Ethical Dilemmas in Mediation of International Aid

We Effect’s Visual Communication from Kenya to Sweden

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how international development organizations are working to communicate campaigns and photographs from one cultural context to another. Additionally, will challenges in making campaigns which are both ethical appropriate and engaging be highlighted and discussed in relation to today’s impatient media landscape where globalization and development are dominated by economic interests. This research follows the international development cooperation We Effect and explore their whole media production process while making external communication from the work in Kenya to the target group in Sweden. The researcher has done interviews with decision makers at the head office in Stockholm, regional communicators in Nairobi, independent photographers and farmers in the fields of Kenya, visible in We Effect’s campaigns in Sweden. Additionally, ethnographical observations and diary notes contribute to answer the question how international organizations are planning, creating and distributing ethical and engaging media about development organizations long-term development work. In theoretical discussions, anchored in concepts about global culture, cosmopolitanism and how to mediate distant others, together with previous literature by Lilie Chouliaraki, Roger Silverstone and Stuart Hall, will this research state that there are several challenges in communicating messages from one cultural context to another. The distance, both geographical and mental, makes it challenging for the media producers and spectators to understand the same message; this research states that both the media producers and spectators’ interpretations of photographs and messages are dependent on their cultural background.

Keywords
Mediation of distant sufferers, cosmopolitanism, global culture, encode/decode, We Effect, ethical dilemmas, engaging campaigns, international aid

The front-page photo is of Beth, 2019, Kenya. She looks at a video of herself published on We Effect’s social media. This is the video she refers to in the quote in the introduction. Photo: Julia Denifl Örtegren
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1. Introduction

We Effect is an international aid organization and development cooperation, working with a long-term approach for a sustainable and fair world free from poverty (We Effect 3). In recent years has a discussion been intensified regarding what type of photographs and stories the organization should communicate. The discussion is about whether to communicate “result images” – images showing results of the aid and positive development, or “need images” – images presenting how the people that We Effect work with are struggling and require the spectator, the Swedish target group, to get involved and donate money to the organization.

There is however a critical balance between mediating people who need support and mediating people as victims and as vulnerable others, dependent on white saviors. But the need images have shown to be efficient in the sense that the target group engage with those photos to a higher

What do you think people in Sweden think and feel when they see this video of you, published by We Effect on social media?

“Actually, I might not know because I don’t know their interest, as they see a Kenyan woman. I don’t even know what the difference is, between your way of life and mine. Maybe they get to know more about what we in Kenya do.”

Do you think it is important to have your name visible together with the photo?

“I don’t know whether to say yes or no. But I think it is important. Maybe sometime you can invite me to your place, also so I know what you do there. I don’t know if there is a problem, that is why I can’t tell. If it’s in your interest then I don’t mind.”

- Beth, Farmer and founder of Kakuyuni Farmer Cooperation Society, Kenya

Beth, 2019. Photo: Julia Denifl Örtegren
extent since they get emotionally involved and understand where their money will go. Additionally, is it a challenge for long-term organizations, such as We Effect who work with gender equality, land rights, financial inclusion and environmental issue in Eastern Africa, to mediate their work in an engaging way (We Effect 4). The target group in Sweden live far away from the challenges in rural parts in Kenya, both geographically and mentally. In order to communicate the beneficiary’s reality in a conceivable way, the stories need to be simplified, which can result in another ethical dilemma.

Private donors in the west, often called “global north” in an aid context, are living in another cultural space than the people in “global south” which means that they are surrounded by different world views and read messages and signs in different ways. This makes it challenging for communicators, sharing stories from one cultural context to another, to create content that both engage the viewer to become a donor and which at the same time make them get a deeper understanding of a situation so far away. In a digital media landscape where we are being fed with thousands of images every day, communicators are struggling to create media content that make the viewers stop their thumb while scrolling on social media. To make the viewer stop scrolling and actually spend a few seconds looking at a photo, read a text or watch a video, they viewer needs to feel an emotional connection to the content. Aid organizations working with international development and global cooperation, partly funded by private donors, do also need to adjust to this new way of fast media consumption. Additionally, are these aid organizations often founded on ideas of solidarity and have an interest in giving a fair world view and portray people and beneficiaries with dignity and respect. This states that there is an ethical balance for the communicators to mediate stories that are simple enough for the viewer to understand, but which is also complex enough to give a fair depiction of reality.

