and were asked to identify frames in the texts.² As a tool, they used a list with interpretive questions to recognize the frames.³ For example, the question 'Does the message contain descriptions of poor living conditions and hardships of people in developing countries?' served as an identifier for the victim frame. The question 'Does the message refer to leaders and elites in developing countries that abuse their power?' referred to the presence of the bad governance frame. Coders were instructed to holistically code whether a frame was a 'present' or 'absent' (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The objective was to identify the key frames in the message. Hence, for each newspaper article and NGO advertisement, a maximum of two frames could be listed. When a third frame seemed to be present, the coder had to weigh the relative importance of the frames. He or she then followed a few rules of thumb, such as

²The coding was performed between November 2013 and March 2014. Newspaper articles were coded by one researcher and six coders, all (former) students of communication at the Radboud University and the University of Wageningen. Newspaper photos were coded by one researcher and two assistants with a background in journalism and communications. NGO commercials were coded by one researcher, an intern of Partos and two students at the Institute of Media Studies of the Catholic University in Leuven.

³The coding scheme is available from the corresponding author on request.

the rule that frames in the headline and lead should be given priority over frames further down in the text.

In addition to the questions about poverty frames, coders analysed how people from developing countries were depicted in the visual material. More specifically, coders determined whether the visuals explicitly emphasized human suffering. Such images were called 'pitiful'. During the coding process, images were marked as 'pitiful' when the depicted people were visibly suffering from malnutrition, illness or hardship: crying, bleeding, dirty or sick. Hence, 'pitiful images' included the proverbial images of 'children with hunger bellies and flies in their eyes', but also of injured people in war and disaster areas. Figures 1 and 2 give an example from the coding process. Figure 1 was coded as 'not pitiful': even though the girl's look could be interpreted as slightly sad, she is not visibly suffering. On the other hand, Figure 2, of a naked and crying girl with a bandage on her head, was coded as 'pitiful'.

Finally, the coders answered questions about the role of the West in solving the poverty issue. For that purpose, different questions were asked of the NGO-material and news articles. For news articles, coders first indicated whether the article suggested that someone was responsible for the solution or improvement of the situation. If the answer was 'yes', they stated whether this responsibility was located in developed countries, in developing countries, or whether it was a joint responsibility. For example, if an article discussed



Figure 1. Still from an advertisement of Stichting Kinderpostzegels, 2011. This image was coded as 'not pitiful'



Figure 2. Still from an advertisement of Save the Children, 2011. This image was coded as 'pitiful'

how international fora brokered climate or trade deals that could benefit poor countries, it was coded as 'joint responsibility for the solution'. For the NGO-advertisements, coders indicated who, according to this advertisement, had the agency to change the situation: the NGO, the donor or the local citizens from developing country. For example, if a video clip showed a group of farmers who had formed a cooperative to increase their income, it was coded as 'local agency', even if that cooperation was established with aid from the NGO.

Ten percent of the advertisements and 13 per cent of the articles and photographs were double coded. As a measure of reliability we chose Krippendorff's Alpha, a measure that corrects the percentage agreement for chance agreement (see Krippendorff, 1982). An Alpha of 0.60 was considered acceptable. The measures were as follows: *News articles*: victim frame: 0.68; progress frame: 0.77; social justice frame: 0.67; bad governance frame: 0.64; responsibility for solution: 0.69. *News photos*: pitiful images: 0.64; *NGO-advertisements*: poverty frames combined 0.78; pitiful images 0.79; agency for change: 0.63.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Poverty Frames in NGO-Advertisements and News Articles

Figures 3 and 4 show the frequency of poverty frames in NGO-advertisements and news articles by country.⁴ The results are illustrated with examples per frame. This answers our first and second research questions.

