The Moral Economy of Aid

Discourse Analysis of Swedish Fundraising for the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012

JULIA LINDSTRÖM

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Abstract
This working paper investigates how aid has been constructed as a moral activity in Swedish non-governmental fundraising for the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012. Fundraising material of four NGOs is examined: the Swedish Red Cross, Save the Children Sweden, Médecins Sans Frontières Sweden, and Diakonia Sweden. Using a moral economy approach, the paper identifies a central discourse in which NGOs present themselves as givers of charity. They depict the aid they provide as a commendable, non-obligatory act for which they take the moral credit. This view reaffirms the existence of moral hierarchies of power between givers and recipients of aid. The notion that people in distress are entitled to aid is thereby repudiated. At the same time, NGOs break the aid chain when they characterize their role as being the sole provider of aid. How transactions between donors, NGOs, and recipients should best be understood is not clear at present. In fact, the NGOs studied do not only construct aid as charity, but also as a right, resulting in conflicting moral economies. Perhaps this is a sign of a discourse moving from a charity conception towards an entitlement conception of aid.

Keywords: Sweden, NGOs, 2011 East Africa drought, relief, aid appeals, charity, entitlement.
Foreword

When we launched the research project *The Moral Economy of Global Civil Society: A History of Voluntary Food Aid* we did not foresee the wide acceptance the idea of conjoining the terms “moral” and “economy” would find. Many agree it has potential to improve our understanding of features of present capitalist society that fail to make sense from the viewpoint of crude economic utility. The donation of money for altruistic purposes is an example of this. We organized an initial workshop entitled “Moral Economy: New Perspectives on Humanitarian Relief and Global Civil Society” at Södertörn University from 31 October to 1 November 2013. The papers presented there have been published in a special issue of the *Journal of Global Ethics*, which in less than a year became the most downloaded issue of that journal to date.

The perspective the project has thus far developed suggests that humanitarianism is a significant field of moral economy studies in which supply and demand although they resemble market forces, are morally – not materially – conditioned variables. From this perspective, supply draws on the economy proper, while demand draws on the assessment of legitimate needs and the feasibility of transfers. Both dimensions of the moral economy are characterized by radically unequal access to resources, and both depend on the acknowledgement of moral claims. While supply is contingent on a donor’s voluntary sharing of assets, demand is operative as a logistic venture involving means testing or acknowledging entitlements rather than being something based on individual requests directly. The ethical concern a particular moral economy is grounded in can be seen in calls for aid and accounts of relief that has been provided. These are the analytical dimensions on which the overall project focuses. Its major outcome will be a book whose working title is *Two Centuries of Humanitarianism: The Moral Economy of Famine Relief*.

The present working paper on Swedish fundraising is a freestanding part of the larger project. It has been written by political scientist Julia Lindström during her research internship at Södertörn University’s multi-disciplinary Institute of Contemporary History from January to June of 2016. Her task was to analyze from a moral economy perspective calls for aid in connection with the recent famine in Somalia. This could not be done on the basis of any consensus provided by the overall project because we are still in the process of developing, refining, and operationalizing our own understanding.
The outcome of Lindström’s work is an independent paper that sheds light on how voluntary organizations currently frame themselves, as well as how they depict their donors and beneficiaries. It shows that Swedish fund-raising for famine relief in 2011–2012 in the Horn of Africa was characterized by the self-aggrandizement of the fundraisers, and a limited effort to either please donors or empower distressed people in the global south. The analysis identifies the expression of an “NGO charity view” that underscores the donorship of an organization, rather than presenting it as an intermediary. Lindström finds this the common denominator of all campaigns, and thus constituting the dominant moral economy. The project did not anticipate this finding, as evidenced by our second workshop entitled “Brokers of Aid,” building on the widespread notion of the existence of an “aid chain,” although we were aware of the crucial agency of aid organizations. The present paper suggests that agents providing services have set themselves up as the principals of aid. Lindström’s result is thought-provoking and stimulates reflection on moral economy at a time of increasing emphasis on branding to organizations and to the public in affluent countries who is offered something beyond individual acclaim, namely, shareholding in larger enterprises of doing good.

Lindström’s internship and this publication has benefitted by her presence at the 4th World Conference on Humanitarian Studies: Changing Crises and the Quest for Adequate Solutions in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 5–8 March 2016, made possible by the Swedish Research Council’s grant no. 2012-614, which has funded our project on the moral economy of aid for the period 2013 to 2018. I would like to thank our funder as well as Lindström for engaging in such a fruitful way with the issues to which the project The Moral Economy of Global Civil Society: A History of Voluntary Food Aid is devoted.

Norbert Götz
Stockholm, September 2016
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1. Introduction

Aid is an economic practice that can be deeply morally laden. To work as a volunteer or make aid donations is commonly seen as a virtuous way to spend time or money. In the same manner, aid agencies are often placed on a moral high ground. This study strives to dissect this widespread sentiment in order to deepen the understanding of aid in general and the frameworks that construct something or someone as moral in particular. These are frameworks that hold great powers, determining what is right and wrong, who is good and bad, as well as how the world should be ordered.

The aim of this study is to map out the kind of moral activity aid has been constructed as and the type of moral credit ascribed to its practitioners, that is, not to determine if aid is moral or not, but to deconstruct its moral components. Using a moral economy approach, aid will be viewed as an economic activity that derives moral value through socially constructed frameworks of meaning, so-called “moral economies.” Moral economies define what an economic practice is and the norms that surround it, thus guiding action by defining what is appropriate, doable, and conceivable in a specific context. Traditionally, moral economy studies have focused on economic contexts that are perceived as morally neutral, such as markets, in order to reveal how they are governed by normative concerns. In contrast, a moral economy perspective will here be applied to a highly moralized economic context in order to detect significant differences within a wide range of moral interpretations of aid.

The present paper is an independent part of the ongoing research project “The Moral Economy of Global Civil Society: A History of Voluntary Food Aid.” This project aims to deepen the understanding of the moral economy of non-governmental aid during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By focusing on non-governmental aid, it seeks to capture the moral-economic underpinnings of global civil society, thus distancing itself from state-focused approaches. More specifically, the project applies a moral economy perspective to non-governmental famine relief. It consists of four case studies analyzing the Irish potato famine of 1845–1851, the Soviet famine of 1921–1922, relief efforts in Western Europe in the mid-1940s, and the famine of 1983–1985 in the Horn of Africa. Further insights are added from a contemporary case: the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012 was chosen for its recent occurrence and magnitude.

There are multiple ways to conduct a moral economy study of non-governmental famine relief. Fundraising is one suitable context, since it
captures a moment in which practitioners of aid articulate what they are trying to do and why people should support their work. Thus, fundraising has an explicit moral quality to it. Fundraising also resonates with socially established norms and values providing insights into broader networks of moral economies of aid. Choosing fundraising for the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012 in a Swedish context was primarily due to my Swedish background. In using discourse analysis, having knowledge of the social, cultural, and historical setting is of great importance. Furthermore, Sweden is one of the largest donors of foreign aid in the world with regard to its proportion of gross national income.

Since this is a study of non-governmental aid, the fundraising activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must be part of the analysis. Fundraising material of the following NGOs is examined: the Swedish Red Cross (RC), Save the Children Sweden (SC), Médecins Sans Frontières Sweden (MSF), and Diakonia Sweden. This group was chosen based on the range of perspectives they provide, consisting of large and small, faith-based and non-faith based organizations, having both general and specific aid orientations. However, the main subject of this study is not the individual organizations per se, but the broader moral economies of aid that they embody and reaffirm.

The main research question of this working paper is What moral economies of aid are expressed in the fundraising of the Swedish Red Cross, Save the Children Sweden, Médecins Sans Frontières Sweden, and Diakonia Sweden for the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012? Secondary questions are What similarities or dissimilarities can be found between the organizations? and Can any dominant moral economy of aid be detected?

