A critical discourse analysis of Twitter messages of three international humanitarian organisations about Refugees

UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP

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Abstract

Public discourses produced by international organisations around global humanitarian crises are often discussed and challenged by scholars in the field of Communication for Development. The purpose of this study is to critically analyse the communicative practices of three United Nations humanitarian organisations, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP in relation to refugees on Twitter. The critical discourse analysis has looked at the language and the discursive practices of these organisations in order to reveal the kind of knowledge they share and the ways they portray the displaced people in front of the western and non-western audience. It explores the selected tweets in the light of the post-colonial critique to observe how they construct social relations between the refugee, audience and organisation, and whether they affect positively or negatively the distance between them. The research is also concerned with the organisations’ practices in the post-humanitarian context, and it explores the implications of the increasingly market-oriented contemporary humanitarian communication on the United Nations’ organisations. Furthermore, it tends to reveal how they engage the public with universal moral claims to support the audience’s commitment with the case of refugees. Based on the research findings, it critically discusses what solidarity means today, in our consumerist cosmopolitan society, and addresses the eventual risks of communicative practices that place institutional interests above humane values.
1 Introduction

The way refugees have been portrayed in the international and national media in various countries, is a frequently discussed topic since 2015, the so-called European refugee crises. The mass media representations of displaced people are often manipulated by the socio-political context of the given time and place in which they are produced. The authenticity of the information often remains unknown, while the complexity of the stories is not revealed. These media representations, however, have a crucial role in shaping the image the audiences create about refugees. In this environment, communication of humanitarian organisations is critical to produce authentic knowledge and inspire appropriate interpretation of global issues by revealing the real stories with their complexities about the people forced to flee. Besides, the digital world provides new and better possibilities to involve refugees in the knowledge production about their own lives and share a variety of narratives that allow the audience to assess situations and reflect on them critically. (Cornwall, 2016, p. 141) It also opens a window to a transformative process in the field of development by shifting the communicative practices from the conventional ‘rescue’ narratives to the fairer inclusive ones.

Only a few studies are focusing on the messages humanitarian organisations produce and share on about refugees on social media, however, public discourses and communication practices of these organisations - including the United Nations, NGOs and INGOs – about the global South, are often contested by academics in the field of Communication for Development (C4D). Humanitarian communication is often criticized for reinforcing the neoliberal hegemony and the ideology of the ‘white saviour industrial complex’ (Cornwall, 2016, p. 154) by depicting communities of the South as dependents from the western (or Northern) aid industry. Besides, critiques often concerned with these discursive practices for prioritizing institutional interests and ‘commodifying’ their activities for fundraising purposes.
1.1 Aim and research questions

This study aims to critically analyse the United Nations humanitarian organisations’ discourses about refugees on Twitter, their language and discursive practices and their relation with the broader socio-political context.

Three major humanitarian organisations Twitter messages have been scrutinized in this study:
- United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- UN’s World Food Programme (WFP)

The main research question is:

*How do the Twitter messages of international humanitarian organisations portray refugees between 2015 to 2019?*

- What kind of power relations are reflected in these messages?
- What kind of reactions can these discourses provoke in the audience?

1.2 Selection

To be able to respond to the research questions, the study have scrutinizing qualitatively 180 (3x60) tweets from UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP between 2015 and 2019. The focus of the three United Nations organisations is intentional as I wanted to explore humanitarian communication practices within the UN and observe the eventual differences and similarities. By analysing the selected discourses, the research tends to reveal the image international humanitarian organisations can potentially construct about refugees in the audience and the ideologies they produce and/or reinforce in their communicative practices. The study also sheds light on to what extent these discourses follow the techniques of the increasingly marketized field of corporate strategic communication and wants to reveal how can this affect the moral engagement of the public with the displaced people.
The study is focusing on the genre of humanitarian appeals produced on Twitter. Daniel Robert DeChaine defines appeals as “a purely textual communicative practice, which engages with moral claims to common humanity in order to raise awareness around specific humanitarian agencies and their cause.” (DeChaine, 2005, p. 6–7 in Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 51). The word “textual” refers to both verbal and visual communicative practices. A broad range of materials can be identified as humanitarian appeals, but this study is concerned with the ones international humanitarian organisations share on Twitter.

The study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the interdiscursivity and intertextuality of the texts and their relation to social practice. Still, it does not reveal the production and consumption phases of the discourses, which can be considered as a limitation with regards to the final conclusion. However, the analysis is informed by the public communication strategies and practices of the three humanitarian organisations as introduced in Chapter 2. Background In addition to the verbal content, it explores the visual elements of the selected texts taking into consideration the ‘multimodality’ factor of Twitter discourses (written and visual elements such as photo, video, graphics, emoticons, etc.). (Machin, 2018, p. 185)

Two main theoretical approaches have been identified for this study to address the research questions. The first is the postcolonial and neoliberal critique. This theoretical approach is relevant to explore whether communicative practices about western-originated humanitarian and development activities can reproduce colonial and neoliberal discourses. These two approaches are introduced under Chapter 3.1.1 ‘Colonial relations of power and neoliberal hegemony in humanitarian appeals’. The second theoretical approach helps the research to explore the discourses in the post-humanitarian context, and explore how the market-oriented communicative practices affect audience’s relationship and engagement with the humanitarian cause and solidarity.
1.3 Limitations

This study has limitations in terms of the selected data. The humanitarian organisations observed in this study have different Twitter accounts specific to each country they operate in. Communication practices on country-specific channels may differ from one another in terms of their language, rhetoric and content. To conduct a comprehensive analysis which covers the entire representational field would have required the collection of a large amount of data and their observation in the country-specific political and social context. The study thus focuses only on the discourses the organisations share on their global accounts, with the assumption that they convey “universal” messages and represent the agencies’ overall strategic directions, norms and practices when it comes to communicating about refugees. Due to this narrowed focus in the research’s field and the limited number of scrutinised data, the study cannot lead to general conclusions about the communication practices of UN humanitarian organisations.

Another limitation of this study is that while it focuses on the visual elements of the selected texts, the additional content that the discourses share by using hyperlinks is not revealed.

1.4 Application to the field of communication for development

According to Florencia Enghel, Communication for Development (C4D) and social change “refers to intentional and strategically organized processes of face-to-face and/or mediated communication aimed at promoting dialogue and action to address inequality, injustice, and insecurity for the common good” (Eghel, 2013, p. 119). Communicative practices of international humanitarian organisations tend to support development with a dual purpose: using communication to do good and communicating about the good done. (Florencia Enghel, 2018, pp. 1-4) The two dominant models of communication for development are diffusion and participation (Nancy Morris, 2003 in Florencia Enghel, 2018, p. 3). Social marketing and large-scale media campaigns are typical forms of the diffusion model, while the
participatory model draws on Paulo Freire’s account to which central is the dialogue between the development practitioners and people of concern to assess their needs, design and implement programmes and sustainable solutions. (Thomas Tufte, 2009, p. 2) This study explores practices related to the diffusion model and informs the field of C4D about the UN humanitarian organisations’ practices associated with communicating about development.

2 Background

2.1 UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) work in close collaboration to provide relief assistance to the world’s most vulnerable people. These humanitarian organisations have key role in providing relief for refugees and those people who are forced to flee their homes due to armed conflicts or natural disaster.

UNHCR is the leading UN agency in coordinating international action and making sure that rights and well-being of the people on the run are safeguarded. In a humanitarian emergency, UNHCR delivers essential aid, including emergency shelter and protection support for refugees and internally displaced people around the world. The UNHCR was established on December 14, 1950 by the UN General Assembly, and its work today is guided by the United Nations Convention adopted in 1951. The UNICEF’s global work on child health is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and they strive to promote protection, health care and education rights of displaced, refugee and stateless children. The WFP provides food assistance in humanitarian emergencies (conflict, post-conflict or disaster situations) for the displaced people who have no access to resources and nutrition. The WFP is fighting against global hunger and their work, similar to other UN entities, is today guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (United Nations, 2020)
2.2 The world’s Refugees

Refugees are people who are forced to flee their homes and cannot return to their country of origin due to war, violence, persecution or circumstances caused by natural disasters. (UNHCR, What is a Refugee? , 2020) Refugees’ protection is defined under international law that prevents them being returned or expelled to situations that threaten their life, freedom or safety. According to UNHCR the world is witnessing the ever-highest level of displacement today, when nearly 1 person is forced to flee in every two seconds. In 2019, the UNHCR counted 70.8 million people in the world who had to leave their homes due to armed conflicts or natural disaster. (UNHCR, Figures at a Glance, 2020)

2.3 Public communication practices of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP

There are limited number of public strategic and policy documents on the communication strategies of international humanitarian organisations. Therefore, this chapter relies on the available literature in this regard and highlights the main principles that guide the communication practices of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, while it sheds light on the similarities and differences between those.