6.1.1 Victim frame

The victim frame was observed in 79 per cent of the British, 41 per cent of the Dutch and 38 per cent of the Flemish NGO-advertisements. The frame clearly dominated emergency aid appeals, made by NGOs such as the Red Cross, MSF and the Dutch Refugee Foundation (Stichting Vluchteling). Their requests reflected emergencies that also attracted much attention in the news media, such as the famine in the Sahel in 2011, the typhoon in the Philippines in 2013 and the war in Syria. In addition, but less frequently, the frame was used in advertisements that highlighted chronic poverty conditions in developing countries, such as malnutrition, diseases and child mortality. For example, a commercial of WaterAid, a British NGO, showed a small African boy scooping a cup of water from a river. According to the voiceover, a child like him 'dies every 40 seconds because of dirty water and poor sanitation' (WaterAid, 2011).

The difference between the UK and the other two countries stood out: British NGOs applied a victim frame twice as often as their Dutch and Flemish counterparts. For example, video-advertisements of ActionAid, Concern Universal, Save The Children and Sightsavers typically broadcast appeals with a dramatic storyline featuring malnourished and distressed children, and a grave sounding voiceover calling upon donors to help or save them. In the Dutch and Flemish material, such videos were an exception.

In newspapers, the victim frame was observed in respectively 31 per cent of the British and Flemish and 23 per cent of the Dutch articles. As expected, and as in NGO-campaigns, the frame was overrepresented in news about droughts, hunger and disaster, such as the abovementioned famine in the Sahel and the typhoon in the Philippines. Likewise, the

⁴Not disaggregated in the tables are articles with another frame (NGOs: 4.6% ($n=13$); newspapers: 25.0% ($n=219$) or frameless articles (NGOs: 12.7%, ($n=36$) newspapers: 7.5% ($n=66$)).

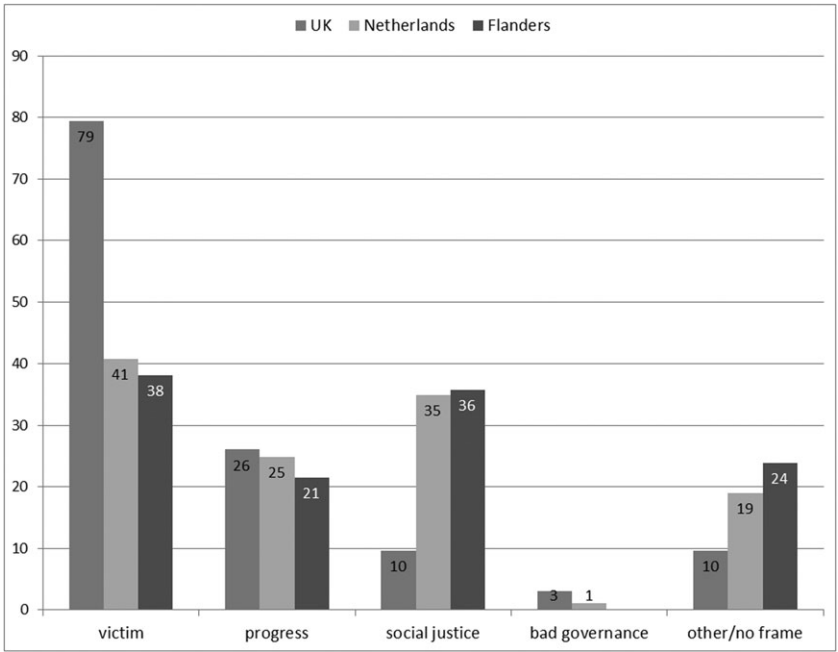


Figure 3. Frequency of poverty frames (percentages) in NGO-advertisements in the UK ($n=73$), the Netherlands ($n=169$) and Flanders ($n=42$). **Notes:** The difference between countries is statistically significant, $X^2(4, n=294)=26.06, p<0.001$. The total frequency of the frames per country can be more than 100 per cent, because some texts contained two frames