2. The famine

On 20 July 2011, the United Nations (UN) declared a famine in two regions of south-central Somalia: southern Bakool and Lower Shabelle. About 3.7 million people across the country were affected. Two weeks later, three more areas in south-central Somalia were added to the list, including Mogadishu, the Afgoye corridor outside of Mogadishu, and the Middle Shabelle region. At this point, a food crisis had spread over the entire region of the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti, where an estimated 12.4 million people were declared in need of assistance. The Somalia Famine
of 2011–2012 marks the first time in history a famine was declared in real time based on empirical data using commonly agreed upon thresholds.6

On 3 February 2012, the UN announced the famine had come to an end, but emphasized that the severity of the crisis and the need for aid continued to be very strong in the Horn of Africa.7 A study commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) estimated that the famine and food insecurity in central and southern Somalia had taken the lives of about 258,000 people between October 2010 and April 2012 – over half of them children under five years old.8 This death toll exceeded the numbers of the Somalia Famine 1992.9

The famine was triggered by a combination of factors. First, a severe drought hit south-central Somalia in late 2010.10 Although droughts are a reoccurring phenomenon in the region, the drought of 2010–2011 was extreme, with the poorest rainfall in 50 years.11 It caused high levels of crop failure and livestock mortality. Since the drought hit agricultural areas it led to a widespread loss of livelihood which, combined with a dramatic increase in food prices, resulted in a fast spreading crisis.12 Second, the conflict between Al-Shabaab and the Transnational Federal Government (TFG), among other groups, had created a great displacement in south-central Somalia, helping to trigger the famine.13 In late 2010, about 1.46 million Somalis were internally displaced.14 Displaced people do not have the same access to coping mechanisms and are, therefore, extremely vulnerable in times of crises. Another central factor was the slow and inadequate humanitarian response from the international community.15 The donation level during the first half of 2011 was significantly lower than previous years, despite greater need.16 One contributing factor to this was that the US had cut off all food aid to Somalia in 2009, stating the risk of food diversion to terrorist groups as the main reason.17 While donations dramatically increased after the declaration of famine in July, enabling humanitarian agencies to scale up their activities, much of the response came too late.18

There had been several warnings made by FEWS NET and the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) leading up to the declaration of famine.19 The first one, announced in August 2010, predicted a failure of rains at the end of 2010 and warned of a potential food crisis in the East African region.20 At the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011, the warnings became more accurate and alarming, reflecting the rapidly worsening situation in Somalia.21 Nevertheless, humanitarian agencies and donors were slow to respond to the emerging crisis.22 The slow response has been
analyzed in different ways. Concerning donors, a common explanation is risk-averse behavior and suspicion towards predictions made by early warning systems.23 Some studies have also highlighted a “normalization” of crises in Somalia, referring to a perception of the country being in a constant state of crises, which presumably undermined an understanding of the severity of the situation in 2011.24

Regarding the humanitarian response, there were very few international aid organizations working on the ground in Somalia at the time of the famine. Most aid agencies had either withdrawn from Somalia, reduced their operations, or subcontracted their work to local partners.25 This was primarily due to an impending lack of security. Aside from the general level of insecurity associated with working in a conflict zone, it was extremely difficult to access the famine-afflicted population.26 This was primarily due to the harsh restrictions set up by Al-Shabaab, which controlled most of the famine-hit areas.27

Prior to 2010, Al-Shabaab was relatively open to external aid agencies working in their areas of control.28 But in mid-2010 their attitude changed, and they enforced stricter policies and used more aggressive methods to implement them.29 In 2011, Al-Shabaab expressed outright hostility towards many aid agencies, finally leading Al-Shabaab to ban 16 international aid organizations, including several UN organizations at the end of the year.30 However, by then many major aid agencies had already suspended their activities in Somalia. Notably, the two main food aid providers in the region, the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) and the World Food Programme (WFP), were absent.31 CARE had pulled out in late 2008, officially due to threats from Al-Shabaab, and WFP in early 2010, citing an inability to fulfill their obligations. During the famine, the International Committee of the Red Cross was the only organization still able to negotiate an extensive food aid program with Al-Shabaab, something which placed enormous pressure on the Red Cross. To put this into perspective, WFP and CARE covered the needs of almost two million people in 2008, the vast majority of whom lived in central and southern parts of Somalia.32 Additionally, WFP had been the main coordinator of food aid in the region, which created a major setback for the management of food aid when they pulled out.33

In sum, the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012 is another example of a humanitarian catastrophe that could have been prevented if the surrounding world had provided enough support in time. In the wake of the famine, several studies have harshly criticized countries, the UN, and the aid com-
munity itself for this inaction. While the present study does not deal with this kind of operational criticism it can provide relevant insights into how NGOs create or negate a sense of moral obligation to assist people in distress.

3. Theoretical outline

3.1. Moral economy

An influential definition of moral economy was provided by E. P. Thompson in the early 1970s. For him a moral economy is “a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community.” This definition will be a general starting point, but it will be adapted to the study of aid in a modern civil society context (see article by Norbert Götz).

Didier Fassin has moved beyond the traditional framing of the concept and its limitation with regard to a community. Fassin is critical toward the previous tendency in moral economy studies to operate on a micro level, studying local communities and what is assumed to be their deeply embedded moral economy. This tendency, according to Fassin, runs the risk of reducing moral economy to a cultural aspect, that is, to a homogenous system of beliefs within a community. By contrast, Fassin promotes studies of broader contexts that focus on the plurality and heterogeneity of moral economies. Moreover, Fassin sees moral economies as something that is constantly negotiated. The present study also views moral economies as diverse and contested systems of meaning. Furthermore, it is not directed toward a specific community, but at the broader context of fundraising for aid. It will examine not what moral economy a community has, but how moral economies are constructed. This does not deny that moral economies also have a traditional, embedded side within communities. Rather, it is an expansion of the concept that opens up other dimensions as well.

The approach taken here sees moral economies as something deeper than “a view of social norms and obligations.” They are, according to Andrew Sayer, systematic interpretations that determine what an economic activity is. According to Sayer, moral economies “frame” an event by placing it within a certain context of meaning, thus prioritizing one interpretation while excluding others. In this manner, moral economies also guide action by providing structured perceptions of what can and cannot be done or said in a particular context. Hence, a moral economy can be
understood as an interpretation of an economic event that in turn determines appropriate behavior. Thus, moral economy will here be understood as a systematic interpretation of economic practices that define norms, obligations, and appropriate behavior within a specific context. In brief, it is as a revised version of Thompson’s original definition.

3.2. A discursive approach

One way to approach moral economies as systematic interpretations is to place them within the theoretical realm of discourse analysis. Mark Langan has defined discourse as a set of rules that establish the limits of acceptable speech and action. In Langan’s view, the concept of discourse captures the idea of a moral economy as a system of meaning that constructs, and socially establishes, normative interpretations of economic practices. Moral economies can thus be thought of as discourses that establish normative “images of economic exchange,” by prioritizing certain understandings and excluding alternative interpretations. As discourse, moral economies define the responsibilities and commitments of actors within an economic context, as well as the purpose of economic activities.

Langan highlights the dialectical dimension of moral economies, that is, how norms are shaped by economic activities and vice-versa. This thought is a common base of moral economy studies, but according to Langan previous research fails to elaborate how this dialectical relationship is presumed to work and how it can be methodologically analyzed. Here Langan puts forward discourse analysis as a way to complement this gap. Discourses are not static but fluent systems of meaning. Even though they strive to enclose meaning, they can never fully succeed since they are constantly under the influence of competing discourses, material conditions, and social processes and structures. Thus, by acting in contrast to a dominant discourse a person can help to disrupt its dominance. This is what Langan calls a “reflexive” approach to the agent-structure debate; the structure can never become fully dominant since actors are the ones that practice and maintain it. In a moral economy context, norms affect economic behavior by defining limits of acceptable speech and action. On the other hand, economic behavior shapes our view on how we should act by either complying with or contesting norms. In this manner, actions “contain constitutive moral dimensions,” to use Langan’s phrase.

