

Global Divides in Cosmographic Genres

Charity, Solidarity and Different Explanations of Difference

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Abstract

This chapter sets out to explore charity and solidarity approaches in three cosmographic genres: aid galas, foreign news, and documentaries about foreign nations. I argue that their nation-based ratio together with the panoptic character that allows the home nation a privileged invisibility as the rest of the world is being written, constitute predominantly charity approaches. Solidarity approaches towards global, inter- and intra-national divides do however appear when dialogic modes of writing (verbally and visually) are used. They also concur with political rather than culturalistic understandings of these divides, therefore oppose naturalization of differences and open up for possibilities of change. In the end I discuss possible ways of analyzing solidarity in relation to power in media studies, as well as ways of constituting solidaritarian media texts. A key feature in this project is the break-up of the opposition of genres that discuss the domestic respectively the foreign.

Keywords: solidarity, charity, cosmographic genres, foreign news, documentary films, aid galas

Introduction

Cosmologies of today are largely created and reproduced in the media, and there are certain genres where the cosmographic aspects are especially clear, genres where the journalists and other producers can be characterized as cosmographers (see Jonsson 2001). Three such genres will be addressed in this article in order to discuss not only global, but also international and intra-national divides. The genres are: TV broadcast aid galas, foreign news, and magazine programmes where documentary films about foreign nations are being broadcast. The attitudes towards global and other divides will be conceptualized mainly as charity versus solidarity, and different approaches to solidarity will be discussed and operationalized in relation to media production as well as to media studies. Attitudes of charity and solidarity will furthermore be related to the different explanations of difference that can be found in those genres. Two significant explanations of difference are politics and culture, and I will argue that the promotion of culturalism (Appadurai 1996), in the cosmographic genres, mitigates political dimensions of global and other divides. I will address media and global divides mainly through attitudes towards and representations of global divides within the production of North-Western media. Starting out with the quite obvious expressions of charity approaches

in aid galas, I proceed by exploring the genre of foreign news, where solidarity is often a cherished ideal of its practitioners, and end up in the documentary film genre where not only truth, but also empathy – an intrinsic feature in both charity and solidarity (Chouliaraki 2006:201, Kössler & Melber 2007: 36) – are key words. In contrast to the presumed solidarity approaches of foreign news and documentary films about foreign nations I will argue that charity modes in fact permeate all of the cosmographic genres, and in the end subsequently propose ways to relate to this within the media as well as within media studies.

Aid Galas, Charity and Solidarity

The spring of 2008 there was a TV broadcast aid gala on a major Swedish TV channel, channel 4, called “The Humour Gala”.¹ There are similar formats in national media of other nations. The gala displayed paradoxical and sudden jumps between slapstick sketches and location reports from famous Swedish people travelling to different places in the South and reporting of sometimes extreme suffering among children, offering a viewing experience that is interesting and perplexing in its own right. The main focus here is however on how the problems that are being reported are explained, or not explained, throughout the show. One way to analyze this is to disclose how the reported problems are supposed to be solved, according to the content of the show. The sub-heading of the Humour gala was “For every kid”, a phrase that was repeated over and over in the show. In connection to this theme, Swedish celebrities read parts of the UN child convention and then asked the audience for help, like this: “Now you have a choice. Either you do nothing, or you do something. Together we shall fight for every kid”. The word “you” was used in the singular Swedish form (there are different words in Swedish for “you” meaning a single person and “you” meaning many others that you address). The solution to the problems that are being reported hence lies in the hands of each individual of the Swedish audience, on the individual level, which it of course to a certain extent does, in an interconnected world. Politics or policies were however not forefronted in the show, neither present, nor historic or future ones. Political action, or change in policies, are thus not suggested solutions. What we are supposed to do is instead to pay 20 dollars a month to UNICEF. Then we can call ourselves “world parents”. This is of course not a bad thing in itself. Countless lives will be saved and improved because of such contributions. What is problematic, however, is that no additional solutions that would address or include structures, policies or politics are suggested. Major divides are thereby preserved rather than eschewed.