Humanitarian organizations, however, organizations working short-term, mobilizing food, providing medication or transport during nature disasters or political conflicts can arguably make the distant spectator understand the message in a clearer way. They viewer might easier understand an urgent situation, get emotionally attached to the extreme situation and therefore will be more likely do engage with the campaign and donate money. Even though both long-term development cooperations and short-term humanitarian organizations are generally working towards the same end goal, which for most of them is a fair world without poverty, they are competing for the same potential donors. Even though We Effect is founded on values of solidarity, they also have an economic interest, since they need money to be able to continue
their business. In addition to cultural differences, mental and geographical distance and the development of the media landscape, is another challenge the political environment. Åsa, the head of communication at the office in Stockholm, summarizes it by saying:

“There are a lot of challenges in We Effect’s communication and one of them is that all of the people that we work with are very far away. It is easier for Stadsmissionen (reds note: Swedish organization working with homeless people in Sweden) when you see the people on the street. So, we have to work in different ways so that the people feel a connection to people in Asia, Latin America, Africa... it is so far away! And the Swedish donor get more and more focused on donating and engaging locally. This is something that has been visible when donor analyses have been made. This has to do with anti-globalization, nationalistic attitudes, xenophobia, and resistance to migration and refugees. People tend to think something like ‘Nope, I’m not going to help someone in Asia, we are having it difficult enough here at home!’ This challenge has been there all the time but it gets harder and harder” (Åsa 2019).

This work will investigate We Effects media production process and analyze the different challenges that arise while trying to produce ethical and engaging communication from the context of Kenya to the audience in Sweden. In particular will the steps of planning, creating and distributing media will be in focus and visual campaigns and photographs will be described and examined. Voices of regional communicators, independent photographers and farmers in Kenya will be heard together with communicators, project leaders and social media officers in Sweden.
Background

What is We Effect and why are they the chosen case study of this research?

The Swedish non-governmental organization We Effect was founded in 1948, and was at that time named “Cooperation Without Boarders (“Kooperationer utan gränser” in Swedish). The NGO started as a cooperation in Stockholm, inspired by an exhibition named “A world without boundaries” showing the gaps between the poor and the wealthy. Ideas of solidarity were substantial in Sweden at the time, and the country’s identity and norms were strongly tinged with social democratic influence. “The ground principles were already back then to have a cooperation and a ‘help to self-help’ approach. The goal was to combine local businesses with democratic participation in aid projects around the world. In ‘Folkhemmets’ Sweden, people counted their money on their Konsum (Swedish supermarket) receipts to get a refund from the previous year’s purchase and a lot of people decided to give their refund to aid. The first year, collections went up to 1 million SEK (in that time’s money market) and the money was given to education for corporations in Asia (We Effect 3).” The organization changed their name 2013 to “We Effect” with the purpose of having an international name that could be understood and used in all the countries where they work. Today, most Swedes know about the history and strong culture of civic engagement but the brand awareness of We Effect is generally low even though they are one of Sida’s biggest frame organizations.

We Effect work to end poverty by increasing equality in 25 countries and four continents. One of the regions are east Africa where they work in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania where they are supporting local partner organizations specialized in rural area development, housing, land rights and equality. They have one office in each country in the region and the regional head office is located in Nairobi, Kenya, where approximately 50 people work, supporting roughly 15 partner organizations. At the end of last year, the Swedish regional director quit and was replaced by a Kenyan born employee. The only swede still working with We Effect in the region is the communicator Mårten, who is responsible both for the regional communication and to produce the content to the Swedish audience.

In the same office building in Nairobi you can also find We Effect’s sister organization Agroforestry (“Vi Skogen“ in Swedish) who have been working in the region since 1983 (Vi Skogen). Except the local employed staff,
they also have a Swedish communicator, Elin, and a Swedish regional director. Both communicators contract will however end at the beginning of the summer of 2019 and they will be replaced by a local communicator. This will be a challenge according to both the communicators since the new one does not know the Swedish target group or have the same awareness of Swedish culture, context or norms. An issue that will be further discussed in this essay.