Like Fassin, Langan focuses on how moral economies are constructed, contested, and used for different purposes. In Langan’s view, moral economies become institutionalized through discursive processes that primarily
express and maintain themselves through language. As a type of “common-sense imaginings,” moral economies have the power to portray economic events in such a way as to create both acceptance and condemnation. This entails using moral economies for ideological purposes to legitimate and justify economic activities as well as cement power relations. Moreover, moral economies are often implicit and hidden. People taking part in reaffirming them might not even be aware of their existence. If a moral economy becomes dominant and reaches a common sense level, it will be perceived as a natural and impartial way of looking at the world. In Langan’s words, people become “blind” towards their own interpretations of economic action.

One of the main purposes of a moral economy study, according to Langan, is to uncover these discourses and make their presence in text and speech visible. Methodologically, Langan uses critical discourse analysis focused on uncovering power hierarchies. Since this may draw attention away from moral economies and towards structures of power, a discourse analysis developed by James Paul Gee will be used instead in what follows.

Finally, moral economies are not considered just any discourse concerning economic activities, but one with a distinct normative dimension. In one sense, all discourses are normative, since they define how a phenomenon should be interpreted and what can and cannot be said or done in a particular situation. Therefore, in order not to reduce moral economies to discourses in general, their normative aspect needs to be emphasized. As discourses, moral economies not only provide a certain interpretation of an economic activity, but they also ascribe moral meaning to it. This moral meaning consists of norms, obligations, and rules of appropriate behavior. In this manner, moral economies can be seen as placing economic activities within a certain moral context, that is, the normative frame of reference in relation to which an event, act, or person is judged.

Des Gasper is a theorist who has classified some common moral contexts surrounding aid. For example, aid may be placed within a context of universal obligations, in which case it is seen as something everyone is obliged to provide. Here people do not receive moral credit for providing aid. Instead, it is viewed in a neutral manner as the doing of one’s duty. Furthermore, people are denounced if they neglect to provide aid. Another example is the moral context of conditioned obligations in which certain actors, or everyone in some situations, are seen as obliged to provide aid. Here people are criticized for not providing aid in some cases but not others. Moreover, aid can be placed within a moral context of supererogatory virtues. Here aid
is not seen as something people are obliged to provide, but as something people receive moral credit for doing. In this case, no one can be blamed for neglecting to provide aid. The ability to not only provide a context of meaning, but a moral context as well is what distinguishes moral economies from discourses in general. What follows will seek to identify the moral context within which NGOs place aid, focusing especially on the construction of moral obligations and the distribution of moral credit.

4. Previous research

Research using a discursive moral economy approach to investigate non-governmental aid is very limited. Among the few examples is an anthropological dissertation by Pierre Minn in which he uses a moral economy approach to analyze medical aid in Haiti 2007–2009, concentrating on the NGO–recipient relationship. Minn finds that aid has often been constructed as a reciprocal gift, leading donors and aid workers to expect something in return. If this return (such as gratitude) is not received they could show resentment. Reciprocity was also expressed through the aid workers’ sense of getting something back, such as experience, knowledge, or professional acknowledgement. Furthermore, Minn identifies a contrasting moral economic theme in which aid is constructed as the repaying of a debt. This understanding was expressed through a sense of duty among aid workers to “give back.” As Minn observes, the sense of debt was connected to a deeper moral context of obligation and fairness than in the case of aid as a gift. In these discourses, aid was interpreted as the right thing rather than a nice thing to do.

Cathy Shutt is another researcher who has analyzed the moral economies of aid. She has written about the varied social meanings and values workers in the field ascribe to aid, primarily from participant observation in Cambodia from 2004 to 2006. Based on previous research, Shutt examines two influential constructions of aid: as an entitlement and as an investment. The former is built on conceptions of justice and fairness in which aid is viewed as “a solidarity relationship and redistribution of wealth.” The latter depends on ideals rooted in a neoliberal, market-based framework that sees aid as an impersonal economic investment that seeks to maximize value for money spent. Further examples of moral economy perspectives on aid may be found in the writings of Richard Fanthorpe, Carolina Holgersson Ivarsson, and Katarina Friberg.
Several studies outside the field of the moral economy similarly examine aid. For example, Tomohisa Hattori uses a discursive approach to study the different ways aid is viewed as a moral activity. According to Hattori, non-governmental aid is constructed as beneficence, that is, as a nonreciprocal gift given from benevolent people to distant sufferers. Within this construction, the moral virtue of donors is confirmed while the recipients, lacking an opportunity to reciprocate, are reduced to objects of the benevolence of others. For Hattori, this conception risks recasting a material hierarchy between rich and poor into a moral hierarchy that may justify inequality and dominance. Hattori argues that constructing aid as beneficence helps to reaffirm colonial structures of power between the global North and South. He concludes that doing so is in sharp contrast to liberal conceptions of rights, since the idea of beneficence places aid within a moral context of generosity and gratitude, rather than one of obligations and entitlements. Several others have seen the discursive construction of aid as a benevolent gift as reaffirming unequal power relations, including Benedikt Korf, Ilan Kapoor, and John Silk.

There is also increasing interest in how aid is constructed as consumption. For example in a working paper Johanna Arnesson uses discourse analysis to study Swedish non-governmental fundraising. Arnesson finds that a dominant feature of the fundraising discourse is the representation of donations as purchases that are a morally superior way to “shop.” In this context, a relationship is set up between donors as consumers and NGOs as companies. On the surface, this may seem to demoralize aid, but as Arnesson explains, it is driven by the idea of consumption being a moral activity.

Previous research has identified several moral economic themes of aid. Aid has been shown to be constructed as a reciprocal gift, the repaying of a debt, an entitlement, an investment, a beneficence, and a purchase. These themes show the great range of ways in which aid can be understood as a moral activity. In each case, a moral context is set up that distributes moral credit and obligations in different manners.

5. Material and method

5.1. Material
The following is an analysis of fundraising material for the Somalia Famine 2011–2012 from Diakonia Sweden, Save the Children Sweden, Médecins
Sans Frontières Sweden, and Swedish Red Cross. It consists of advertisements published in Swedish newspapers, press releases, and articles published in the organizations’ own magazines. Access to relevant material became a central factor guiding the choice of which organizations to analyze. Since in conducting discourse analysis, an excess of material can interfere with the depth of the study, four organizations were considered sufficient for the present purposes. They were chosen to include larger and smaller, faith-based and non-faith-based organizations, with both general and specific aid orientations.

Most of the advertisements were collected by using a search engine of digitized newspaper material provided by the National Library of Sweden. The search was guided by specific terms intended to capture fundraising about the famine. “Somalia” and “famine” gave a limited results. A broader range of search terms such as “Horn of Africa,” “drought,” and “catastrophe” were then tried, followed by names of aid agencies. The time span included began with the declaration of famine on 20 July 2011 to the official end of the famine on 3 February 2012. The time span was then extended until no relevant new material was found. The resulting time span for digitized newspapers was then 1 May 2011 to 31 March 2012.

While the digitized database covered a broad range of newspapers during the time period of interest, one of the biggest newspapers in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter*, was not included. Material from this newspaper could only be accessed through microfilm provided by the National Library of Sweden. Due to the considerable influence of this newspaper, it was added for the period 1 June 2011 to 31 August 2011. This period was chosen based on the most active advertisement period in the digitized material. Moreover, some samples were conducted in December 2011 and February 2012.