During the gala, the prominent guests are eating, all dressed up, and watching for instance a report from a camp/hospital in DR Congo that specializes in caring for girls who have been severely injured through war-related rapes. A significant amount of time is spent on a nine-year-old girl who says that no-one wants to play with her because she smells. This is explained to be because of all the injuries from these rapes and the reporter/celebrity describes how all of a sudden the constant washing of clothes and sheets in the camp makes sense to her. All these girls and women have been more or less cut up and can’t control their bodily functions any more. This reportage is important, both emotional and factual, but it lacks something, as does the whole show; it lacks structural, political explanations of difference in conditions; of difference related to

global and other divides. The structure of this cosmographic genre is panoptic (Foucault 1991) and nation dependent in essence. One part of the world, predominantly a nation, can remain invisible while surveilling and controlling potentially all other parts. This structure implies, together with the lack of political explanations, geographical cultural explanations of differences, that appear as constant states and subsequently are naturalized. The reportage more specifically is also lacking a postcolonial perspective that could certainly have been added to conflicts in DR Congo, and it lacks solidarity from the formerly colonizing parts of the world. This is plain charity. Pay some money and go on living like before.

A definition of solidarity – as well as charity – is needed at this point. In a series of interviews of people formerly active in the anti-apartheid movements in Sweden, Håkan Thörn (2008) discovered that almost all of them when asked to define solidarity explained it by distinguishing it from charity. Most of them associated charity with an unequal relation and furthermore with Christianity.² The activists associated solidarity on the other hand with a political worldview, in other words a political cosmology. What was also stressed in the definitions of solidarity was a reciprocal aspect. Where charity goes one-way, solidarity included for many people expectations that the “others” would actually be able to contribute something that would be interesting for the “self”. Solidarity thus needs to be directed towards something, from both ends. Traditionally it has been between citizens of nations as a constituent of the nation as an idea and as a primary idea (Renan 1882/1990, Durkheim in Thörn 2008), or inter-/cross-nationally between classes or between women in the women’s and feminist movements.

More specifically, solidarity can be constituted through:

1. ‘identity’, meaning common interests such as those represented in the classical example of the international worker or labour movement
2. ‘substitution’, meaning the commitment and action on behalf of those unable to protect themselves or resist (this kind of advocacy includes forms of benevolence and development co-operation)
3. ‘complementarity’, meaning the exchange of experiences and assistance of various and diverse forms
4. ‘reciprocity’, meaning the exchange of equal or similar forms of experiences and assistance
5. ‘affinity’, meaning common values, emotions, ideas, and concerns, for example among pacifists, socialists, environmental activists, representatives of indigenous minorities and so on
6. ‘restitution’, meaning the recognition of historical injustice as a basis of action

(Kössler & Melber 2007: 32, following Waterman 2001)

Kössler and Melber (2007: 36) go on to add “empathy” to the list and stress also how solidarity today, in an interconnected world, is a political requirement. It is a political requirement because reciprocity is a prerequisite in interconnectedness if it is not to appear as cultural or media imperialism (see Sparks 2007: 94). Empathy is needed to constitute reciprocity. Empathy is the “conscious effort to ‘understand’ the ‘other’ and in this way to actually constitute potential addressees of, or partners in, solidarity” (Kössler & Melber, *ibid*). All members of a society need to, as in the original meaning of the word

solidarity, stand up for the debts and duties incurred by, or imposed upon, the collective or individual members (Kössler & Melber, *ibid*). And today, the society which is most applicable is not the national society to which Durkheim and Renan once applied the term, but a world society (see also Volkmer 2002: 243). The notion of solidarity with strangers that emanates from solidarity between citizens of a nation is stressed by the class and women movements' examples. Solidarity can be transnational. It should then indeed be possible to relate it to a world society, to the world as an imagined community (Anderson 1991) with partners in solidarity being situated on different sides of global divides. The world society is indeed a society that is cut up by severe divides, across as well as inside nations. The nation dependent and panoptic ratio of the cosmographic genres might therefore stand in the way of solidarity directed towards anything else than the traditional imagined communities of nations. This interface of media and the life world is where the media as a moral force, in Roger Silverstone's words (2007: 10) "becomes most relevant, where the world in its otherness is at its most visible". And it is here, as Silverstone (2007: 10-11) continues "in this role and with this responsibility, where the world's media become, indeed must become, ethically constitutional".

We will return to the different understandings of solidarity and what they may contribute to media studies, when operationalized, at the end of this article. Our journey there will initially go through the perhaps most prominent cosmographic genre: foreign news, also known as world news or international news.