The public communication strategy of UNHCR for 2015 articulates the overall objectives of the agency’s global communication practices. According to this policy document, communication practices tend to stimulate the global media coverage of people of concern by storytelling practices showing the refugees ‘courage’ and ‘humanity’, support host countries, raising funds and gaining political support for ‘protection and solutions’ for people of concern and their host communities, ‘strengthen public awareness’ of UNHCR and its partner’s and donor’s work and build a ‘coherent and positive UNHCR brand identity’. (UNHCR, UNHCR’s communications strategy, 2015) UNICEF in its Global Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy for 2014–2017 determined that all types of communication have to be constructed around ‘equity’ and ‘rights’ while advocacy messages have
to be global and ‘fully integrated into programme and policy work’. The UNICEF strives to make sure that public advocacy is driven by ‘action for children’, essentially ‘people-focused’ and ‘embrace and embody innovation’. In addition to this, UNICEF also puts an accent on the development of brand identity. (UNICEF, UNICEF’s Global Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy 2014-2017, 2014-2017) According to WFP’s Corporate Communications Strategy and Branding 2016 document, the organization is driven by communicating “the how, the why and the what” necessary to generate the political will to eliminate hunger”. (WFP, WFP CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND BRANDING, 2020, p. 3) They strive to connect better with the people they serve, have more dialogues and highlight their stories by storytelling practices, while focusing on the building of a strong brand identity. In addition to this, UNICEF and UNHCR have emphasized the importance of engaging ‘good will ambassadors’ who can serve as key influencers to advocate for their cause and draw the public’s attention to humanitarian emergency situations.

There are differences between the three organisations’ communication practices which stem mainly from the difference in their fundraising methods. (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005, p. 684) The UN Programmes and Funds, including UNICEF, UNHCR and the WFP are funded via voluntary contributions from member countries, but private donors and corporate partnerships have increasing importance in the financing of these entities. A significant part of UNICEF’s fundraising activities is carried out by its National Committees working in 36 different countries and collect donations using digital and offline methods (i.e. selling postcards on the streets or commercial centres, aid concerts, etc.) on a national level. This independence in terms of fundraising practices provides UNICEF with a wider scale of opportunities for establishing partnerships and implement complex marketing campaigns compared to UNHCR and WFP, and this strongly affects their public communication strategies as well. UNHCR and WFP heavily rely on voluntary and assessed contributions from governments, but private donors and corporate partnerships are more and more important for them. While sponsorships are
characteristic mainly to UNICEF, engaging celebrities as ‘influencers’ or ‘good will ambassadors’ is a common public communication tool for all the three organizations for advocating their mandate via globally appreciated public figures and inspire the audience to take action to help refugees, children or fight against global hunger. The tendency of trying to engage more private and corporate donors and partners require a different type of humanitarian communication strategy with a more consumerist view, that can commodify the subject of the mandate of these organisations. In this regard, UNICEF seems to be the leading entity, as communicating on children is the most effective tool to engage the public and collect funds. (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005, p. 684)

The position of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP is politically sensitive as they have difficulty to keep their independence from donor governments or the military. This type of ‘dependence’ plays crucial role in their public communication strategies, as messages they construct and convey on the national or global level, can have serious effect on their work and the assistance they get to deliver to their people of concerns. (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005) Humanitarian communication is thus shaped by the complex political, economic and sociocultural context specific to a region and assures a high level of sensitivity when it addresses the case of refugees. (Scott, 2014, p. 139) Working closely with journalists and the media may be helpful to address some of these tensions, and inform the public transparently on humanitarian emergencies, but the organisations can never fully resolve the problems stemming from the given socio-political context.

Correspondents and humanitarian organisations’ press officers and field workers collaborate more closely in humanitarian news production today, and have a great role to play when it comes to shaping the public knowledge about refugees. It is this expanded collaboration with the media that calls for a more transparent and consistent public communication strategy of these organisations. (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005, p. 691)
2.4 Representations of refugees in humanitarian communication

This chapter provides an overview of the available academic literature in relation to the genre of humanitarian communication.

“…there is no ideal form of humanitarian communication, only a series of similarly problematic compromises in response to the intractable and often irresolvable tensions inherent within NGO communications.” (Scott, 2014, p. 138)

Academics in the field development communication are highly focused on scrutinizing the strategies and practices implemented by humanitarian organisations. Studies show that displaced people are often portrayed on a ‘negative’, ‘dehumanising’ or ‘homogenous’ ways in the discursive practices of international humanitarian organizations, who portray them without their history, identity and show them as helpless and needful masses who depend on the West’s solidarity and relief. (Chouliaraki, 2013; Dogra, 2013; Scott, 2014)

In the past decades, humanitarian organisations’ discursive practices were often criticized for their discursive practices for trying to provoke grand emotions in the public but disregarding the ethical and humane perspectives and blurring the authenticity of a given situation. Many earlier humanitarian campaigns and visual representations were characterized by the ‘shock effect’ style of appeals (Scott, 2014, pp. 140-142), which wanted to mobilize the feeling of guilt or pity in the audiences by focusing on the “raw reality of the suffering of worthy victims”. (Scott, 2014, p. 148) Although this style of appeals was more dominant in Europe and North America until 1985 – until the heavily criticized representations of the Ethiopian famine in 1983-85 - scholars show that humanitarian organisations still rely on it in their public discourses to move the ‘spectator’ into action. (Dogra, 2012, p. 64; Scott, 2014, p. 141; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019) In this style, visualizing and representing the ‘raw reality’ reality of the desperate situation and suffering of refugees is catalytic in moving the audience into action. However, this results in
depoliticizing, dehumanizing and de-historicizing the displaced people. (Chouliaraki, 2011 in Scott, 2014, p. 141) Characteristic to this style are those visual methods that overcome the distance between the audience and ‘distant sufferer’ (Chouliaraki, 2013) such as the close camera focus and “close up, on naked or semi-naked bodies to provide graphic evidence of malnourishment, for example.” (Scott, 2014, p.141) Another tendency in ‘shock effect’ style of appeals is showing the ones in need as ‘ideal victims’ which means that they construct the distant sufferer both as ‘innocent and as helpless’ (Höijer, 2004 in Scott, 2014, p.143). ‘Shock effect’ style of appeals has been heavily criticized in the academia not only for lacking context and historical background but also for portraying refugees on a negative way, showing them as needful, ‘helpless and passive objects’ whose dignity is often disregarded as they are often shown in ethically questionable visual representations. (Scott, 2014, p. 145) Besides, while they were proved to be effective for fundraising efforts, in the long run, they caused *compassion fatigue* in the audience. (Katherine Kinnick et al. 1996 in Scott 2014, p. 146)

In response, humanitarian communications shifted its focus to a more ‘positive’ way of representation of which is often called as ‘deliberate positivism’ (Lidchi, 1999 in Scott, 2014, p. 149). This style of representation wants to show the importance and the positive implications of the aid agencies’ work in order to raise funds. By showing images of grateful refugees who have been provided with shelter and food, the audience can learn about implications donations can have on their ‘beneficiaries’. (Scott, 2014, p. 149) Similar to the shock effect appeals, this style of representation also relies on showing the ‘raw reality’ but respects more the dignity of the distant others and gives the importance of showing their agency. It often personalizes individuals, by introducing them by their name or giving them a voice to tell their stories, which helps to create an intimacy with the audience. This intimacy and emphasis on agency can create ‘shared humanity’ and the feeling of ‘empathy’ that brings refugees closer to the audiences who may perceive them as one of ‘them’. (Chouliarki 2010, in Scott, 2014, p. 150)
Contradicting the fact that they are built on an argument around common humanity, both styles lack a moral sensibility and show the refugees in constant need and as dependent from the ‘Western self’, which have a strong dehumanizing effect. (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019, p. 478) This western superiority over developing countries can enlarge the power relations and distance between the refugees and the wealthy western spectators. While the deliberate positivism tends to give voice to the refugees, it subordinates them to the institutional interests of these organisations as narratives are usually constructed and mediated by the aid agencies. (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019, p. 483) In addition to his, these styles promote short-term and interventionist solutions, while they lack longer-term efforts at building a constituency of support for development. (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 110) After being gradually criticized by academia, and with the expansion of the digital media, a new form of humanitarian communication evolved. The ‘post-humanitarian style’ of appeals (Chouliaraki, 2010 and 2013) breaks with intending to inspire grand emotions in the audience by using ‘conventional’ charity advertising practices. Instead, it wants to reach out the self, so that the ‘spectators’ can evaluate a situation decide whether or not acting over a cause by their own value system. The post-humanitarian communication will be further elaborated in Chapter 3. Theoretical framework.