In addition, press releases and news provided by the organizations themselves were collected. For the Red Cross, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Diakonia this material was accessed through their homepages and “newsrooms” on the Mynewsdesk website. Since press releases and news bulletins were issued over a longer period of time than the advertisements, they were collected from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2012. Finally, where available, organizational magazines were surveyed from 2011 to 2012. In total, approximately 20 advertisements, 55 press releases and news bulletins, three longer reportages, and ten shorter articles and notices were examined.
5.2. Method

The method chosen for this study was discourse analysis. It is a way of studying social constructions through language, viewing it not only as a communication device but also a way of doing and building things in the world. A form of discourse analysis developed by James Paul Gee will be used, as it provides an extensive analytical toolbox. These tools work as questions that guide the researcher towards certain aspects and details of the text. Gee stresses the importance of using tools that are most suitable for the particular study being made.

A discourse analysis has to consider the meaning of “language-in-use.” This entails the researcher having a contextual understanding of what the text means in the situation in which it is being used. For written texts, the context includes shared preconceptions and knowledge, as well as the social and linguistic setting of the text. Having a native understanding of the cultural meaning of words and expressions is a great advantage when defining the situated meaning of a text. Still, this is a complicated endeavor since people who are part of a language community often perceive their way of talking to be a universal way of describing the world. An important part of any discourse analysis is therefore, never to read a text as a neutral way of expressing something, but instead, always as a partial description prioritizing certain perspectives while excluding others. A holistic method will be used to “fill the gaps” and find general themes in the body of text from each organization.

Intertextuality is another central topic for a discourse analysis. It refers to the connections and references linking a text to other texts. These connections can be explicit, by using direct quotes, or implicit by using associations and allusions. A text can make several intertextual connections at the same time, something Gee calls “textual mixing.” Here “text” is understood broadly to also include discourses. Thus, intertextuality does not only refer to connections made to written or spoken texts, but also to larger frameworks of meaning. Furthermore, words and expressions can be borrowed from one discursive context by another. When studying intertextuality, it is important to stay attentive to contrasts in language, to places where changes in genre occur, and when words typically associated with a specific context are used in another kind of situation. Moreover, a researcher has to capture both explicit references and implicit allusions to other texts, styles of language, and discourses.

The specific method and analytical tools being used in this study may be summarized in four analytical steps. These steps are designed to capture
how aid is constructed, the moral credit ascribed to aid and its practitioners, and broader moral economies of aid expressed in the material.

The first analytical step was directed towards getting an overview of the fundraising discourse. Here central identities being constructed in the text were mapped. In particular, focus was placed on the identity-construction of the NGOs, donors, and recipients of aid. This was done by closely studying what kind of attributes they were ascribed. These attributes both concerned how the actors were described and what they were described as doing. As Gee points out, identities and actions are closely interrelated. Next, the construction of relationships were examined. Of special interest was how the NGOs represented their relationship to donors, on the one hand, and recipients on the other. Here factors of identification, closeness, and distance were relevant, providing insights to constructions of “us” and “them.” Larger narratives being communicated in the material were sought by examining how the NGOs constructed storylines of their own work and the situation-at-large. It depended upon how they drew links between the past, the present, and the future, placing themselves in a “bigger picture.” The first analytical step provided a preliminary understanding of the organizations and how they differed from one another.

The second step, consisting of a closer examination of how the activity of aid was represented, involved the use of metaphorical language. As Gee points out, metaphors are a powerful mean of communicating a certain interpretation of a phenomenon. The analysis looked at how transactions of aid were described, what senders of aid were described as doing, what recipients of aid were described as receiving, and at how the content of aid was described. Within this step, intertextuality that connected aid to other types of practices, particularly language relating to the findings of previous research, were of prime interest, as was detecting which actor was linked to which understanding of aid. Finally, recurring patterns led to the identification of several systematic interpretations of aid.

In the third analytical step, the normative dimension of the interpretations cited above were studied, particularly the vocabulary used and the construction of something as good and desirable. Close reading and sensitivity towards phrasing revealed implicit ways of framing something as valuable. The moral value ascribed to aid, the moral credit ascribed to its practitioners, and moral contexts were identified by differentiating types of moral credit, conceptions of the good, and expressions of moral obligation. Also studied were the instances in which actors were commended or criticized.
In the fourth step of the analysis, all findings were reviewed in order to identify dominant moral economic themes that several NGOs had in common. These themes were later on used in an additional rereading of the material.

6. Analysis

The analysis focuses on the results of the fourth of the steps enumerated above, that is, the identification of central moral economic themes. Two such themes in Swedish non-governmental fundraising for the Somalia Famine of 2011–2012 will be considered. The first constructs aid as charity and the second as the providing of entitlements.

Charity is here understood to be similar to beneficence, as previously discussed by Hattori. In this case, aid is viewed as a gift given to people in distress. Here the giver of charity receives moral credit for being perceived as virtuous, caring, and generous. The moral status of the giver is often affirmed by gratitude expressed by the recipient. The moral context of charity does not concern obligations. Instead, charity is situated among the supererogatory virtues. Thus, within this moral economic theme, givers of aid are commended, while non-givers are not blamed.

By contrast, a conception of aid as the provision of entitlements is connected to a moral context of obligation. Here aid donors are seen as providing something to which a recipient has a prior claim. However, there is a difference between fulfilling an obligation and providing an entitlement. A provider of entitlements need not be seen as obliged to do so; instead the obligation can be placed on some other actor. Thus, if someone is considered under obligation to provide an entitlement, they will be denounced if they fail to do so. On the other hand, whoever not seen as obliged to provide an entitlement will not be faulted if they do not do so, but commended if they do. Thus, the moral economic themes of charity and entitlement operate within different types of moral contexts. Both have the capacity to ascribe moral credit, but the type of credit differs.

Before the thematic presentation, some general aspects concerning the narratives the NGOs use of the Somalia famine of 2011–2012 will be highlighted. Diakonia portrays the famine to be spread over the entire region of the Horn of Africa. This is done by using indirect vocabulary when describing the extension of the famine, such as "Famine on the Horn of Africa," which is a recurring headline for their advertisements. With re-
gard to severity, the famine is described as “extremely extensive,” affecting about 12 million people.\(^{119}\) The Red Cross also widens the scope of the famine to include the entire region of the Horn of Africa.\(^ {121}\) RC estimates that about 12 million people are affected by the famine.\(^ {122}\) In addition to stressing the extensiveness of the crisis, RC states that it is “one of the worst hunger crisis the region has seen in living memory.”\(^ {123}\)

The same tendency to maximize is true of fundraising by Save the Children.\(^ {124}\) SC sees the extent of the famine covering the entire region of East Africa. “Children are starving in East Africa” is a recurring headline for their advertisements.\(^ {125}\) Concerning severity, SC states that the famine was the “worst starvation catastrophe ever,” affecting more than 10 million people.\(^ {126}\) But SC both exaggerates the severity of the famine and downplays it. For example, they state that UN declared southern Somalia to be in a state of catastrophe, not famine, which communicates a lower degree of severity.\(^ {127}\) This tendency to minimize can be found even more clearly in the case of Médecins Sans Frontières. Similarly to the other NGOs, MSF includes the whole of the Horn of Africa in their fundraising. However, instead of using the word famine, MSF talks about a hunger catastrophe and malnutrition crisis.\(^ {128}\) Regarding severity, MSF calls it “the largest hunger catastrophe in decades,”\(^ {129}\) affecting millions of people.\(^ {130}\) MSF’s narrative thus communicates the lowest level of severity. By doing so, it presents a misleading image of the situation. At no time does the organization state that there is a famine in southern Somalia. Thus, by contrast to the other NGOs, MSF understates the extent of the crisis.