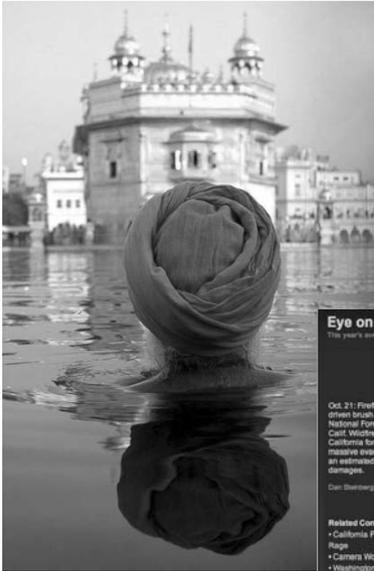
Foreign News, the Epitome of Cosmography

In the foreign news genre the world is still understood as a world that is naturally divided almost exclusively into nations (Roosvall 2005, see also Berglez 2007, Volkmer 2002). This ratio of the genre connects to an understanding of global divides as divides predominantly *between* nations, *between* different parts of the world, as in Yudhishtir Raj Isar's proposed second basic understanding of the notion of "divides" (see Isar's chapter in this book), rather than divides that are common to all societies. Foreign news is a quite conservative and conserving genre compared to some of the trans-national and globalizing media trends that for instance Anheier and Isar (2008, 2007) identifies, even though this genre actually has many features that *could* promote trans-nationalization. Swedish foreign news is about anywhere in the world except about Sweden. This distinction is important in itself since it suggests that events and processes in other nations need to be treated differently than events and processes that occur in the home nation. Thereby it suggests a different attitude towards so called foreign events or processes than attitudes that would be taken towards domestic events and processes. In the end Swedish foreign news is however not really about anywhere. There are clear patterns where certain regions, like Western Europe and the US, are overrepresented and others, like South America and Western Africa, are almost blind spots (Roosvall 2005). To a certain degree this depends on the placement of Swedish foreign correspondents (see also Hannerz 2004), but since most news articles in the Swedish press are from international news agencies (Roosvall 2005: 99), this should have limited bearing. Rather, some areas are more interesting than others; some – like the US and Western Europe – because they are seen as important, both politically and culturally. Others – like the (post-)communist world and the Middle East – because they are seen as dangerous, both politically and

culturally (Roosvall 2005: 315). This division is fairly constant over time, appearing in similar ways both before and after the end of the cold war, and both before and after September 11, 2001 (Roosvall 2005: 183). If cultural globalization is understood, as I suggest, as the questioning of alleged (stereotypical) relationships between geography and identity (Thörn 2004: 45), the relative stability in these representational divides is remarkable. Not only in relation to world order changes, but also in relation to the overwhelming technological globalization that has taken place since the end of the cold war, one could have expected cultural globalization, as the questioning of old-fashioned assumptions about how a certain geography implies a certain identity, to have taken place. In foreign news it has not.

Let's zoom in now on a certain sub-genre of world news, as it appears in Swedish-, US- and UK-based newspapers on the web. It is a genre that is called things like "24 hours in the world" and that displays slide-shows of picture paragraphs. This is an expanding sub-genre. It seems to grow with the excessive increase in access to, circulation of, and interest for pictures from around the world (see also Frosh 2003). A lot of pictures appear simultaneously in both the Swedish and the British and the US newspapers web-editions (see Roosvall 2008a, 2009a forthcoming). What is common for these pictures, and for the foreign news genre as a whole, is how difference is focused, by display of supposedly typical, in fact stereotypical, features from different parts of the world: cars in the US, an ancient statue in Greece, lederhosen in Austria, dryspells in Australia, a turban and a temple in India, etc., and over all colourful and aestheticized displays of nature, buildings, people and their clothes (see Roosvall 2008a, 2009a forthcoming).