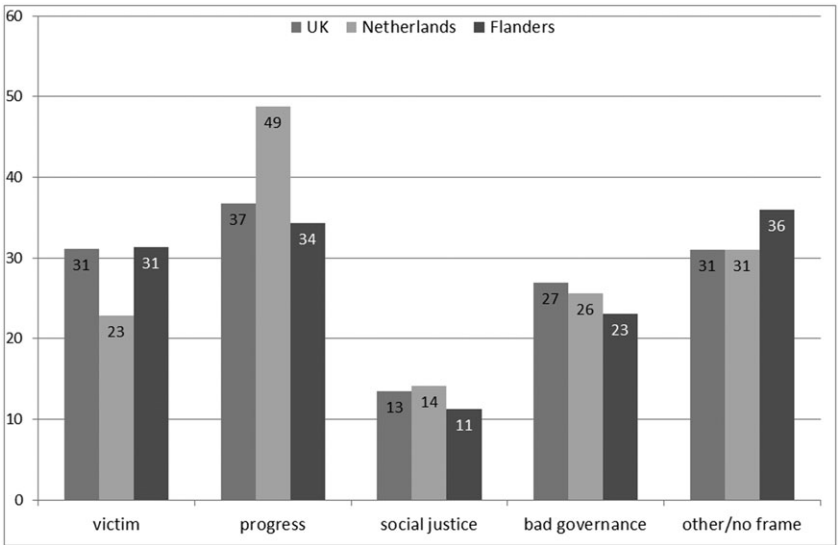


Figure 4. Frequency of poverty frames (percentages) in newspaper articles in the UK ($n=357$) the Netherlands ($n=289$) and Flanders ($n=230$). **Notes:** The difference between countries is statistically significant, $X^2(6, n=938)=13.00, p=0.043$. The total frequency of the frames per country can be more than 100 per cent, because some texts contained two frames

frame was used in stories that highlighted chronic poverty problems in the South, especially in connection with health, education and children. An example is a story by *NRC Handelsblad*, a Dutch paper, with the headline 'Unicef raises alarm about children in large cities', highlighting the misery of poor children in slums (Chin-A-Fo, 2012).

6.1.2 Progress frame

The progress frame was the most popular frame in newspaper articles (UK: 37 per cent; the Netherlands: 49 per cent; Flanders: 34 per cent). Hence, a considerable proportion of news reports on global poverty was characterized by a focus on development, or the lack thereof. This was especially true for Dutch articles, which adopted this frame more frequently than the other countries. The progress frame often appeared in news with an economic angle of incidence, such as stories on economic development in Africa, fair trade or the rise of the IT sector in developing countries. For example, *The Guardian* ran a story that discussed whether poor countries' economies would benefit from copying China's export model (Stewart, 2011).

NGO-advertisements used the frame less frequently than newspapers, but it was still a fairly important frame in their communications (UK 21 per cent; the Netherlands 25 per cent; Flanders 26 per cent). A difference with the news media was notable. While news media used this frame especially in economic news, NGOs used it primarily with regard to social issues, such as education, food security, and water and sanitation. In their advertisements, the frame highlighted the lack of development as well as the progress that could be made—with the help of donors. For example, a TV-advertisement of Oxfam Novib in the Netherlands portrayed an Indian woman who made it to village headwoman thanks to education with donor support (Oxfam Novib, 2012).

6.1.3 Social justice frame

In NGO-advertisements in the Netherlands and Flanders, this frame was seen in a little over one third of the communications (35 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). In the UK, just 10 per cent of the NGO-ads applied this frame. The social justice frame was, not surprisingly, a popular frame for organizations that push for human rights for women, children, girls or people with disabilities. The frame was also visible in campaigns for better positions of farmers and workers in developing countries. For example, the Belgian NGO FOS campaigned for better working conditions of domestic servants, who are 'treated like dirt' and whose 'labour rights are often violated' (FOS, 2013).

In the newspaper data, the social justice frame was observed in 14 per cent of the Dutch, 13 per cent of the British and 11 per cent of the Belgian articles. As in NGO-campaigns, the frame featured in articles about working conditions and the position of women and children in developing countries. An example is a story by the Dutch *NRC Handelsblad* about women in Afghanistan (Van Straaten, 2011). It described their struggle for better access to health care and education and political influence. Nevertheless, the difference with the advertisements of development organizations stood out: While social justice was one of the key frames for NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, journalists less frequently shed light on the poverty issue from a perspective of human rights, justice and equality.