These narratives of the famine have several implications. In general, it is deceptive for all the NGOs to present an inaccurate picture of the famine to the public. Moreover, these narratives can be used to obtain moral credit in different ways. The narrative of an extended famine gives NGOs the credit of saving several entire countries, not only smaller regions. NGOs can also more easily depict themselves as being “on the ground.” As mentioned earlier, southern Somalia is a region that is hard to access for aid agencies. Thus, by widening the scope of the famine, the NGOs can present themselves as being there although they do not have operations going on inside Somalia, and in that way obtain greater credit. The narrative of downplaying the severity of a crisis is more puzzling. It may be that since the word “famine” is emotionally laden, avoiding the term portrays the NGO as more trustworthy and neutral, thereby increasing professional credibility.\(^ {131}\)
6.1. Diakonia

The main moral economic theme that Diakonia expresses is that of charity. Throughout their fundraising, Diakonia constructs aid as a gift conveyed to people in distress. This places aid within a non-obligatory moral context where it may be seen as a commendable act done by benevolent and generous people. In this scenario the givers of charity are the ones who receive moral credit. However, who is considered a charity giver is not clear in the fundraising activity of Diakonia. Instead, Diakonia communicates two conflicting views. According to the first view, which may be called “Donor charity view,” donors are seen as the givers of charity, and funds from donors are portrayed as going directly to people in distress. For example, in the Diakonia campaign “Give a lunch to the Horn of Africa,” it is stated that 70 Swedish kronor will feed a family for a month.132 In this case, Diakonia takes on the role of a middleman, passing on charitable gifts from donors. In general, the organization describes donors as giving gifts to the Horn of Africa,133 and their own work as facilitating these gifts.134 Accordingly, donors receive moral credit for giving charity. Donors are described as being incredibly committed and generous,135 and making an important contribution to the welfare of people in Somalia and Kenya.136 Their donations are described as gifts that “save lives”137 and “make a difference right now and in the future.”138 Diakonia also uses testimonials from people expressing how “good it feels in the heart” when they donate.139

According to the second or “NGO charity view,” Diakonia is depicted as the giver of charity. Instead of mediating gifts from donors, they themselves assume the role of the giver. Diakonia portrays itself as providing resources to people in distress from their own funds.140 Following this view, Diakonia receives moral credit as the giver of charity. Their work is described as outstanding and vital to the development of Somalia.141 They are also characterized as giving people in dire circumstances the opportunity to live a decent life.142 Throughout their fundraising, Diakonia uses narratives portraying their organization as the savior of the Somali people. They credit themselves for building a governmental system, social institutions, and a working civil society.143 Diakonia also uses the famine of 2011–2012 as an example of the quality of the work they have performed in the northern parts of Somalia. By showing that the areas in which they were active were not as badly affected by the crisis, and at the same time explicitly stating that this was thanks to their work and that of other NGOs, Diakonia creates a narrative ascribing stability in northern Somalia to those efforts.144

Diakonia also publishes testimonials of gratitude they have received.
“It is amazing that you have done all this in my region, that it has become so good,” he exclaims. “Our whole society has basically been built by Diakonia.” He presses my hand in both of his when I get out of the taxi, thanks me, and refuses to let me pay for the trip, even though I insist. It is enough that I work for the organization that has made a difference in his homeland, that is payment enough.\textsuperscript{145}

In addition, Diakonia uses narratives from their own activists, relating that they feel “very pleased and proud” of their work.\textsuperscript{146} In contrast to the first view, donors are here portrayed as giving gifts to Diakonia, not to people in distress. On several occasions, Diakonia describes donor transactions as gifts to them and their work.\textsuperscript{147} Diakonia expresses gratitude towards donors for the support they have been given.\textsuperscript{148} Thus, donors in this case do not receive moral credit for giving charity but for being organizational supporters. By expressing both a donor and an NGO charity view, Diakonia constructs a paradoxical representation of aid in which transactions between NGOs and the recipients of aid are seen as a) the mediation of charitable gifts, and b) an act of charity itself. In both cases, aid is placed within a moral context in which it is characterized as a voluntary, commendable act. Since the recipients are not entitled to aid, those neglecting to provide it cannot be blamed.

Regarding the risk of a charity view of aid establishing moral hierarchies, Diakonia uses a narrative that is permeated with colonial and missionary discourse that contains a view of the global North as saving an uncivilized South. Diakonia presents itself as teaching Somalis how to live and how to think. For example, the organization describes its work as training Somali farmers how to cultivate their land,\textsuperscript{149} educating teachers who use outdated methods,\textsuperscript{150} educating members of the local government,\textsuperscript{151} educating imams on human rights and especially the rights of women,\textsuperscript{152} and teaching girls how to breastfeed and take care of children.\textsuperscript{153} Here the knowledge and capacity of Somalis is constantly neglected. Moreover, Diakonia presents itself as building a society from a previous state of chaos, taking the credit for making northern Somalia a stable region with a working civil society.\textsuperscript{154} Such a narrative creates a hierarchical view of Diakonia as possessing superior wisdom and capacity compared to the Somali people. Throughout Diakonia’s fundraising, Somalis are portrayed as passive, incapable, and ignorant thereby depriving them of both agency and credit for past agency.

6.2. Save the Children

Save the Children expresses the moral economic theme of charity and that of entitlements. As with Diakonia, SC communicates a NGO charity view,
but one they do not combine with a donor charity view. In the first instance, SC portrays itself as doing charity. They describe their activities as giving and recipients as receiving aid. For example, they state that “Bona is one out of several districts in southern Ethiopia where Save the Children together with UN and the Ethiopian authorities have given and give aid.”  

In this type of recurrent phrasing, SC appears to be giving money from their own funds. Thus, SC creates a view of itself as a generous giver of charity and takes moral credit as such. They characterize their fundraising activities as important, life-saving, meaningful, and providing hope. Like Diakonia, SC expresses a narrative of recipient-gratitude, as when they write: “‘Thanks,’ he shouts after us, when we leave, and the strong furrowed face cracks into a smile. ‘Thanks to your organization for saving Sunbete!’” Such a narrative communicates a view of the organization doing a supererogatory virtuous deed, placing aid within the moral context of commendable and non-obligatory acts.

SC portrays donors as giving gifts to the organization, not to people in distress. This can be seen in their appeals, where SC uses the expression “give a gift to Save the Children’s catastrophe fund.” SC expresses gratitude towards donors for the support the organization has been given. They also describe donations as valuable contributions and good deeds, giving donors moral credit for being organizational supporters. As in the case of Diakonia, SC constructs a view of aid as charity given from their NGO to people in distress, making such aid a commendable and non-obligatory act. By not combining the NGO charity and donor charity view, SC avoids the paradox of Diakonia. However, the risk of creating a moral hierarchy between givers and recipients of charity remains. Throughout their fundraising, SC portrays itself as the active agent, while recipients are generally depicted as passively waiting for help and depending on foreign aid for survival. The capability and knowledge of the recipients is seldom acknowledged, although colonial and missionary discourses are less conspicuous than in the case of Diakonia.

SC also expresses a moral economic theme of aid as providing entitlements. In this case, SC establishes itself as an organization protecting the rights of children. SC distances itself from the view of aid as charity by saying that their work “is not about helping ‘the weak.’” Most clearly this view is expressed in the recurring presentation of the organization used in their press releases.
Save the Children is a politically and religiously independent popular movement, with operations in Sweden and internationally. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a base, we work to improve the conditions of children and insure that the rights of children are respected.165

Both the work of SC and the donation of funds is constructed as providing entitlements.166 Thus, both SC and its donors are cast as rights-providers. In contrast to charity, the moral context of entitlements operates on a level of obligations. Here SC ascribes obligations to provide aid to the international community, individual states, and civil society in general. For example, SC has insisted that states that are aid donors contribute additional funds.167 They also see themselves as obliged to provide aid (“We think that it is our duty to be there”168), and for individuals to give aid.