While difference is clearly alluded to in the slideshow compilations of the pictures, it is not explicitly discussed or explained. Rather, the pictures accumulate a cultural meaning from each other (see also Hall 1997); a national-cultural meaning, where the nation part is signalled by the structure of the genre. Structural perspectives on the world are however absent. Even in May Day reports, where workers all over the world appear in demonstrations at the same time, structural-political aspects are hard to find, while culture appears as an implicit explanation (see also Roosvall 2008a). A constant focus on national symbols and traditional national-cultural clothing is accompanied by short captions that give almost no clues to the actual conditions that the people who are demonstrating are demonstrating against. The national-cultural notion in the slide-shows hides not only structural-political divides between different parts and nations of the world, but also intra-national divides, and the cross-national character that these divides often have. At the same time it is implied by the ratio of the genre that the global divides are *international*, rather than connected to the cross- or transnational structures that we know exist. There are privileged people in every nation. The nation as a main frame of reference stands in this sense in the way of both global- and intra- and cross-national understandings of significant economic, informational etc. divides, and the national cultures that are being displayed clash severely with the aforementioned notion of cultural globalization. The world here is a de-politicized cultural spectacle.³ Even though solidarity might be an aim for many of the foreign news producers, the overall outcome of culturalistic⁴ (Appadurai 1996) explanations, underlined by the nation dependent ratio of the genre, where one nation looks at and analyzes potentially all others, but not itself, this one-directional, panoptic approach denounces solidarity and ends up in a charity mode.



15 / 15
Amritsar, India: A Sikh worshipper takes a bath in the tank of the Golden Temple

Eye on the World: 2007 Review
The year's events from around the world, captured in photographs.

Oct. 21: Firefighters battle a wind-driven brush fire in Angeles National Forest near Castaic, Calif. Wildfires ravaged southern California for five days, forcing massive evacuations and causing an estimated \$1 billion in damages.

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Eye on the World: 2007 Review
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Aug. 28: Smoke envelops the original site of history in the village of ancient Olympia, near the birthplace of the Olympic Games. Three days of forest fires blazed through Greece, leaving at least 60 people dead and threatening the 2,800-year-old site, one of the most revered sites of antiquity.

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Så firades första maj i andra länder
I Österrike demonstrerade socialdemokraterna i Wien framför stadshuset.

Foto: HEINZ-PETER BADER/REUTERS

◀ Bild 6 av 12 ▶ Bläddra automatiskt: 1 2 3 Fullskärm

Picture paragraphs from world news slide-shows. Top: Sikh and temple in India (*The Guardian*, 24 Hours in Pictures, May 2, pic. 15). Second from the top: Cars in the US (*The Washington Post*, Eye on the World, 2007 review, pic. 24). Third from the top: ancient statue in Greece (*The Washington Post*, Eye on the World, 2007 review, pic. 14). Bottom: people in (neo-)traditionalist garb demonstrate on May Day in Austria (*Svenska Dagbladet*, Around the World in Pictures, May Day special, pic. 6).

Documentaries about Foreign Nations. Monologic and Dialogic Modes

Panopticism is also an intrinsic part in a long-running Swedish foreign magazine programme *Documents from Abroad* [Dokument utifrån]⁵, where documentary films about foreign nations, but not the home nation of the medium, are being broadcast.⁶ A picture from the vignette may illustrate the cosmographic claims of the genre.



Caption: *Documents from Abroad* [Dokument utifrån]. From the vignette of 2006. Permission from Dept. of Audiovisual Media, National Library of Sweden (former Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images/SLBA).

In a comparison between films broadcast in the year of 2000 and the year of 2006 there is a distinct difference in the areas focused upon and how they are treated within the films. In 2000 there is a significant introspection going on, with a lot of films focusing on Europe and European nations, where they have also been produced (see Roosvall 2008b, 2009b forthcoming). The films constitute a trend of critical introspection and can be understood as parts of the deconstruction, the re-negotiated understanding, of the world that started after the end of the cold war (see Ekecrantz 2002).⁷ A focus on single nations, similar to the ratio of foreign news, however, dominates both in the material from 2000 and from 2006 (see Roosvall 2008b, 2009b forthcoming), although there were a few interesting exceptions. In the year 2000 two documentary films about both African countries and Sweden were broadcast. One of them focuses on connections between difficult conditions in Sudan and the presence of a Swedish oil company there and thus illustrates both the interconnectedness of the world and significant power relations.⁸ The other film depicts poverty in both Kenya and in Sweden, and through this approach it actually displays not only global, but also international and intra-national divides.⁹ It connects to an understanding of global divides as divides that are common to all societies, and that exist for instance *within* nation states. This understanding corresponds with Isar's first basic understanding of the notion of "divides"; divides as a predicament common to all societies (see Isar's chapter in this book). The film furthermore connects to solidarity rather than charity in that the equal representation of Kenya and Sweden is connected to a dialogic rather than a monologic mode. The story, the problems, the solutions are not one-directional, but dialogic, reciprocal, mutual, going back and forth between places and people. The North-Western introspection and the dialogue of the documentary films of 2000, has however disappeared in the films of 2006.¹⁰ There is one documentary film

from 2006 that has a transnational character, though. It is a story about the journey of a t-shirt from Germany, where it has been donated, to Tanzania, where a little boy gets it. Again interconnectedness is on the agenda. But the story is one-directional, and in this way connects to charity rather than solidarity and is monologic rather than dialogic in its mode. This is post September 11, post questioning of alleged relationships of geography and identity, it seems; in other words post cultural globalization. North-West appears now to be back to charity, back to talking about or perhaps listening to rather than talking to the subalterns, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) words.