Another critique of UN organisations’ communication practices about displaced people hav been shared by Shani Ograd in his analysis of ‘Representations of Migration’. In his work he shows how discourses and media representation of refugees can constitute symbolic resources for people to develop their imagination and judgment on ‘migration’ and ‘people’s possible lives’. He shares a critique about the representations developed by humanitarian organisations for promoting the “dream narrative of migration”. (Ograd, 2012, p. 212) He argues that these ‘dreams’, constructed of the positive experiences and opportunities refugees have in the new place or country of asylum, lack a certain level of authenticity and provide only one type of interpretation to the audience. They shed light on the agency and the potential socio-economic contribution of refugees in the host
community, but miss to explain other perspectives, complex implications and provide context. This ‘polarized’ type of discourse tends to construct the public’s imagination on a closed and concrete way and does not give any space for debate. (Ograd, 2012, p. 242) Therefore, it can have the potential to devise the audience and enlarge the distance between refugees and the spectator. (Ograd, 2012, p. 242)

2.5 Online humanitarian communication

This chapter provides a brief overview of the on the online humanitarian communication, and introduce UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP social media activities with particular attention to their Twitter channels.

Today, humanitarian organisations have better and cheaper solutions to convey their messages due to the expansion of the digital sphere. They do not need to spend anymore on costly campaigns to compete with the corporate sector. Besides, digital solutions can help bring the audience closer to refugees, their situations and stories by creative audio-visual methods and real-time dialogue. Moreover, it provides the public with easy ways to engage with a cause, via clicktivism1. (Scott, 2014, p. 161) ‘Clicktivism’ makes simple for the audience to take action for a good purpose, but due to this simplicity, it is often challenged for its capacity of inspiring self-satisfaction instead of promoting real engagement of a humanitarian cause.

The three observed organizations use similar social media channels and practices. The main channels used by them include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn.

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1 Clicktivism is defined as “the use of social media and other online methods to promote a cause” (Oxford English Dictionary), however it is not only used to promote a cause but it actually gives the possibility for the public to take action and be part of an activism in only one or two ‘clicks.’
2.5.1 Twitter

Twitter is the leading social networking service, which has become increasingly popular in the past few years. According to Twitter’s Q3 2019 report, it has 145 million monetizable daily active users, which shows a growth of 17% since Q3 2018. Organizations publish they principal updates via this ‘micro-blogging application’ where the Tweets are restricted to 140 characters. Although this causes some challenges for organizations to formulate powerful messages, Twitter offers multiple solutions to make the visual content of Tweets more attractive (i.e. TwitPic and TwitVid), while hashtags, hyperlinks and rapid diffusion of information by retweeting messages boost the messages popularities and help engage the stakeholders. (Lovejoy, 2012, p. 6) Twitter gives the opportunity for its users to start public dialogues with their audiences, so that two-way communication or cross promotion can be established between users by using the “@” symbol. This requires an effort from the organizations, however being responsive is crucial in case they want to gain and maintain credibility in their audiences.

Twitter is indispensable for international organisations and government bodies to broadcast their stories. According to a study on International Organisations on Social Media in 2017, published by www.twiplomacy.com, Twitter is the most popular social media channel used by the 97 multi-lateral international organisations and NGOs the research was focusing on. (Twiplomacy, 2017) Despite of being mainly text-driven, the use of visual contents is very popular among the international organisations. The study states that in 2017, only five percent of the analyzed tweets were plain text updates. Arguably, when it comes to analyzing the tweets of international organisations, visual content must be examined as well.

To have a better reach, share location specific contents and be able to communicate on the local language of the region they operate in, humanitarian organisations tend to have multiple Twitter accounts in addition to their global channel. Due to the limitations of this study, my the research is focusing on the global Twitter accounts the three humanitarian organisations: @Refugees
The accounts were created with one year difference; UNHCR’s in 2008, UNICEF’s in 2009 and WFP’s also in 2009. Figure 1 shows the number of tweets they have shared on Twitter since they joined to date. We can also see the number of followers of their pages, however, it needs to be noted, that the number of followers is not representative, as it may contain fake profiles.

![Followers vs Tweets Chart]

Figure 1: Number of tweets and Twitter followers of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP as at 01/11/2019 (Source: https://accountanalysis.app/)

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourse analysis looks beyond the study of language and intends to reveal, e.g. interactions between sentences in a given text, the way sentences are linked together, the role of talk and texts in constructing the social world, ideologies determining different forms of speech and text or "the way in which psychological issues become live in human practices". (Potter, 2012, p. 220)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a cross-disciplinary framework, a fundamentally critical social research aimed at revealing the relationship between ideologies and discourses by paying close attention to semantic properties of texts
that can have some effect to reproduce or maintain a given social problem, political or institutional power. Scholars engaged in CDA are driven by a critique towards a social phenomenon reproducing and maintaining unequal power relations through the use of language, and characterise their work as explicitly critical and political orientation to studying discourse. (Potter, 2012, p. 220) CDA relies on the analysis of texts (verbal or visual) or transcripts of oral interactions as data. Studies are often focused on “discursive manifestations of (hegemonic) oppression within a particular network of practices such as education or the media” (Weninger, 2012, p. 147) thus in their scope of analysis, we find media texts, political speeches, documents published by government agencies, institutions, or international organisations. (Potter, 2012) CDA is subsententially concerned with power and struggle over power.

This study is using Fairclough’s approach and his three-dimensional model to reveal the power relations and sociocultural practices regarding the selected discourses in light of the below presented theories. CDA was first conceptualised as a framework by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, Language and power, 1989) who wanted to study the connection between the use of language and the assertion of power through language. For Fairclough, the discourse is not only ‘constitutive but also as constituted’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 65) which itself can shape ‘knowledge, identified, social- and power relations” while it can be also influenced by’ social practices and structures. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 65) In other words, for Fairclough, discourse play crucial role in constructing and shaping social identities, social relations, systems of knowledge and meaning. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 67)

Fairclough’s approach differs from the poststructuralist position from certain perspectives, but mainly because it uses a theoretical and methodological model to analyse spoken and written language to reveal social action. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 66) This is contested in poststructuralism due to the subjective nature of the historical and cultural conditions. However, Fairclough’s approach is careful to analyse the discourse within the social structure, social relations and
social processes they are located in and adopt a both “‘insider’s’ (directly engaged) and an ‘outsider’s’ perspective (theorist) to analyse and reveal the ideologies behind the communicative interaction.

Fairclough, to understand better broader social processes in which a discursive practice is located, relies on social theories of late modernity. Important for this study Fairclough’s approach of the ‘marketisation of discourse’ which refers to a societal development process in late modernity, “whereby market discourses colonise the discursive practices of public institutions”.

3.2 The postcolonial theory

In the era of the European Enlightenment many philosophers shared the notion of ‘universality’, claiming that all human beings are the same and thus access to progress and freedom should be applied universally. (Mcewan, 2008, p. 79) This meant the emergence of ‘development’ thinking based on Eurocentric ideas, although during the imperialism the notion ‘development’ has mainly served to justify the modernization and westernization processes in the South. Colonialism and ‘development’ have strongly related roots in the history, while postcolonialism can be understood as a product of ‘development’ as imperialist initiative. (Mcewan, 2008, p. 88) Postcolonial theories emerged from the main political, ideological and military resistance of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which were all focused on struggles around racism, liberationist politics, challenges to white political and cultural domination and the asentation of black identities and cultures. (Mcewan, 2008, pp. 37-38) Postcolonialism condemns the West’s cultural dominance, criticizes the Eurocentric approaches and modernization processes and urges for changing the discourses from within the international development processes. (Mcewan, 2008, pp. 102-106) Postcolonialism draws attention to the risk of advocating ‘global cultural convergence’ through ‘universalizing models’ and neoliberal approaches, which may ‘constitute the contemporary versions of modernization theory’. (Pieterse, 2004, pp. 7-21 in McEwan, 2008 p. 110) It is however acknowledged by theorists
that there were significant changes in development theories with regard to these initiatives since the mid-1990s. (Mcewan, 2008, p. 110)

3.2.1 Colonial relations of power and neoliberal hegemony in humanitarian appeals

To introduce the post-colonial critics with regards to humanitarian organisations' discourses about refugees, I refer to Nandita Dogra's conceptual framework and theoretical account. (Dogra, 2012) This section reveals to what extent the portrays of refugees are characterized by “othering” in the public discourses of international humanitarian organizations, how the ‘difference’ between ‘us’ (North) and ‘them’ (South) is depicted and thus reproduce the colonial rhetoric.