6.1.4 Bad governance frame

The bad governance frame was virtually absent in NGO-advertisements. When those advertisements referred to bad leadership or conflicts, as in Syria, they mostly used a

victim frame to draw attention to the affected citizens. In newspapers, however, this frame was used in about a quarter of the articles (UK: 27 per cent; the Netherlands: 26 per cent; Flanders: 23 per cent). The bad governance frame was observed in political news and news about wars and violence, as (within in the time frame of the study) in Syria, Mali, Central Africa, South Sudan and Congo. Occasionally, the frame drew attention to the role of governance in chronic poverty conditions and ‘natural disasters’, such as the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011. An example of the latter was a story in the Dutch *Volkskrant* with the headline ‘Is hunger caused by drought?’ It argued that, besides crop failure, mismanagement of African leaders is one of the main causes of the crisis (Bossema, 2011).

6.2 The prevalence of ‘pitiful images’

The purpose of the third research question was to examine the frequency of explicit ‘pitiful images’ in the material. Figure 5 shows that explicit images of miserable people from developing countries were not omnipresent in the media. Newspapers in all three countries used such images sparingly (UK and the Netherlands: 9 per cent; Flanders: 12 per cent). In the NGO-material from the Netherlands and Flanders, the ‘pitiful poor person’ was seen in 14 per cent and 10 per cent of the messages respectively. Again, the difference with British NGOs was significant: they used pitiful images in 34 per cent of their advertisements, two to three times as often as their Dutch and Flemish counterparts.

Pitiful images were, as could be expected, most often observed in emergency relief campaigns and news articles on war and disasters. However, a closer look at the Dutch material revealed that even emergency campaigns were rather careful with the display of human suffering: the majority of them did *not* show explicit ‘pitiful’ images. It was also observed that the typical image of the ‘starving African child’ was rather rare. In the dataset, it was displayed in 12 NGO-campaigns ($n=289$) and 12 newspaper photos

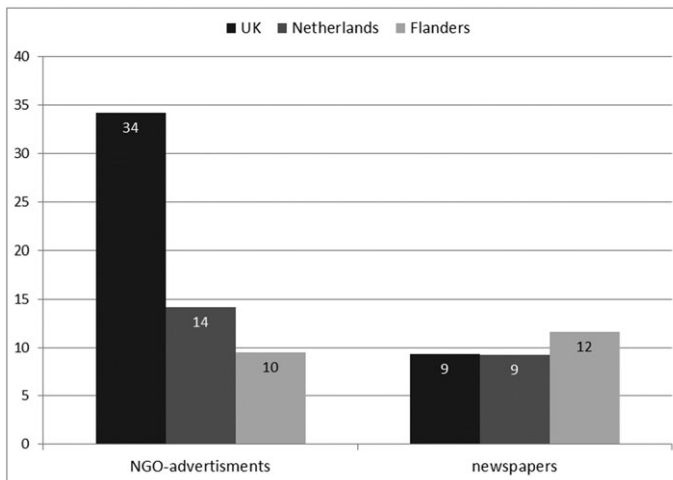


Figure 5. ‘Pitiful images’ (per cent) in NGO-advertisements ($n=284$) and newspaper photos ($n=403$) in the Netherlands, Flanders and the UK. The difference between countries is statistically significant for NGO-advertisements, $X^2(2, n=284)=17.06, p<0.001$, but not for newspapers, $X^2(2, n=304)=1.82, p=0.403$

($n=403$). Each of these photographs or videos was taken during the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011. Other ‘pitiful’ images included, for example, refugees from Congo, child labourers in a mine or people in the rubble in Syria.