Everyone should give some of their time to somebody else.... On the Horn of Africa the children right now are paying the ultimate price for climate change, financial crisis, and food shortages. Their emaciated bodies can easily give us the impulse to look away. But in this situation it is just no longer good enough to think only of oneself.169

SC shows indications of blaming those who do not fulfill their obligations to provide aid. Here they criticize donors, NGOs, and states that they believe have not done enough to mitigate the famine.170 This creates a climate in which people are made to feel obliged to provide aid. In this moral context, neither SC nor its donors are commended for providing aid, which is viewed in a neutral manner as the fulfillment of one’s duties. However, SC and donors do receive moral credit for taking the role of a rights advocate, that is, for urging others to provide aid. This can be seen when SC employs a vocabulary of fighting for the rights of children and striving to create a more just world.171 For example, the following expression is a reoccurring theme of their advertisements: “Become a Children’s rights-fighter and work for a better future for millions of children.”172 In contrast to more neutral language, SC creates an image of themselves and their donors as heroes fighting a war for justice.

Thus, SC expresses both a moral economic theme of aid as charity, and one of aid as providing entitlements. While avoiding the paradox of combining a donor charity and NGO charity view, this generates another type of contradiction in which aid is placed within two different moral contexts at the same time. In a charity context, aid is seen as a non-obligatory commendable act, while in an entitlement context, it is viewed as an obligatory non-com-
mendable act. While these two views are incompatible, they enable SC to receive moral credit as a giver of charity and as a rights advocator.

6.3. Médecins Sans Frontières

Like SC, Médecins Sans Frontières expresses both moral economic themes of charity and entitlements. Regarding charity, the organization’s publicity shows it as having its own funds which it then distributes to people in distress. Overall, MSF describes its activities as giving support, help, or health care.173

According to MSF, they give aid for free,174 as in the following presentation of the organization.

Médecins Sans Frontières has worked in Somalia since 1991 and gives free medical care in eight regions of the country. Over 1,400 local staff, supported by hundreds of international staff in Nairobi, assists the population with free medical care, surgery, treatment for malnutrition, as well as water supply.175

MSF creates an image of having the option to charge for their services, but generously refusing to do so. Here they are building an identity in contrast to profit-driven organizations, thus receiving credit for providing aid for free. This representation is in opposition to a donor charity view. Overall, the presence of donors in the fundraising is much more limited compared to Diakonia and SC. When mentioned, donors are described as financing176 or giving generous gifts to MSF for which MSF expresses its gratitude.177 In such cases, donors receive moral credit for providing organizational support. MSF, on the other hand, receives moral credit for saving lives, relieving suffering, providing meaningful help, and giving sanctuary to people in distress.178 Similarity to SC and Diakonia, MSF makes use of a narrative of gratitude in which recipients thank the organization.

His father was overjoyed to see him when he came to pick him up. He did not cease to thank Médecins Sans Frontières when he and Yusuf left the hospital. I myself am Somali and without the help of Médecins Sans Frontières we would be like a boat that runs out of fuel in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Without the help of Médecins Sans Frontières thousands of people would have died.179

With such a narrative MSF communicates that their work is virtuous and evokes gratitude. Moreover, MSF highlights the hardships it faces while providing aid. The portrait is one of an organization that is overburdened,180 near the breaking point,181 and working under great pressure.182 Their per-
sonnel are shown working in unsafe conditions, facing great risks, being attacked, kidnapped, killed, and cold-bloodedly murdered. Nevertheless, MSF depicts them continuing their work despite these hardships, thus emphasizing their deep commitment and bravery. These narratives give MSF the moral credit of a self-sacrificing, courageous, charity giver and place aid within a moral context of commendable and non-obligatory acts. Regarding moral hierarchies, MSF ascribe agency to their recipients, stressing how they have fled hundreds of miles, but primarily show them as extremely vulnerable and dependent on MSF for survival.

In addition to the NGO charity view, MSF constructs aid as providing entitlements. In this case, MSF insist on everyone’s right to adequate health care, the right of refugees to protection, and the fulfillment of people’s basic need for food, shelter, and water. Here MSF takes a legalistic approach to rights, referring to international laws and conventions. In contrast to SC, MSF sees the obligation to provide aid at the state level. For example, by stressing that it is the joint responsibility of the international community to assist Somali refugees with food and shelter. MSF especially addresses policy makers in this regard.

The refugees in Dadaab need more than ever continuous support from UNHCR, the Kenyan government, and humanitarian organizations in order to survive. It is the responsibility of policy makers to find solutions to turn around the current trend in which refugees are paying the price for a conflict they are trying to escape.

MSF is not reticent in condemning the international community and individual countries for not fulfilling their obligations. They have described the lack of aid to refugees in Dadaab as a crime against the Refugee Convention, urging all countries that have ratified the convention to fulfill their obligations. However, its strongest rebuke is expressed toward those who attack the organization and its personnel. Here the Somali people are depicted as obligated to insure the safety of MSF workers. “All parties in the conflict, the leaders as well as the Somali population, must support us in our work and guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers.” In addition, MSF states that they feel forced to quit operations in some areas since the Somali population has not provided them security. This is the opposite view as that of SC. Rather than MSF being obliged to secure the rights of the Somali people, the Somalis are expected to secure the rights of MSF workers.
However, like SC, MSF receives moral credit for being a rights advocate, although it does not use a vocabulary of fighting for rights. Instead, MSF draws on the moral credit commonly associated with journalism, taking the role of a neutral truth-teller that informs the world of the situation on the ground. For example, in a news item with the headline “The world needs to know,” MSF states that “Then could Médecins Sans Frontières as one of the few organizations on site testify to the situation and demand everyone’s right to appropriate medical care, regardless of political affiliation.”\(^{197}\) MSF describes it as part of its mission to share information concerning the conditions they see on the ground.\(^{198}\) While SC ascribes the moral credit for rights advocacy to its donors, MSF reserves this for itself. Unlike SC, MSF takes the moral credit for both advocating rights and providing them. Since MSF does not see itself as obliged to provide aid, it can be commended for doing more than their duty. This casts MSF in the role of stepping in when the international community fails to fulfill its obligations.

MSF creates a moral context that is conditioned by whom it concerns. If that actor is the international community or individual countries, aid is constructed as an obligatory, rather than a commendable, act. With regard to civil society, aid is constructed as a non-obligatory, commendable act. In this manner, MSF manages to construct aid as an entitlement that they receive moral credit for providing. In this way, MSF is ascribed moral credit for giving charity, advocating rights, and providing entitlements while donors only receive credit as organizational supporters.

6.4. Red Cross

Red Cross presents a diverse moral construction of aid, having some aspects in common with the other NGOs already considered. Like Diakonia, RC expresses both a donor charity and NGO charity view. RC depicts donors as giving gifts mediated by their organization to people in distress. This view can be found in several appeals in which RC urges people to “help the victims of the drought” by giving gifts.\(^{199}\) Here, donors receive moral credit for being caring and having a strong will to give.\(^{200}\) RC states that the collected funds “show that the Swedish people have been moved by what is now happening in East Africa and commit themselves to those now affected by the extreme drought.”\(^{201}\) Furthermore, RC stresses their role as fundraisers by referring to their resources as money raised.\(^{202}\) RC continually states the amount of money they have collected and how they use it.\(^{203}\) This representation puts emphasis on the donor, so that RC’s funds are not seen as neutral or disposable in any way RC wishes, but as a special type of money
linked to a giver. Thus, RC shows itself as having to report back to donors how they use their money, especially when the organization discusses earmarking and how it can insure that the money donors contribute goes to its intended purpose.204