As in the aid galas and the foreign news genre, the televised documentaries about foreign nations generally demonstrate cultural rather than political explanations of differences, but (national-)cultural explanations dominate more in relation to so called third world nations (Roosvall 2009b, forthcoming). Significant global and international divides can thereby be connected to the use of different media narratives and different media modes in relation to different parts of the world.

Solidarity in/and Media Studies

The three cosmographic genres that have been discussed here can be concluded to be rather similar when it comes to their cosmologies, and all of them tend to apply mainly a charity approach towards the rest of the world, even though solidarity approaches can also be detected within the foreign news and documentary film genres. The shared charity attitude can be connected both to the culturalistic, rather than political, explanations that dominate within the genres, and to the panoptic ratio of the genres as such.

Let's turn back now to Kössler and Melber's (2007: 32, following Waterman 2001) list of different understandings of solidarity and see how they can be related to the ratios and modes that have been found in the cosmographic genres, and to the field of media studies over all.

Identity (1) – common interests such as those represented in the classical example of the international worker or labour movement – could be detected in parts in the May Day reporting examples from the web slide-shows of foreign news. Future media studies should among other things investigate what kind of identities that are included in solidarity approaches within the media today and if they correspond to experienced identities among people, thus subsequently problematizing the identity politics concept (see for ex Fraser 2000) in the constitution of a distinction between identity politics generally and the *represented* identity politics that is being played out in and by the media. A similar approach could be taken towards issues of *substitution* (2) – the commitment and action on behalf of those unable to protect themselves or resist – in media representations. Who needs to be substituted today and who actually gets substitutional solidarity in and through the media?¹¹ Here it becomes especially important to monitor the absences in media discourse (Fairclough 1995, see also Spivak 1988). Approaches of *complementarity* (3) – the exchange of experiences and assistance of various and diverse forms – and *reciprocity* (4) – the exchange of equal or similar forms of experiences and assistance – on the other hand will in the media presumably generally be used for other groups than the substitution approach, and for other geopolitical areas of the world. Both complementarity and reciprocity are connected to a

dialogic media mode, but we can distinguish here between a complementarity dialogic mode which could be seen as less equal, but in certain emergency situations perhaps necessary and more realistic, and a reciprocity dialogic mode, where similarity rather than difference is expected but not demanded. Similarity is in this respect related not to the superficial levels of clothing and religious buildings that the world news slide-shows tend to focus on, but to similarities in basic human needs and human features, as in the documentary about poverty in both Kenya and Sweden. The Kenya-Sweden documentary thus displays a reciprocity dialogic mode, whereas the Sudan-Sweden documentary displays a complementarity dialogic mode. The reciprocity dialogic mode moreover connects to *affinity* (5) – common values, emotions, ideas, and concerns, for example among pacifists, socialists, environmental activists, representatives of indigenous minorities – where investigations of when and how affinity is constituted in the cosmographic genres would give excellent clues to the character of and the ratio behind both dominating and competing cosmologies and the anthropologies that are inscribed in them. *Restitution* (6) – the recognition of historical injustice as a basis of action – is perhaps most apparently lacking in the media, and most needed because of the media's cosmographic claims. Earlier cosmologies need to be questioned and rewritten and alternative ones need to be written today. One way of doing this – a crucial one – is to apply a postcolonial perspective (McClintock 1995, Loomba 1998). How does the history – and presence – of colonialism still affect our world and how we see it? Furthermore, Kössler and Melber added empathy to the list. Empathy in itself can result in plain charity, but merged with the six points above, and with political rather than cultural explanations of difference, it provides a solidarity mode that will be necessary for evoking the audience as citizens and not as consumers and thus subsequently address the audience as dispositioned for political action.