6.3 Dependence on ‘the West’

The fourth research question concerned the portrayal of poor countries’ dependence on the West. Figure 6 shows that NGOs strongly reinforced this perception: only a small share of their advertisements demonstrated the initiative of the local population (UK 4 per cent; the Netherlands 13 per cent, Flanders 17 per cent). An example was an advertisement of Kinderfonds Mamas, a Dutch NGO, in which we read that the South African ‘Agnes’, together with hundreds of volunteers, cares for disadvantaged children in Limpopo, South Africa. The advertisement called on donors to help women like Agnes, thereby emphasizing that they are the agents of change. However, the vast majority of the advertisements solely highlighted the agency of the NGO (‘Plan provides education for girls’) or the donor (‘You can save a child’s live’). The ‘local agency’ was least visible in advertisements with a victim frame (5 per cent) and social justice frame (10 per cent), and most visible in those with a progress frame (34 per cent).

Newspaper reports also reflected that the West does play a large role when it comes to solving the poverty issue (Figure 7). Approximately two thirds of the articles (68 per cent) suggested a potential solution for the problem. About a quarter of these articles (UK: 27 per cent; the Netherlands: 28 per cent; Flanders: 22 per cent) exclusively attributed the responsibility to governments, people or institutions in developing countries. These articles highlighted, for example, the responsibility of governments to end local conflicts or to implement appropriate policies. The remaining articles suggested that Western governments,

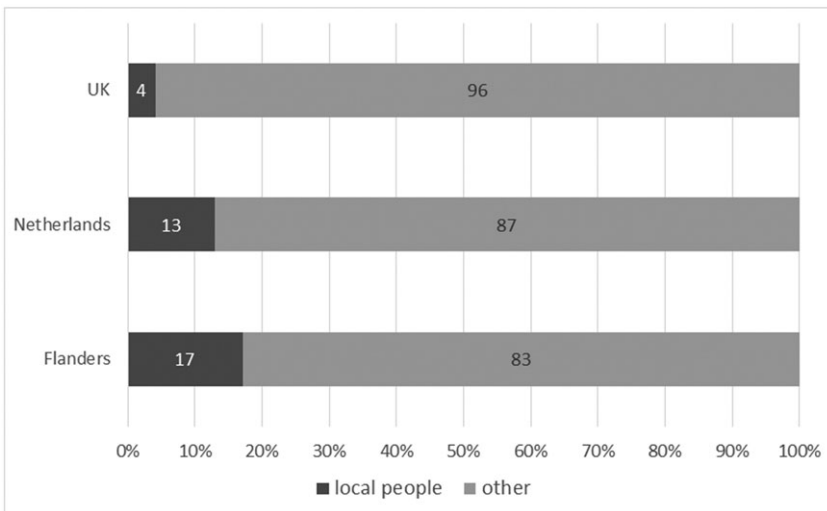


Figure 6. Agency for change (per cent) in NGO-advertisements from the UK ($n=73$), the Netherlands ($n=169$) and Flanders ($n=42$). The difference between countries is statistically significant, $X^2(8, n=284)=39.99, p < 0.001$

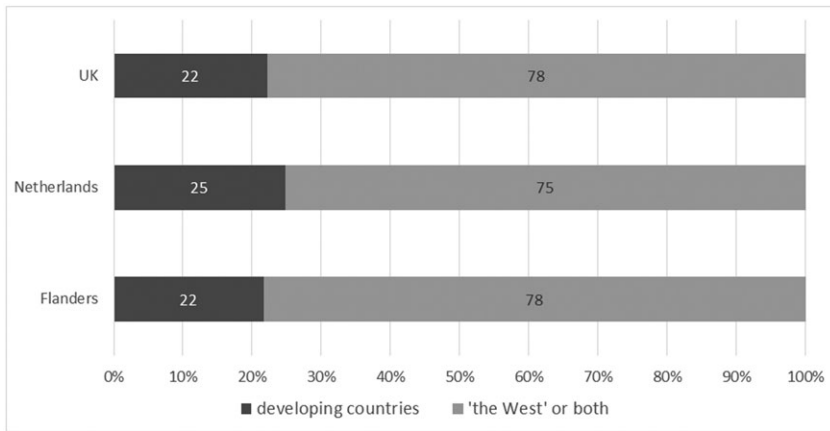


Figure 7. Responsibility for solution (per cent) in news articles from the UK ($n=246$), the Netherlands ($n=191$) and Flanders ($n=157$). The difference between countries is not statistically significant $X^2(6, n=594)=11.33, p=0.79$