RC also presents itself as a giver of charity and as having its own funds from which to give.205 For example, they use the following headlines in their press releases: “The Red Cross gives food assistance to 1 million people in Somalia”206 and “The Red Cross gives 10 million to the world’s largest refugee camp in Kenya.”207 Donors are here seen as providing support for the work of the RC, not as giving directly to people in distress.208 In turn, RC thanks donors for such support and in that sense ascribes moral credit to them.209 From this perspective, donors are not seen as givers of charity but as organizational supporters. Regarding the moral credit that accrues to RC, they describe their own work as outstanding, life-saving, and of vital importance.210 Like MSF, RC uses narratives of self-sacrifice and courage when they describe the hardships they face while providing aid, such as great insecurity, conflict, and flooding.211 Despite these risks, RC claims that they stay on the ground when other organizations leave.212 However, although RC tells stories similar to other NGOs of saving the lives of malnourished children, it does not publicize explicit narratives of gratitude coming from recipients, suggesting the NGO charity view of RC is not as strong as other NGOs’. However, by expressing both a donor charity and NGO charity view, RC faces the same paradox as Diakonia. Like Diakonia, RC expresses this paradox in their appeals by first describing donors as helping victims of the famine and, later on, thanking them for supporting RC.213 Concerning the problem of moral hierarchies, RC seems to express the least elements of colonial and missionary discourses. Throughout their fundraising, RC stresses the skills, capability, and knowledge of recipients.214 The surviving strategies of recipients are constantly mentioned, as well as their active fight for survival.215

RC also express a view of aid as providing of entitlements, in a way similar to SC and MSF. For example, RC uses the expression “The right to food” as a thematic headline for a reportage.216 It also stresses people’s right to a decent life and the right that people in distress must have to retain control over their own lives.217 Like SC, RC places the obligation of fulfilling these entitlements upon the world in general, using “we” in an inclusive sense, such as “We must act now to save lives.”218
First of all, the world must not stand nonplussed before predictable crises like the one in the Horn of Africa. There must be an end to the way of ignoring these recurring droughts. … Clean water, sanitation, health care, support of livelihoods, and shelter is a must to strengthen people’s right to a decent life.219

RC particularly insist that individual countries, donors, and the aid system provide long-term aid.220 As in the case of SC, RC direct blame towards those who fail to meet their obligations.221 A distinctive feature of RC is that they criticize the global financial system for destroying the livelihoods of millions of poor people around the world by speculating on global food prices.222 RC also shows indications of criticizing private citizens if they do not contribute.223 Regarding moral credit, RC primarily receives it for being an advocate of rights, showing elements of both a “rights fighter” like SC and a “truth-teller” like MSF. RC often presents itself as giving early warnings about things others ignore and urging the outside world to take action.224 It also describes its work as taking a stand, sending a clear message, and expressing support for people in exposed situations.225 Furthermore, RC includes donors in sharing the moral credit of rights advocacy. Donors and the RC are described as part of the same value community, as in the following appeal: “No human being should have to face discrimination, oppression, torture, isolation, war, famine, or bullying. If you agree, you are welcome to join us as a member of the Red Cross.” 226 Finally, since RC expresses a view of aid as charity and as providing entitlements, they face the same contradiction as SC. This makes RC’s fundraising the most conflicting, conveying both the donor/NGO charity paradox and the charity/entitlement paradox.

7. Concluding discussion and summary
The moral economic structure of the fundraising for the Somalia famine of 2011–2012 by Diakonia, SC, MSF, and RC is summarized in Table 1 below. Following this table, the NGOs can be divided into balanced and unbalanced, and into maximizing and minimizing approaches with regard to how they distribute moral credit. RC expresses a balanced view, ascribing the same amount of moral credit to donors and themselves. They take a maximizing approach since they derive credit from both a charity and an entitlement conception of aid. Like RC, Diakonia presents a balanced view, distributing moral credit to donors and to Diakonia equally. However, in contrast
to RC, Diakonia take a medium approach, deriving credit solely from a charity conception of aid. SC, on the other hand, shows an unbalanced view, ascribing more moral credit to themselves rather than to its donors. While both SC and SC’s donors receive credit for rights advocacy, SC also takes credit for being a giver of charity. Finally, MSF exhibits a highly unbalanced view in maximizing their own moral credit by receiving charity credit, advocacy credit, and rights provider credit, while minimizing the moral credit of donors to that of organizational support only. (Organizational support is not included in this table since all NGOs generally ascribe it evenly to donors.)

Thus, the NGOs differ from one another in the way they distribute moral credit. The greatest contrast is between Diakonia’s balanced medium approach, and MSF’s highly unbalanced maximized approach. Table 1 indicates that aid in itself does not entail any specific moral credit, nor that it be distributed to a specific actor. Who is deemed virtuous differs between different interpretations of aid. In some cases, neither donors nor NGOs are seen as commendable at all, while in other cases NGOs are highly praised and donors are viewed simply as organizational supporters.

The moral economic themes of charity and entitlements place aid within different moral contexts. A charity conception of aid views it as a non-obligatory, commendable act, while an entitlement conception sees it as an, either universal or conditioned, obligatory non-commendable act. In Table 1, Diakonia is the only NGO that remains within the same moral context of aid, that is, a charity context. The other NGOs use a combination, as for
example SC and RC combine a charity context with a universal entitlements context. MSF, on the other hand, combines a charity context with a conditioned entitlements context. Thus, we see one NGO expressing a moral economy of aid as charity solely and three NGOs that use a combined view, constructing aid as both charity and providing entitlements. None of the NGOs examined presented a moral economy of aid solely as the provision of entitlements. Thus, no examples were found of aid fundraising that would place it within a clear moral context of a non-commendable, obligatory act where recipients are entitled to aid by virtue of a legitimate claim.

Table 1 shows that the NGOs examined share one thing in common: they all express an NGO charity view, making it the main moral economy of aid being communicated in their fundraising. As we have seen, an NGO charity view constructs aid as a charitable gift given by NGOs to people in distress and places aid within the moral context of non-obligatory, commendable acts that evoke gratitude from recipients and admiration from the larger social context. Under such circumstances NGOs receive moral credit for being caring, generous, and self-sacrificing. This view is demonstrated when NGOs use the vocabulary of gift giving to describe their work together with recipient narratives expressing gratitude.

Since a gift is the former property of the giver, the funds of NGOs are seen as something belonging to them that they then give. Thus, an NGO charity view has to construct the funds an NGO receives from donors as free money, that is, funds without any defined purpose, condition, or restriction. If NGOs are to be viewed as givers of charity, their funds cannot be seen as already earmarked for people in distress. In other words, the decision to give funds to a charitable cause must be ascribed solely to the NGO. This construction of free money can be seen when NGOs describe funds from donors as gifts to them. Commonly, a gift has no restrictions and can be used by recipients in any manner they see fit. However, with gifts can come the responsibility to reciprocate, but this is unrelated to the use to which the original gift is put. Instead, a reciprocal gift on the part of an NGO can be a way of creating a social bond between the organization and its donors. Thus, by framing a donation as a gift in this manner, the NGOs enable to detach it both from the intentions and the goodwill of the donor.

Not only does an NGO charity view contrast sharply with a donor charity view, but also with the broader “aid chain” conception of aid. The latter views aid as something transferred from donors through the mediation of NGOs to the intended recipients. It is a common metaphor for describing how aid works within both academia and the aid community. Moreover, it is often
assumed that NGOs want to emphasize the aid chain, that is, present a clear path that the money follows to recipients in order to enhance credibility, legitimacy, and donor support. However, the preceding analysis has shown contrasting results as NGOs, rather than stressing an aid chain, break it in order to be viewed as givers of charity. Despite some expressions of the aid chain view by Diakonia and RC, the NGO charity view is clearly dominant.

A moral economy of NGO charity leads to two main interpretations of the economic practice of aid. The first depicts funds transferred from donors to NGOs as free money; the second sees resources transferred from NGOs to recipients as charitable gifts. Following this understanding, the donation of funds to NGOs becomes detached not only from the concept of charity but from aid in general. Instead of donor transactions being something directed to support people affected by some crisis, it becomes a way to support an organization. Thus, a person giving money to an NGO is no longer seen as providing aid. Instead, the NGO becomes the sole actor conveying aid by doing charity. Perhaps this is why NGOs have combined the NGO charity view with other constructions of aid. Overall, the moral economy of non-governmental fundraising can be visualized as a pair of scales in which the moral credit ascribed to donors is balanced against that ascribed to NGOs. Such a structure can be found in the fundraising of Diakonia, balancing the moral credit of NGO charity with donor charity; SC, balancing the moral credit of NGO charity with donor rights advocacy; and RC, balancing NGO charity with donor charity and with donor rights advocacy. However, MSF is an exception, since it does not balance the maximized NGO credit with donor credit.