Dogra argues that international development and humanitarian agencies reproduce the ‘long history of colonialism’ in their communication in multiple ways. (Dogra, 2012, p. 212) She analysed the discursive practices of a number of public messages produced by International NGOs (INGOs) and for this, she applied her ‘postcolonial lens’ conceptual framework (colonialism, Orientalism, Africanism and ‘development’) to show how the global North (‘Developed World’) and the global South (‘Majority World’) are portrayed as distant, different but still as ‘one’ in the selected discourses. (Dogra, 2012, p. 17)

Portrays of refugees, in many ways, represent them as different, distant and separate from the global North, even though discourses tend to convey ‘counter-hegemonic’ messages and foster the ideology of ‘one humanity’. It is this ‘paradoxical logic’ of ‘difference’ and ‘oneness’ that characterizes INGOs' public messages when it comes to representations of people from the global South. (Dogra, 2012) While there is a rhetoric of distinction in the messages of INGOs, such as ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘the West’ and ‘East’, ‘here’ and ‘there’ or the ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, they often share justice claims about solidarity, one humanity (‘universality’) and human rights appeals. She argues, that these justice claims and arguments
are the principal ways international organisations can connect refugees with western audiences. (Dogra, 2012) However, these universal images of ‘oneness’ deprive refugees from their complex situations and historical context and do not explain “the complex, longer-term, structural causes of suffering.” (Scott, 2014, p.144) The postcolonial critique argues that claiming ‘one humanism’ excludes the historical roles and connections (i.e. colonialism) and miss to reveal the causes of today’s inequalities. This can deepen the feeling of injustice in the South, while it enlarges the gaps between poverty and prosperity among different regions. Besides, these types of representations leave the western audience with universal, dehistoricized and aid-dependent portrayals of distant others who should be saved by people of the global North in the name of ‘solidarity’ and ‘one humanity’ and thus may uphold and further strengthen the power relations between North and the South.

The idea of the western-dominated development comes along with the West’s political and economic ideologies and institutionalization to promote transnational capitalism in the South. Neoliberalism, as an “extension of competitive markets into all areas of life” (Springer, 2016, p. 2) promotes the western idea of material improvement and does not consider the culture-centric approaches. Those discourses about refugees which tend to promote and highlight their economic ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘self-reliance’ contribute to West’s economic dominance by placing refugees in a consumerist-centric society. (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018) Discourses around empowerment and inclusion into western systems often serve the purpose of resettlement and inclusion as “the refugee… to be accepted as citizen might require to fulfil what the receiving society/culture perceives as the markers of ‘true’ citizens”. (Nayar, 2010, p. 198) While this type of representation may be effective to inspire the western audience in showing hostility towards refugees, it does not consider the own cultural, social and economic values of the displaced people. Besides, similar discourses foster the individual empowerment of the refugees, disconnecting them form their
communities and from their country of origin, instead of rebuilding this relationship with the state. (Duffield, 2019)

3.3 Post-Humanitarianism

There is a gradual shift in humanitarianism in terms of its objectives, functioning and ways of providing assistance. Humanitarian agencies today have significantly limited space to manoeuvre compared to the nineteenth century due to new political barriers, security risks and sovereignty of donor countries. (Duffield, 2019)

In this environment a new humanitarianism evolves, which builds on neoliberal ideologies, seeks to achieve a behaviour change in communities of the global South by focusing on ‘innovation’ and ‘resilience’ and besides government funds, relies increasingly on private and corporate sponsorships. (Duffield, 2019) This technologically updated, “politically safe, logoed, glitzy and smart” (Duffield, 2019, p. 16) humanitarianism evolved with a new way of humanitarian communication in order to be competitive in the contemporary consumerist environment dominated by private sector entities. Today’s consumerist way of thinking and the technological expansion also created a new audience that required a different type approach from humanitarian communication to address issues of the global South. (Chouliaraki, 2010)

3.3.1 The post-humanitarian style of appeals

The post-humanitarian style of appeals has been first discussed by Lilie Chouliaraki, who has approached “the communicative structure of humanitarianism as a theatre of suffering”. (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 27) She explored the communicative event as spectacle, in which ‘refugees’ are actors and the western audience is the ‘spectator’. She argues that humanitarian organisations, in order to “renew the legitimacy of humanitarian communication” (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 108 and Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 13) and in response to the ‘compassion fatigue’, had to move from the emotion-oriented ‘discourse of pity’ to the ‘post-humanitarian discourse of irony’ in their communication strategies. The ‘discourse
of pity’ refers to the earlier styles of appeals (see more in Chapter 2. Background) which wanted to provoke grand emotions in the audiences by using a ‘victim-oriented’ narrative and photorealistic images such as the ‘shock-effect’ and the ‘deliberate positivism” of humanitarian communication.

Shifting the focus from the conventional ‘affective’ style of influencing, the emerging ‘post-humanitarian’ form of appeals addresses the morality of the ‘Western self’ to achieve solidarity with the displaced people, instead of trying to mobilize the spectator by emphasizing ‘common humanity’. To mobilize ‘low-intensity emotions,’ it uses ironic rhetoric and a reflexive type of narrative in order to contrast the spectators with their own moral norms and inspire action. What characterizes the language of this new style of appeal is a ‘meaning-making system’, ‘textual games’ and a ‘contrast’ in the narrative due to which the ‘spectators’ are faced to their own cultural distinctness rather than that of the refugees. (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 115) Visual elements of this style still work with representations of suffering, but on a different and more creative way by combining various audio-visual elements that blur the case of the suffering itself. They do not want to shock the audience by “exposing the extremities of ‘bare life’” and tend to reveal the causes of a situation. (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 118) However, Chouliaraki argues that there is a 'de-emotionalization of the cause' in this new type of humanitarian communication in which the case of suffering “becomes disembedded from discourses of morality”. (Chouliariki, 2010. p. 118-119) The contrasting elements in language and visual content also help to build up the moral agency by concentrating on the ‘self’ instead of universal claims. These contrasts create a ‘reflexivity’ in the audience and render “the psychological world of the spectator a potential terrain of self-inspection” (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 118) where they can judge and decide based on their own value system how to act on the case of refugees. This ‘self-inspection’ has critical importance in reinforcing cosmopolitan sensibility of self-fulfilment, which imply the moral obligation of ‘taking action’ for a cause. At the same time, it has the risk of turning the attention away from the broader political context and historical background of the cause of
suffering as the focus is on the act of helping over the ‘distant other’ and on the ‘self-gratitude’ that is related to it. (Chouliariki, 2010)

Post-humanitarian appeals prioritize corporate branding strategies to marketize their cause instead of sharing universal claims and influencing the audience on what they should think and feel about a humanitarian situation. According to the post-humanitarian critique, organisations today focus on building organizational brand and image by moving “from explicit marketing of suffering as a cause towards an implicit investment in the identity of the humanitarian agency itself” (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 118). This endeavour is contested by many scholars today, as it seems to rely on the effectiveness of the branding and marketing strategies of these institutions instead of engaging the public with broader moral values.