institutions and companies should take action, for example through emergency aid for refugees, or they suggested that there was a joint responsibility of the West and the developing world. The emphasis on local responsibility for solving this issue was strongest in stories with a bad governance frame (42 per cent) and social justice frame (39 per cent) and weakest in those with a victim frame (13 per cent). The progress frame reflected (24 per cent) the average score.

6.4 Differences between NGOs, news media and countries

The previous questions about poverty framing and problematizing representations already disclosed some differences between countries, and between NGOs and newspapers. This brings us to our hypothesis and last research question. First, we expected that NGOs would be more likely to use problematizing representations than news media (H1). We thereby separately examined two characteristics of 'problematization': the presence of a victim frame and the depiction of 'pitiful' people. The third characteristic, 'dependency on the West', was not comparable because of the difference in questioning. Our findings partly support the hypothesis. NGOs used the victim frame significantly more often than newspapers, $X^2(3, n=1236)=139.38, p<0.001$. By contrast, they did not use pitiful images significantly more often than newspapers, $X^2(1, n=687)=2.99, p=0.084$.

Second, we asked a question about the differences between the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders (RQ5). We found that British NGOs used a victim frame and pitiful images significantly more often than Dutch and Flemish NGOs. Moreover, they attributed agency for change to local people significantly less often (see Figures 3, 5 and 6). The analysis of newspaper articles showed that the Dutch papers used a progress frame more frequently, and a victim frame less frequently than the other countries (see Figure 4). However, there was no significant difference between British, Dutch and Flemish newspapers with regard to the use of pitiful images (see Figure 5) and the attribution of responsibility for solutions (see Figure 7).

7 DISCUSSION

The starting point of this study was the discussion about the representation of global poverty in the Western media. The research questions and hypothesis were aimed to gain specific insight into how poverty is framed, how problematizing representations manifest themselves in a media content and who exactly contributes to it.

Our analysis of newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements challenges the idea that the media unilaterally portray people from the South as pitiful victims. NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, and newspapers in the Netherlands, Flanders and Britain choose a variety of frames to communicate about global poverty; they alternate the victim frame with progress, social justice and – in newspapers – bad governance. Moreover, the origin of ‘pitiful images’ appears to be related to newsworthy events, not specifically to Africa as such. However, British NGOs are an exception to this general finding. Contrary to their Dutch and Flemish counterparts, a large majority of their communications apply a victim frame and a large portion explicitly uses images of suffering, sick, malnourished or crying people.

While this study puts the use of explicit ‘victim portrayals’ in perspective, it confirms the idea that (people from) developing countries are predominantly portrayed as dependent on outside help or intervention. NGOs especially reinforce the South’s dependency on the West, rarely visualizing the actions and initiatives of local people. This is mostly the case in communications with a victim frame, but the pattern is also true for communications with other frames. Hence, advertisements with a ‘progress’ or ‘social justice’ storyline also often suggest that Western donors or NGOs have to bring about progress, justice and equality in developing countries.

For news articles the finding is somewhat mixed. If articles suggest a solution, they mostly point at a sole responsibility of Western countries, or a joint responsibility of Western and developing countries. Hence, they attribute a significant responsibility to ‘the West’ when it comes to accomplishing change in developing countries. This is especially true for stories with a victim frame, which reflect the notion that the West must relieve the suffering in the South. However, stories with a bad governance frame more often point at the sole responsibility of local governments to take action, suggesting that they themselves are responsible for ending corruption, mismanagement and conflicts.

Using a quantitative framing analysis allowed us to present a nuanced picture of current poverty representations in the media. In conclusion, it appears that the problematizing portrayal global poverty is most clearly carried out by NGOs, especially British NGOs. Furthermore, and in general, problematization manifests itself especially in the portrayal of the poor as ‘dependent on the West’, and less obviously in the use of explicit visuals of human suffering.