We have seen that these combinations of the NGO charity view with other perspectives creates paradoxes. Regarding the donor/NGO charity paradox expressed by Diakonia and RC, transactions from donors are seen as gifts to famine-afflicted people and organizational support. In turn, recourses provided by NGOs are seen as gifts to famine-afflicted people and the mediation of gifts from donors. This would not be a problem if the different views were applied to different transactions. The paradox arises when the same resource is viewed as a gift from donors and NGOs at the same time. In other words, Diakonia and RC try to uphold and break the aid chain simultaneously. Furthermore, Diakonia and RC show indications of constructing a synonymous relationship between the notion of supporting people in distress and supporting the work of NGOs. For example, a notice from Diakonia first states that hairdressers gave money to “to the Horn of Africa,” but a few sentences later the same notice says they gave the
money to “Diakonia’s catastrophe-work.” Another appeal from Diakonia reads: “‘Do as I do– give your lunch to the Horn of Africa’ calls the social democratic party leader Håkan Juholt, who gives money to the work of Diakonia for famine-afflicted people in the Horn of Africa.” Similarly, an RC advertisement urges people to give to those in the Horn of Africa, while later stating, “Many thanks for all contributions, but we need more.” Thus, transactions from donors can be seen both as gifts to an NGO and to famine-afflicted people since it is framed as one and the same thing. While this can soften the donor/NGO charity paradox, it entails other problematic aspects.

By placing “supporting famine-afflicted people” and “supporting the work of NGOs” on an even par, Diakonia and RC equate their work with the fulfillment of the needs of people suffering from famine. In this manner, Diakonia and RC take the paternalistic position of knowing exactly what famine-afflicted people require, that is, how they would use funds if given to them. At the same time, the voice of the recipients is silenced when an NGO is depicted as their representative– an important example of the discursive power of moral economies. This also gives the illusion that all the funds Diakonia and RC receive go directly to assist those in need. The money they divert for, for example, salaries and administrative expenses is deleted from the discourse. Alternative ways of supporting famine-afflicted people aside from the work of the NGO are also excluded.

Regarding the charity/entitlement paradox expressed by SC and RC, the providing of aid is seen as a non-obligatory commendable act, and simultaneously as a universal, non-commendable, obligation. This entails that both conceptions of aid are weakened, but primarily this is a problem for an entitlement view. While stressing the right to aid, urging others to provide it, and criticizing those who do not, SC and RC are undermining the idea of aid as an entitlement. In return, they claim moral credit from both rights advocacy and charity. The paradox also allows SC and RC to switch between these two moral economies of aid in order to secure moral credit. If a critique of a charity conception of aid, such as the one Hattori defends, is put forward SC and RC can stress their role as a rights provider. On the other hand, if they are censured for not fulfilling their obligations, they can underscore their role as a giver of charity. In this manner, SC and RC can avoid criticism from both standpoints.

MSF’s fundraising does not entail the charity/entitlement paradox. Since MSF places aid within a conditioned entitlements context, where only state actors are obliged to provide aid, recipients are not entitled non-governmental aid. Thus, both MSF’s charity conception and entitlement con-
ception of aid place the work of the organization within the moral context of supererogatory virtues. However, this understanding blurs the concept of entitlements. In general, when people are entitled to something it is from the point of view of the claimant. What MSF does in this case is turn the focus away from the claimant towards the provider of entitlements. Thus, people are entitled to aid depending on who is providing it. In the case of nations, people are entitled to aid; in the case of civil society purveyors, they are not. Although this standpoint can be defended by referring to international law, as MSF has done, it remains problematic. A law-based conception of obligations is inherently relativistic because if the law changes, our obligations to one another change with it. Thus, when the law says that no one is obliged to assist another, they are not. This view becomes especially troubling when appropriated by an organization claiming to be an advocate for rights. Rather than strengthening the idea of a global civil society having responsibilities towards its constituents, MSF undermines such a conception. Finally, MSF is inconsistent in this matter since they stress the responsibility of the Somali people to assist them, thus departing from a state oriented view on obligations.

This working paper has examined the way moral economies shape our view of what aid is, how it should be managed, and attitudes towards its practitioners. A central moral economy has been identified in which NGOs present themselves as givers of charity. As in previous research, this conception of aid has been found to reaffirm moral hierarchies of power. Considering aid as charity draws attention away from the structural causes of suffering, those who benefit from it, and those who are to blame for it. By departing from a moral context of fairness, such a view also deprives people in distress of the entitlement to aid.

A charity conception of aid can be defended by the claim that it motivates people to donate. However, this study has found that NGOs mainly depict themselves as givers of charity, not their donors, so that the moral credit ascribed to donors is less than that of NGOs. It is puzzling why NGOs use a moral economy of NGO charity. If their purpose is to promote the organization, there are other types of moral credit available, such as the credit of rights advocacy. Moreover, presenting themselves as givers of charity breaks the aid chain by characterizing NGOs as the sole aid provider. How transactions between donors, NGOs, and recipients should best be understood is not clear at present. In fact, the NGOs studied do not only construct aid as charity, but also as a right, resulting in conflicting moral economies. Perhaps this is a sign of a discourse moving from a charity con-
ception towards an entitlement conception of aid. However, in order for such a transformation to succeed, NGOs need to be prepared to forgo the moral credit as givers of charity.
8. Notes


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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 11.
38 Ibid.
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69 Ibid., 227.
70 Ibid., 101–102.
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72 Ibid., 101.
73 Ibid., 219.
75 Ibid., 1530.
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77 Ibid., 1540.
80 Ibid., 237–238.
81 Ibid., 233.
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83 Ibid., 246.
84 Ibid., 233, 246.
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93 Ibid., x.
94 Ibid., ix.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 101.
98 Gee, How to do, 8.
99 Ibid., 20.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 16.
102 Gee, An Introduction, 112.
103 Ibid., 58.
104 Gee, How to do, 166.
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107 Gee, How to do, 166.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., 110, 112.
110 Gee, An Introduction, 2.
111 Gee, How to do, 117.
112 Gee, An Introduction, 76.
113 Ibid., 90–91.
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115 Ibid., 19.
116 Gee, How to do, 122.
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127 Ibid.
130 MSF [News], Behovet av.
131 Maxwell & Majid, Famine in Somalia, 15.
132 Diakonia [Campaign], Ge en lunch.
134 Diakonia [Notice], ”Frisörer klippte till, gav dagskassan till Afrikas Horn,” Dela med 2011(4); 10.
135 Ibid.
136 Diakonia [Article], ”3 miljoner samlades in till Afrikas Horn,” Dela med 2011(4); 11.
138 In Swedish: ”gör skillnad just nu och i framtiden,” Diakonia [News], Tack alla.
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145 In Swedish: ”Det är fantastiskt, att ni har gjort allt det här i min region, att det har blivit så bra’, utbrister han. ‘Hela vårt samhälle har i princip byggets upp av Diakonia.’...
Han trycker min hand med sina båda när jag stiger ur taxin, tackar mig och vägrar låta mig betala för resan trots att jag insisterar. Det räcker med att jag arbetar för den organisation som gjort skillnad i hans hemland, det är betalning nog.” Diakonia [Article], Att utbilda.


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150 Ibid.

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174 MSF [Press release], Vårdar sårade.
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180 MSF [Press release], Skriande behov.

181 MSF [Press release], Somalia – Krav.

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184 MSF [Press release], Chockade efter; MSF [Press release], Tvingas avbryta medicinsk.

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