Another characteristic of the post-humanitarian appeal is the ‘technologization of action’ that usually requires low time engagement from the audiences, such as ‘clicktivism’ (see in Chapter 2 Background) by which a simple ‘mouse click’ can be enough to act for a cause. (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 117) This ‘effortless immediacy’\(^2\) meet well the expectations of today’s consumerist and cosmopolitan audience and gives a simple way for the western ‘spectator’ to stand in solidarity with refugees and practice self-expression – whether or not for egocentric purposes. (Chouliaraki, 2012) This simplified style of action misses claiming why help is needed and thus abandons the ‘universal morality’ that characterized the emotion-oriented appeals. (Chouliariki, 2010, p. 117) This is why post-humanitarian communication becomes vulnerable to critiques as it might not be able to inspire long-term ‘commitment to moral causes’. (Scott, 2014, p. 156)

It is very common in post-humanitarian communication that the story of the refugee or the cause of the displacement and its difficulties are told by public

\(^2\) Immediacy is defined as ‘a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium and believe that he [or she] is in the presence of the objects of representation’ (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 272, in Scott, 2014)
figures and celebrities. UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP all have similar partnerships with celebrities who serve as 'goodwill ambassadors' to advocate for the refugees and other people of concern. (i.e. Angelina Jolie, Ben Stiller, Mia Farrow, etc.) The risk of this type of communicative practice, according to Chouliaraki, is that the attention can easily be taken away from the refugee and turned to the celebrity, contributing to constructing their image as 'heroically' helping vulnerable others instead of engaging the spectator with the subject and the cause of suffering. (Chouliaraki, 2012) Moreover, “instead of enabling us to hear their voice and get an insight into their lives, it treats distant others as voiceless props that evoke responses of self-expression, but cannot in themselves become anything more than shadow figures in someone else’s story”. (Chouliaraki, 2011, p. 372)
4 Methodology

4.1 The three-dimensional model of CDA

The three-dimensional model of CDA is one of the most frequently used analytical method in CDA. It has been developed by Norman Fairclough who applied a three-level model to analyse discourses revealing their micro-, meso- and macro-level interpretations. (Potter, 2012) His aim was to explore a particular social event from three angles: the text (description - spoken or written language); discursive practices (interpretation – processing analysis) and discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice (explanation – social analysis). (Fairclough, Discourse and Social Change, 1992, p. 93)

4.1.1 Text (description)

This phase of the analysis is “concerned with formal properties of text” (Fairclough, 1989 p. 26). It is about analysing the textual-linguistic features and their organization within the discourse. (Short, 2009, p. 8) Several tools can be applied to explore the linguistic features of the texts, and scrutinize how they relate to social context and construct reality. These tools are: interactional control (who is setting the agenda?) (Fairclough, 1992, p. 152); ethos (how identities are constructed) (Fairclough, 1992, p. 166), metaphors, grammar and wording. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 83)

This study is looking at the vocabulary (or wording) of the selected texts by focusing on the choice of different words, while it explores their grammatical features such as transitivity, nominalization and modality. In this phase of the research, I explored how identities of refugees and those of the readers and institutions are constructed by the wording and grammatical elements used in the selected texts.

Transitivity is concerned with how “events and processes are connected (or not connected) with subjects and objects” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 83) in order to reveal what kind of ideologies are reflected in the discourse. In order worlds, transitivity is the way an idea is transferred through words to share one’s thoughts
about how s/he understands the reality. For instance, using passive form can describe an event as a ‘natural phenomenon’ without no ‘agent being responsible for it emphasizing the ‘effect’ itself. Similarly, *nominalisation* whereby instead of identifying the agent responsible for the ‘effect’, a “noun stands for the process” causes reducing the agency of (e.g. ‘There were….’ It has been…’ etc.) (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 83)

The *modality* is concerned with the speaker’s ‘degree of affinity with or affiliation to’ her/his statement. It reveals the degree of commitment with a particular case, affects the construction of ‘social relations’ and knowledge-meaning systems. For example, ‘truth claims’ can be a type of modality: the speaker is committed to her his statement by using indicative grammar. This constructs a ‘particular knowledge-claim’ as it does not communicate any degree of uncertainty. ‘Permission claims’ are also characteristics to modality and can be manifested by examples such as ‘You don’t have to…’ or ‘You can do…’. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 83) Important is to investigate whether the objective/categoric or subjective modalities can be revealed in the text. For instance, the mass media often use categorical modalities in their discourses, (i.e. ‘It is dangerous’) which ‘reflects and reinforces’ their authority. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 83)

### 4.1.2 Discursive Practice (interpretation)

This stage of the analysis is focusing on how the text is produced and consumed. As Fairclough states, "interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as recourse in the process of interpretation" (Fairclough, 1989 p.26). In other words, the relationship between the discourse and its production and its consumption is in focus in this phase of the research.

*Intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* are key for consideration to analyse and interpret the discursive practices that occurred in the text. Intertextuality refers to the linkage
between different texts. It is the ‘influence of history on a text and to a text’s influence on history’ that is in focus. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 12)

In this stage of the research, the study will rely on the available literature on the public communication strategies of humanitarian organisations in order to relate key indicators to the production phase of the analysed text. The consumption/reception of the discourses has not been investigated in the study, which is considered as a limitation in the exploration of the discursive practice. This points out to a potential area of investigation for future studies.

4.1.3 Sociocultural practices (explanation)

This phase of the research is concerned with how the text and the text as discursive practice relate to the broader social context. According to the Fairclough, "Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the process of production and interpretation, and their social effects". (Fairclough, 1989, p.26) For the contextualization of the discourse the researcher needs to explore the relationship between the discursive practices and its order of discourse (interdiscursivity), in other word the networks and the distribution between discourses are to be examined (Fairclough 1992, p. 237) Besides, the researcher needs to map the ‘non-discursive, social and cultural relations and structures’ (social matrix) that construct the broader context of the discursive practice.

This explores the relationship of the linguistic elements and discursive practice with social context in order to shed light on broader ideological conclusions. This last stage of the research is partially be informed by the theoretical approaches introduced in Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework, while it will relate to the relevant social context to explore the effects on power relations and social change.
4.2 Critical perspectives regarding CDA

CDA is often criticised for its assumptions regarding the subjectivity of the relationship between linguistic form and social function and for the manipulative potential of the researcher guided by his/her own critical and political stance. As in CDA, there is no particular rule for data selection/elicitation, this method is often accused for leaving too much room for the researcher’s bias that can guide the research process. Moreover, this method is often criticised for the fact that analysts already know the findings before conducting their research, and their analysis only confirms what they suspected. (Short, 2009, p. 10)

4.3 Visual analysis

Visual elements in the analysed discourses are a substantial parts of the texts as they were produced in conjunction with the verbal content. Therefore, I examined them by applying the above-introduced methodology. As no specific CDA based method exists for visual analysis, the study follows the logic of the research methodology used for the entire text (verbal and visual) and applies Fairclough’s three-dimensional model.

As photographic data has significant importance to interpret the discourses compiled for this research, it is important to conceptualize the ways meanings of images can be translated. Semiological analysis can be helpful in this regard, as it can help to produce accounts of “the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image”. (Rose, 2001, p. 74)

4.4 Analytical framework

I have selected 180 Tweets for this study; 60 per organisation and 12 from each year. To analyse the selected discourses based on the theoretical grounds I have presented in Chapter 3. Theoretical framework, I have identified key indicators and characteristics, that helped me to relate them to the different approaches. The keywords used for the data gathering are also introduced in the below framework in Figure 2 (see below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of discourse - theoretical approach</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Keywords used for Twitter search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Postcolonial discourse                  | • De-historicization  
• Collectivization  
• Quantification  
• Lack of agency  
• Reduced voice and participation  
• Dependence on western aid  
• Distance in rhetoric: ‘us’ and ‘them’  
• Articulating ‘one humanity’ | Promoting the agenda of post-colonial criticism, reinforcing the power relations between the Wester self as ultimate ‘savior’ over refugees. | “one” “mass” “number”  
“influx” ”refugees need”  
“solidarity” ”humanity”  
“concerned” ”we need to”  
“we are responsible”  
“vulnerable” ”help” ”your support” ”call” ”action”  
”call for action”  
”starvation” ”poor”  
”famine” ”war” ”suffering”  
”sufferer” ”die” ”think”  
”withrefugees” ”solidarity”  
”humanity” ”we” ”poverty”  
”us” ”them” |
| Neoliberal discourse                    | • Represented roles  
• Economic participation  
• Empowerment  
• Entrepreneurship  
• Employment  
• Active contributors  
• Self-reliance | Promoting western economic systems. | “empowering” ”business”  
”inclusion” ”contribution”  
”active” ”self-reliance”  
”entrepreneurs”  
”employed” ”host communities” ”giving back” ”receiving” |
| Post-humanitarian discourse             | • Brand focus  
• Celebrity communication  
• Story telling  
• ‘Clicktivism’  
• Gamification  
• Ironic, contrasted messages  
• Self-reflective content  
• Solidarity | Marketized discourses, in which the discourse about the refugees as well as their stories become commodified to serve broader institutional interests. | ”solidarity” ”stand” ”think”  
”time” ”act” ”we need to act” ”the world needs to act” ”it’s time for” ”give back” ”humanity”  
”solidarity” ”help” ”donate”  
”take action” ”we can stop”  
”stories” ”refugees”  
”storytelling” ”voice” |

**Figure 2: Analytical framework**

In order to deconstruct and translate the photographic representations of refugees on the analysed images, I used Dyer’s checklist of signs to explore the symbolic meaning of human representations in the given discourse. (Rose, 2001, pp. 76-77):
• representations of bodies (age, gender, race, body, looks)
• representations of manner (expression, eye contact, pose)
• representations of activity (touch, body movement, positional communication)
• props and settings.
5 Findings

In this chapter, I have summarized the overall findings of the three organisations for each dimension of the research method. The findings of the visual analysis are integrated into each level of the research to inform the results further.