However, this study has some limitations. First, the NGO-sample was rather small and not representative of the whole range of NGO-communications in the mass media. Second, the study did not address some important topics in the discussion about poverty representation. The most notable one is the debate on ‘complexity versus simplicity’, which questions the lack of context in both NGO-communications and news articles. According to critics, the media present issues in ‘the global South’ above all as a local problem, caused by internal factors such as drought, overpopulation and corruption. They fail to make reference to historical factors and obscure the role of the West in the emergence and continuation of global poverty (Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Tallon, 2008). It was beyond the scope of this study to empirically measure this ‘complexity’ dimension.

Still, the results raise some questions. An obvious question is why British NGOs show a greater preference for victim frames and pitiful images than their Dutch and Flemish counterparts. Potential explanations include a stronger charity culture in Britain and a fiercer competition between NGOs. This could motivate British NGOs to use more confrontational, emotive images to attract people's attention. More research is needed to interpret this difference, for example by analysing the differences between the countries in NGO- and campaigning culture.

Another question relates to the perception of the public that the media overload them with pitiful images from the poor. While this seems plausible in Britain, it is less clear why this would be the case, for example, in the Netherlands. One explanation is that vivid portrayals of poverty and hardship, for example of starving people in a famine, were frequently activated in the past and have become chronically accessible to us (Shrum, 2009). Hence, powerful problematizing images easily surface when people think about developing countries, or when they are confronted with a victim frame, regardless of whether or not they actually see those explicit images.

The above limitations and questions indicate that the field could benefit from more empirical research into the media representation of global poverty. It could, for example, further investigate differences between countries, or study specific features of the messages, such as their profundity. This is at the service of another area of research that deserves attention: understanding the impact of media representations on public engagement with global poverty. Little is known, for example, about the extent to which media representations reinforce or undermine long-term support for development cooperation. In addition, our findings suggest that research could afresh the question to what extent 'pitiful images' are needed for fundraising. The wide use of such images by British NGOs suggests that they are indeed needed. However, the fact that Dutch and Flemish NGOs use them sparingly questions this premise.

Finally, this study has some implications for the future debate on the representation of global poverty. It suggests that the discussion about 'victim imagery' is still relevant for NGOs in the UK. However, it appears less significant for NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, and for newspapers. Instead, the emphasis should be on the media's portrayal of the global South's dependence on the West. NGOs could be questioned about the fact that they appreciate the importance of local initiative and local ownership, but hardly ever show this in their advertisements for the general public. It might be true that NGOs do display more examples of local initiatives in their newsletters and on their websites, which were not assessed in this study. However, the general public does not come across these messages without making a deliberate effort, while they are sure to be confronted with appeals in the mass media. If NGOs take the representation of local initiative seriously, they should also show it in their messages and appeals to the general public.

For news media, the message is less straightforward. Not every article that emphasized the responsibility of the West also reinforced the image of the South as 'dependent' in a problematizing way. For example, a number of articles pointed at the responsibility of Western countries to mitigate the effects of climate change on the poorest people. The argument is that the West has greatly contributed to climate change and should therefore pay the bill. Such articles can clearly not be labelled as an undesirable portrayal of dependency of developing countries. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that local governments, leaders and citizens are the main agents for change in their own countries. Consequently, journalists should pay attention to their views, specifically with regard to solving problems. During the analysis it was observed that this perspective received little

attention in the news articles: newspapers rarely published stories about successful or promising initiatives of governments in developing countries to tackle poverty, fight injustice or improve governance. Therefore, journalists could be encouraged, when applicable, to forward examples of local initiatives to change the situation for the better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Part of this study was made possible with a grant from NCDO in the Netherlands. The authors thank Pieter van Groenestijn from the Research Technische Ondersteuningsgroep at the Radboud University in the Netherlands for his helpful comments on the statistical analysis of the data. Any errors remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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