The six general approaches to solidarity could in the end be divided into two to three categories that call for different approaches in media studies. Concerning *identity* (1), *substitution* (2), and *affinity* (5), monitoring of the presence/absence of these approaches in relation to groups in media output (and the relating of this to studies of these groups and their perceptions) are suggested. In a second category, *complementarity* (3) and *reciprocity* (4) provides excellent grounds for discussing aspects of solidarity in different media modes, which could be studied – and demanded – even though profit driven media institutions can not be considered solidaritarian per se. There is a need of studies of different media modes of representation in relation to different (imagined) groups, especially monologic and dialogic modes. As seen in the exceptional examples from the documentary film genre dialogic – both complementary and reciprocal – modes are possible. *Restitution* (6), can be connected to this second category in that it does not only refer to different quantities or qualities of representations of certain groups, but also to the constitution of more equal power relations. *Restitution* also in itself constitutes a third category, appearing as the epitome of the policy aspect of all six approaches in that it explicitly calls for change in policies in connection to significant power relations; to significant global, inter- and intra-national divides.

Adding empathy as well as the notion of solidarity as a political requirement to the conceptualization of solidarity, as Kössler and Melber suggests, underlines the need for both symbolic and material action. It furthermore demands a reversal of the relation between culture and politics as explanations in the cosmographic genres; it demands a

focus on structures and politics and the possibility of change, that challenges the naturalization of differences in conditions, as well as the naturalization of related divides between and within different parts of the world, that are implied by the culturalistic explanations (see also Roosvall 2008a).

To conclude there is a need to continue, or resume an introspection where we look at cosmologies of dominating cosmographers and ask: what do these cosmologies say about these cosmographers, about their presupposed audiences, and how they relate to the rest of the world? We – and by we I mean specifically the North-West, where much of the media production (and ownership) is situated, but the same goes actually for everyone – we need to combine outlooks with introspection and subsequently try to bridge the divides between these two approaches. One crucial way to do this is a break-up of genres (see also Volkmer 2002: 242). If the cosmographic genres are also panoptic genres, as they have been disclosed to be, neither divides between outlook and introspection nor significant and unequal divides between different parts of the world are likely to disappear. The break-up of foreign and domestic news genres does however not necessarily mean universalism, which often ultimately has proved to be used in a Euro-centric way. It means universalism only in the sense that term can be modified along the lines of Spivak's (1993) and Ernesto Laclau's (1996) theories (see Thörn 2008). Universalism in this sense can be relativized, its historic and social context-dependence recognized, and thus we can see universalism as not borderlessness, but as transcending of borders, as a possibility of action, of movement, which in a specific situation transgresses a specific interest and particular groups or identities (Thörn 2008). Such an approach would meet both the empathic and political requirements of a solidarity that is essential within the media as well as within media studies today.

Notes

1. Broadcast May 1 2008.
2. Even the Christian activists made this connection, but specified it as a connection between charity and the more conservative parts of church.
3. Structural explanations are generally, in the foreign news genre, reserved for communist or post-communist parts of the world, but also these stories are to a significant degree de-politicized and spectacularized (see Roosvall 2005).
4. Appadurai (1996) suggests the term cultural, and different forms of it, rather than the reifying noun culture, and identifies culturalism as the main way of relating to difference in our globalized world (p 16). Culturalism appears as identity politics on the national level (p 15).
5. A literal translation of the title would be "Documents from the outside".
6. The panoptic notion of this programme is stressed further by the existence of a similar programme reserved for documentaries and reportages about domestic Swedish events. This other programme is called *Documents from the inside* [Dokument inifrån].
7. The introspective aspect can be related to Bill Nichols' (1991) description of the development of the documentary film genre over time, where introspection (and personalization) is seen as a late, and more advanced, stage.
8. *Tron, hoppet och oljan* [Faith, Hope and Oil], broadcast on SVT May 3 2000.
9. *Att vara fattig är ett helvete* [Being Poor is Hell], broadcast on SVT October 18 2000.
10. This tendency contradicts Nichols (1991) one-directional history of the character of documentary films, and supports Stella Bruzzi's (2000) analysis of the genre where she claims that different characteristics are mixed within films, and can not be expected to be part of a one-directional evolution of the genre.

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11. It can of course be discussed whether substitution as such really qualifies as solidarity, since it can be viewed as non-reciprocal, but it still includes essential elements of action, that differs decisively from charity approaches, and does not exclude a reciprocal aspect in a second stage.

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