5.1 Text (description)

In general, there is a high degree of transitivity and nominalization in every organisation’s messages when it comes to describing the situation of refugees:

…”1 person in every 122 has been forced to flee their home” (UNHCR, 18 December 2015); “There is a children on-the move emergency in this country” (UNHCR, 30 November 2019)

“Rohingya refugee children have already endured unimaginable suffering.” (UNICEF, 22 December 2017);

“…WFP provide lifesaving food assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey.” (WFP, 29 December 2015); “…Help feed the bodies and dreams of children around the world…” (WFP, 27 December 2017)

This type of representation focuses on the case of suffering and depicts the ‘fleeing’ of refugees as a phenomenon without a responsible agent which leaves the reader without any information about the cause of the emergency situation. Without revealing the complexity of their situation, refugees and refugee children are depicted as victims, while the organization is inserted in the role of a ‘savior’. This is especially true in case of WFP’s message, where the clause helps positioning WFP as the ‘lifesaving’ entity while the refugee is portrayed as a needful, helpless victim without agency. These grammatical tools define the social relation and the power balance between the refugee, audience and organization by emphasizing the case of the suffering and the roles associated with it and masking the processes responsible for the humanitarian emergency. Moreover, the sentence "Help feed the bodies and dreams of children…” is humiliating and dehumanizing for refugees while
it completely subordinates the refugees to the western aid industry and wealthy ‘saviors’:

UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP all use an imperative mood and objective, categorical modality in their messages:

“We appeal to Europe to act with humanity and in accordance w/ international obligations” (UNHCR, 29 August 2015);

“The children of #SouthSudan must no longer live under constant fear of hunger or conflict…” (UNICEF, 22 December 2016); “Action needed now to prevent genocide” (UNICEF, 20 December 2016);

“17 million women, children & men in #Yemen are facing famine. The clock is ticking, their lives are at stake. Help us help them.” (WFP, 8 December 2017)
The deontic modality\(^3\) in the messages of the three organisations expresses strong affinity. It asserts a high degree of authority by indicative subordinate clauses that imply the obligation of taking action such as “We appeal” or “must no”. Although all the three organisations use obligative modality, UNICEF’s tweets are particularly characterized by urging and alarming messages compared to those of UNHCR and WFP:

> “…children trapped in east #Aleppo, who could die if they are no evacuated urgently…” (UNICEF, 16 December 2016)

> “…Our support is more urgent than ever” (UNICEF, 30 December 2016);

> “…More than half of the world’s refugees are children. We cannot give up on them.” (UNICEF, 9 July 2018)

> “…Yemen’s children need immediate emergency aid.” (UNICEF, 10, December 2017)

Obligative modality contributes to the discursive construction of social relations and knowledge and meaning systems, and claims authority over the reader. Although it is a moral obligation that is expressed, the rhetoric contributes to unbalanced power relations between the reader and the organisation. At the same time, the responsible party for taking action is rarely identified in these messages. In UNHCR’s tweet the responsible party is often ‘Europe’, in UNICEF’s message it remains unknown, while WFP puts accountability on the reader, as it says that ‘without your help, WFP cannot support them’. The reader is thus given and obligation to help while s/he is also endued with an ‘heroical’ quality, as her or his help is illustrated as indispensable.

Discourses with obligative modality use photographic images of either groups of people or individuals in difficult circumstances, expressing vulnerability, sadness or anger as the below tweets of UNHCR (Figure 5) and UNICEF (Figure 4) show. The

\(^3\) Deontic modality is modality that connotes the speaker’s degree of requirement of, desire for, or commitment to the realization of the proposition expressed by the utterance. [https://glossary.sil.org/term/deontic-modality](https://glossary.sil.org/term/deontic-modality)
above-cited WFP tweet uses video content, that is trimmed of pictures showing collapsed buildings, desperate habitants queuing for food aid and crying, undernourished infants. The subtitles share statistics on the number of malnourished people, urge the audience to act by closing down the video with three words: “Support. Share. Donate.”

I analysed the use of vocabulary in the 180 tweets in order to compare the three organisations’ selection of words and reveal differences and similarities. The most frequently used terms, as well as the number of times they appeared in the selected texts, have been summarized in Figure 6.

Figure 4: UNICEF Tweet from 10 December 2017

Figure 5: UNHCR Tweet from 29 August 2015
Source: (UNHCR, Twitter UNHCR, 2015)
As the figure shows, the three most frequently used words in the tweets of UNICEF and WFP are ‘support’, ‘help’ and ‘need’, while in addition to this, UNHCR is also emphasizing ‘solidarity’ and ‘humanity’. The argumentation strategies related to the selection of words will be further analysed under discursive practices.

5.2 Discursive practices

Given the genre of tweets, there is a high level of intertextuality in the messages of the organisations with reference to sharing information on humanitarian situations but also for claiming universal humanity or solidarity. Intertextuality becomes even more dominant in those messages which use citations in the body of the tweets:

“We can change the world & make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference.” (Nelson Mandela) (WFP, 18 July, 2016)

“I feel a connection spiritually to others when I am able to help”- Paulina is sponsoring a refugee in Canada…” (UNHCR, 26 December 2016)

“Safeguarding child refugees is everyone’s responsibility’…” (Mail&Guardian) (UNICEF, 24 June 2017)

Intertextuality helps organisations to share more information on a particular case and articulate better on their message by bringing an ‘external’ voice or content into the context.

There is a high-level of interdiscursivity in the tweets of all the three organisations. There is a diversity in the type of audio-visual content they use and in the combination of different genres; such as statistics, story-telling, poetry, animation, theatrical scenes, music and dance. These are all creatively combined and played to maintain the public’s attention.
5.2.1 Colonial relations of power in discourses

As Figure 6 shows, the three organizations explicitly use the words ‘support’, ‘help’ and ‘need’ to convince the audience (general public and governments) about the importance of taking action for refugee protection. This practice draws on the colonial discourses as it depicts refugees without their agency and shows them as dependents from western aid. It emphasizes the importance of western aid, including private and public donations, and reaffirm the position of humanitarian organizations before the states and the general public:

![WFP Tweet from 29 August 2015](Source: (WFP, Twitter WFP, 2015))
“Venezuelans are fleeing their country. They need our help.” (UNHCR, 16 November 2019);

“From clean water to vaccines, we’re providing life-saving support to millions of children in #Syria.” (UNICEF, 30 December 2016)

“WFP reaches > 4 million people in #Syria + 1.3 million refugees every month. Help us to help them” (WFP, 10 September 2015)

The discursive practices tend to reinforce the authority of the three organisations by emphasizing the need for their exigent work and by drawing the audience’s attention on the risks refugees may face without their help:

“We’ve received just 43% of Yemen funds sought – the lack of support limits our capacity to provide urgent relief.” (UNHCR, 29 December 2016);

“Justine may loose her leg if poor roads prevent us getting her to hospital in time” (UNHCR, 29 January 2015);

“We can’t farm here. What WFP gives us is all the food we get’- Aicha” (WFP, 28 December 2015)

Refugees are often portrayed as distant communities, and the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the organisations’ rhetoric further increase the space and ‘otherness’ between the audience and the displaced people i.e: “They need our help”, (UNHCR, 16 November 2019), “Help us to help them” (WFP, 10 September 2015). While the reader is not sure who are behind the ‘we’, ‘they’ or ‘them’ obviously refers to the refugees. This type of collectivization may also assert a difference in power relations and promote colonial discourses.
Colonial discourse can be revealed in the below UNHCR tweet (UNHCR, 8 August 2018) in which the organization shares advice to the ‘people around the world’ on how to help refugees in 8 practical ways. The first advice is to ‘host a refugee in your home’. The video shows a picture of a wealthy white man who accommodates a black refugee in his home. This type of representation may subordinate the refugee to the white man’s hospitality and can show the imbalance between the ‘giver’ and the ‘beneficiary’:

![UNHCR Tweet from 8 August 2018](UNHCR, 2018)

Figure 8: UNHCR Tweet from 8 August 2018 (UNHCR, 2018)

The physical distance is further emphasized in UNICEF’s message, although it advocates for shared responsibility around the world:

While they are shown as different and distant from the audience in the analysed tweets, organisations continue emphasizing ‘oneness’ in their messages:
Claiming ‘solidarity’ and ‘humanity’ also affirms the message of ‘oneness’ and try to unite the international community and private actors by inserting the moral obligation of helping and acting over vulnerable refugees, as UNHCR did in its message regarding the 2015 Refugee crisis:

“We call on #Europe’s government to respond with humanity” (UNHCR, 4 September 2015)

UNHCR is leading in claiming solidarity in its tweets compared to UNICEF and WFP. In the selected 60 tweets they used 13 times the word ‘solidarity’ and the latest one is from December 2019:

“For more than 25 million refugees, the biggest hope is us. It’s time to turn solidarity into action…” (UNHCR, 17 December 2019)

Despite the afore-mentioned dominant argumentation strategies that tend to depict refugees in constant need, refugees’ agency and their diverse qualities are strongly promoted in multiple tweets. These messages are usually accompanied with a ‘positive’ and ‘inspiring’ photo of strong women, youth or younger man:

Figure 11: UNHCR Tweet from 29 December 2017 (UNHCR, 2017)

Figure 12: UNICEF Tweet from 1 November 2018 (UNICEF, 2018)
Refugees are also often presented as entrepreneurs that further highlight their agency:

Storytelling and represented roles have crucial importance in highlighting refugees' agency in line with their communication strategies presented in Chapter 2, which calls for a storytelling initiative that shows refugees’ ‘courage’ and ‘humanity’ to the audience. UNHCR and UNICEF often tell stories on behalf of refugees, based on a scenario constructed by them organisations. Characteristic to these discourses is that they are built up around a specific theme and many times use passive tense in
the narrative, while in case of videos there is a combination of powerful, subtitled visual elements trimmed by the producers:

Figure 16: UNHCR Tweet from 12 August 2017
(UNHCR, Twitter UNHCR, 2017)

Figure 17: UNICEF Tweet from 27 December 2018
(UNICEF, Twitter UNICEF, 2018)

WFP’s storyteller initiative gives more space for stories told by the displaced people, who can build up the storyline, share their feelings and thoughts about their situation. These discourses help refugees to raise their voices while a high-level of authenticity is granted for the audience:

Figure 18: WFP Tweet from 19 June 2019
(WFP, Twitter WFP, 2019)
Discursive practices show that organisations often communicate about refugees in numbers to provide statistical data on the number of displaced people in a given region or around the world:

“…@WFP provided food assistance to 2M Syrian refugees…” (WFP, 16 July 2016)

“…Some 2.7 million Afghans live as refugees abroad…” (UNHCR, 17 December 2019)

“…3 million people have fled Venezuela since 2015…” (UNICEF, 7 May 2019)

5.2.2 Neoliberal discourse

UNHCR’s tweets underline the importance of including refugees into businesses and promotes the benefits for both refugees and enterprises:

These representations depict refugees as potential active players of the society who can contribute to economic growth. While emphasizing business sense may help the inclusion of refugees into western host societies, it can also draw on a neoliberal narrative by promoting a western-originated institutionalization and the importance
of capitalist systems. Further contributes to this type of discourse the emphasizes on the role of western businesses in finding solutions for helping refugees:

“...Ben and Jerry asked businesses to take a stand for a greater inclusion of refugees.” (UNHCR, 18 December 2019)

In the tweet, Ben and Jerry and the Global Refugee Forum suggest that business as ‘the most powerful force in the world’ is the only solution to deal with the case of the refugees as this is the only force that can put pressure on political leaders. The ice-cream makers affirm the role of neoliberal institutions within the development and humanitarian projects while they engage with solidarity by presenting a brand-new flavour: ‘Cone Together’ in solidarity with refugees.
5.2.3 Post-humanitarian discourse

WFP seems to be leading in inventing creative digital solutions and fundraising campaigns in relation to refugees’ protection. #TechTuesday is a good example for this, while the #ShareTheMeal initiative provides an innovative digital solution for engaging the cosmopolitan audience in taking action with low time requirement. It offers a mobile application accessible for everybody that enables the subscribers to be paired with a refugee family and contribute with their donations to the family’s ‘dinner table’. Relevant in this discourse is the advanced corporate marketing solution that packages this initiative under an attractive name, ‘ShareTheMeal’, and combines strong brand and digital marketing approach to sell the product, while in reality, the donation means direct cash assistance for refugee families.

Compared to WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF use more ‘traditional’ digital solutions for fundraising initiatives on Twitter. They integrate a link in the body of the tweet that guides the readers to the organisation’s website where they can pay by credit card. This requires one or maximum of two mouse clicks from the audience:
There is a high level of reflexivity and irony in the tweets of the three organisations. These tweets invite the reader for a self-investigation by imposing irony and trying to inspire the feeling of moral obligation to support vulnerable refugees:

In the above discourses, there is an apparent contrast between the wealthy western audience and the vulnerable ‘needy’ refugee, which is suggested to be intentional to make an impact and inspire action. UNICEF’s appeal may imply the feeling of guilt in the reader by using an ironical tone and saying that ‘you could do this small
thing for them’. At the same time, UNICEF’s tweet presumes that the reader does not value USD 13.50.

Celebrity communication for advocacy purposes is characteristic to all three organisations’ tweets; however, UNICEF and UNHCR are leading in this sense:

![UNHCR Tweet from 22 July 2018](UNHCR, Twitter UNHCR, 2018)

![UNICEF Tweet from 1 August 2017](UNICEF, Twitter UNICEF, 2017)

These tweets are both emphasize the celebrities’ image. In UNHCR’s tweet, Ben Stiller is surrounded by children whose faces are hidden so that the reader can make eye contact only with him. He is in the focus of the picture, while the message lists a number of – mainly ‘negative’ – associations to refugees in order to emphasize their vulnerability. In UNICEF’s tweet the wealthy couple, Clooney and his wife are posing for a photo at the Festival of Cannes in 2016, so their activism towards refugees remain invisible. The picture is out of the context of the written text. It has the potential to draw the public’s attention on the photographic content, but the verbal message will be blurred.
5.3 Social practice

The European refugee crisis has resulted in and established a strongly divided public in western countries which is further strengthened by an equally divided political sphere. While the number of refugees is exponentially growing worldwide, western societies do not always show a welcoming attitude towards the ones fleeing war and persecution. In this climate, international humanitarian organisations had to focus their communication strategies on the ‘persuasion’ of political leaders and the western public in order to advocate for the protection and inclusion of refugees. Thus, as the above presented, discursive practices have to be examined in this social context. Textual elements and discursive practices presume that the produced discourses target the western audience primarily, while other societies of the world may be excluded.

Another essential social practice that this phase of the research needs to consider is the ‘post-humanitarian’ context and the increasing consumerist-oriented behaviour in our society today. The real intention of ‘helping’ and ‘making a difference’ has to be put in the social context of the contemporary cosmopolitan ‘lifestyle’ and scrutinized whether solidarity is practised for the sake of humanity or is driven by a consumerist choice or a feel-good activism. In this context, claiming ‘solidarity’ can be translated into an effective ‘marketing strategy’ that aims to engage the western audience for institutional interest.
6 Conclusion and discussion

This study has critically analysed the discourses of three UN humanitarian organisations about refugees on Twitter. Before presenting the concluding points, it is important to note, once again the limitations of this study. The discourses analysed in this study were selected during a data gathering process which was based on the keywords associated with the theoretical approaches as presented under ‘Analytical framework’ in Chapter 4. I have selected 60 tweets from each organisation between 2015 and 2019 (12 per year), however, it is important to note that the scrutinized organisations share 8-12 tweets per day on their global accounts, thus the findings presented in this study cannot lead to general conclusions about the overall communication strategies of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP on Twitter. Moreover, the in-depth analysis of the visual content in most of the texts was not possible due to the limited space of this master thesis, therefore only those were analysed which substantially affected the whole of the discourse. In the light of this, the below conclusion is limited to the discourses presented in this study.

In general, the findings show that the three organisations communicate very similarly about refugees on Twitter. They use similar argumentation strategies, wording and photographic images. The scrutinized tweets have not shown any significant evolution or change in their discursive practices between 2015 and 2019.

As discussed in the third dimension of the analysis, and as the argumentation strategies and other discourse practices revealed, it can be argued that the main audience of the texts, produced by the three organisations, is the western public and the majority of the texts use a persuasive rhetoric targeting this audience in order to raise fund or inspire ‘solidarity’. This suggests that humanitarian organisations target western political leaders and the generic public on their global Twitter account to inspire action. This implies a differentiation between the western audience and people from the South.
The study suggests that UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP in their messages, construct the victim-savior social relation between the refugee, audience and organisation by emphasizing the case of the suffering and the roles associated with it: sufferer or victim (refugees) and savior (audience and organisation). They continuously affirm the exigence of the assistance they provide in emergency situations in the analysed messages, and they focus more on the case of ‘suffering’ instead of the refugee, while the agents responsible for the ‘suffering’ are almost never revealed. I argue that this is intentional in order to reaffirm the legitimacy of their work and mandate and highlight the importance of their activities vis-à-vis the protection of refugees, which strengthens their authority.

The analysis suggests that organisations in their Twitter appeals use argumentation strategies that may subordinate the refugees to the Western aid industry and show them as passive actors of the society who constantly depend on the western donors. This type of representation may have multiple risks, I argue. First, if refugees are constantly depicted as dependents from western societies, their ability to self-reliance and agency are blurred. This type of portrayal can generate bias in the western audience and refugees may face difficulties in finding employment in host societies. Second, showing their dependence on the support of the western society reinforce colonial relations of power and thus promotes an image that subordinate distant ‘others’ to the West. Another risk associated with the portrayal of ‘needy’ and vulnerable refugees is that it may construct the feeling of ‘responsibility’ in the western audience that, in some cases, can also be associated with the feeling of ‘superiority’ thus power relations are again unbalanced. Moreover, being responsible for helping refugees presumes of being ‘empowered’ for making a difference in the life of the displaced people and taking action that actually matters. On the one hand, small actions and donations can indeed have short-term benefits in the life of refugees, but on the other hand this communication practice contributes to the bigger neoliberal development idea as it promotes the dependence of the South on the western aid industry. Besides, ‘victim-oriented’ communication practice and emphasis on the help and support provided by the West, construct the image of
‘savior’ before the displaced people, which may further promote the movement of people seeking asylum in western countries.

The study has also revealed a duality in the total of the analysed discourses, as despite of the dominance of the tweets in which refugees are depicted as ‘victims’ and in ‘need’ of ‘support’, several tweets emphasize their agency by showing them working in western companies, helping other refugees, helping their hosts, studying hard, running their own business, doing sports, etc. It is also very common that refugees are associated with a heroical role via stories organisations share. In most of the cases these roles are constructed by a narrative that is built up and told by the agency and not by the refugee, although many times, refugees share their feelings and experiences in front of the camera or in case of a written text, the article cites their words. The analysis has shown that WFP gives more voice to the refugees in their tweets by their storyteller initiative and provides them with an opportunity to build up and share their stories. However, those storytelling practices where the organisations speak on behalf of the refugees and portray them in roles constructed by the agencies show a similarity with the for-profit ‘corporate advertisement’ methods. One may thus argue that their motive can be interpreted as wanting to ‘sell’ the displaced people to the western audience by showing them with their associated qualities that can be beneficial in the western capitalist societies. The communication strategies of the three humanitarian organisations revealed that it is intentional that in their storytelling initiative they show refugees’ ‘courage’ and ‘humanity’ to the audience. The intention itself is indeed valid, I argue, as it is essential for the western (but also non-western) audience to meet and learn about the displaced people and turn to them with humanity. However, it is the method that is questionable and it calls for further research to reveal how these for-profit advertising and convincing techniques effect psychologically the audience when it comes to communicating about the lives of refugees. The roles constructed to ‘sell’ an image about refugees may impersonalize them and have the risk to blur their real identity.

Another paradox phenomenon in the analysed messages is depicting refugees as different from but still as same as ‘us’, where ‘us’ presumably refers to the western
audience. These paradox representation and duality in terms of the depicting the refugee as active and passive actor at the same time, I argue, construct an inconsistent image of the displaced people in the western audience that may further strengthen their ambivalent and divided feelings towards them. Collectivization and quantification of refugees can also reinforce this impersonalized ambivalent image, and further affect colonial relations of power by showing refugees as homogenous and subordinate communities.

The study revealed a strong market-oriented in the communication practices used in the selected tweets, which confirms their ‘post-humanitarian’ nature. The study suggests that UN organisations build a consistent and strong brand image by communicating continuously about the importance of their work in every selected tweet. They are consistent in their use of words, colour scales and use of visual elements which strengthens their identity. They build attractive digital campaigns with a high level of aesthetic and consumer-focused digital solutions, which also demonstrates that UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP increasingly follow corporate trends in their communication practices. This ‘commodification’ of suffering underlines the earlier suggested shift in focus from the humane-centric humanitarian communication to a strategy that prioritizes corporate interests. This shift in focus make questionable the real intention behind donating or taking action for a cause. Is it the cause and universal moral values that inspire action in the audience or rather it is the engagement with the brand itself that represents a ‘cool activism’? This study has not explored the actual social practices with regards to the analysed tweets and relied on the available literature in this regard. This prevents revealing how the audience if affected by this new corporate-centric humanitarian communication and what is the real motivation behind the audience’s behaviour and action. Based on the analysed tweets, another example for the humanitarian organisations’ orientation toward the market-focused communication campaigns is UNHCR’s strong engagement with solidarity claims. The organisation has claimed solidarity in 18 tweets out of the 60. One can argue that ‘Solidarity’ became a campaign tool for the
organization in general, which also proved by the Solidarity train\(^4\) (Le train de la solidarité #AvecLesRéfugiés) initiative launched in November 2019. The strong campaigning about promoting solidarity as an ideology has the potential to engage the public with an activism, however, the real motivation of the public remains again unknown. Well-constructed marketing campaign tools can be effective in manipulating the public for taking action, however it is often the engagement with the brand that drives the motivation of the ‘s consumer’. It needs to be revealed in future studies whether it is the intention of ‘helping’ others and ‘making a difference’ that drives the public’s engagement or it is the brand and with the trendy nature of today’s ‘cosmopolitan solidarity’ (Chouliaraki, 2012, p. 29) that commits the audience to stand with refugees.

The study has also shown that there is and increasing expansion of corporate partnerships and the growing role of private sector in humanitarian affairs which also indicates the market-oriented focus of the three organisations, while it promotes a neoliberal agenda by emphasizing the role of western capitalist institutions in ‘improving’ the life of people from the South.

In the light of the research findings I argue that UN organisations should reassert the humane element in their communication practices instead of relying on the corporatized and business focused advertisement methods and discourses of solidarity. The humane element with all its diversity and ‘otherness’ (Chouliaraki, 2011, p. 192) in terms of cultural, social, political and economic systems should be introduced and emphasized.

As discussed earlier, the study has limitations as it has not explored the production phase and the reception practices of the analysed tweets, that prevents the research to make general conclusions about the three organisations’ communication strategies. It is explorative in the sense that limited number of academic studies focused on the practices of UN organisations on social media. Further limitations

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\(^4\) The solidarity train has been a cooperation among UNHCR and SNCF (the French national railways) to create a moving exhibition stopped in five French cities, creating dialogue and educating the public about refugees. It was launched before the Global Refuge Forum supporting the advertisement and media visibility of the event. [https://www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2019/12/5df3aff24/all-aboard-the-solidarity-train.html](https://www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2019/12/5df3aff24/all-aboard-the-solidarity-train.html)
however can be revealed as the analysis explored the organisations’ discursive practices on only one social media platform and did not consider other those on the other channels. These limitations call for further multi-method research that allows exploring the main principles and goals UN organisations prioritize when the produce social media content, as well as the feedback of recipients vis-à-vis the consumed content.
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