I have chosen to look deeper into We Effect as an organization and their communication work since I find their approach and discussions about ethical images interesting. Their work with the report #EveryoneHasAName indicates that they have an interest in the consequences of sharing images from one context to another and that they are interested in discussing consequences of distributing photographs from different contexts. I have respect for their work and their campaigns and think they are doing a worthy job of portraying people in a humanizing and decent way, which is another reason why I wanted to look deeper into the production process behind the campaigns and which is also why We Effect came to be the source of my empirical work. I did not want to choose an organization that has obvious unethical images of starving nameless children because they might not have the same awareness about the ethical dilemmas which can occur while creating their campaigns. I found it important to choose an organization that is conscious of power balances and that consider their own position of responsibility while communicating about people from the global south. However, this is an independent academic thesis and I have no interest in just confirming that they are doing a respectable job. I have no economic relationship with We Effect or any organization and this study will be carried out with an independent and critical approach.

**Everyone has a name**

We Effect have since 2012 released a yearly report named “#EveryoneHasAName” (translation from: #AllaHarEttNamn). Each report contains a media analysis of the previous year, investigating who are represented and named in Swedish analog and digital news media in discussions of international development. Last year’s report states that only 47 % of black Africans have been named in Swedish news media. This is a telling number if it is put into comparison to white, western, aid workers where 97 % of which have had their names published (My News Desk 2018). The percentage of how many Africans are given a name is an increase of 4 percent units from the last four years. However, the development of the content online is
not showing positive numbers. Less material has been analyzed but the report states that simply 12 % of black Africans have been named in Sweden’s news magazines online. These are also significant numbers since most articles about international aid in Sweden are published online, not in printed magazines. Another finding is that “victim images” are coming back as the most frequent kind of image.

The way people are being portrayed in media matters. The way the narration has been built says something about the media producers and it also reveals the norms of our society and how we see people – how we position ourselves and how we see distant others. When the report and conclusion were announced that only 12 % of Africans get their names published, Anna Tibblin, CEO at We Effect, commented “This is a tendency I hope the editorial staff takes very seriously. To portrait people without giving them a name makes it easier to create a distance to them. To publish a person’s name is a publicity-minded good practice (translation from Swedish “god publicistisk sed”) and also a very concrete way to guard open societies and democracy” (We Effect 2018).

Portraying white aid workers subjects with names and black beneficiaries into objects without names produces the idea of the “white hero” and the “black victim in need” which is harmful on both a local and global level. Arguably the objectification of black beneficiaries does not only increase polarization and racism but could also harm Swedish people’s world view and the perception of Swedish international aid. Most of the international Swedish aid goes to long term development and cooperation work, not to humanitarian work, which might be misconstrued if most of the photographs in an international aid discourse are portraying victims in need. Sida, The Swedish development cooperation, argues that the work with humanitarian aid might be the international aid work that is the most visible (Sida 2018).

**Global south/global north**

I have chosen to use the terms “global north” and “global south” while discussing international aid and work in the donator country and in the beneficiary country. In most cases I will specifically mean Sweden and Kenya but I will also discuss international aid in more general terms and will in these cases not use definitions as “undeveloped/developing/developed countries” or “first/third world” since these terms are arguably outdated. I will base a significant amount of analysis on the theory of Lilie Chouliaraki who uses the term “global south” while
describing countries previously named “developing country”. Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo describe this further in their research “The Global South and World Dis/Order”: “Thus, it is well known—to start with—that ‘Global South’ is the geopolitical concept replacing ‘Third World’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union. From this perspective, the global south is the location of underdevelopment and emerging nations that needs the ‘support’ of the global north (G7, IMF, World Bank, and the like). However, from the perspective of the inhabitants (and we say consciously inhabitants rather than ‘citizens’, regional or global), the ‘Global South’ is the location where new visions of the future are emerging and where the global political and decolonial society is at work” (Levander & Mignolo 2011, p.3). Levander & Mignolo addionally states ”In a nutshell, the ‘Global South’ (like democracy, development, and many other concepts) is now the place of struggles between, on the one hand, the rhetoric of modernity and modernization together with the logic of coloniality and domination, and, on the other, the struggle for independent thought and decolonial freedom” (Levander & Mignolo 2011, p.4).

**Are the people mediated in We Effects communication suffering?**

For 20-30 years ago, it was common that humanitarian organizations used photographs of starving children with swollen stomachs and flies in their eyes in their campaigns. Some of the big humanitarian organizations still do, even though they have been firmly criticized. We Effect rarely publish photographs of children and they have a policy saying that they should portray people with dignity. The people they work to support are not either victims of humanitarian crises but members in corporations, working for better livelihoods. They are not suffering explicitly but many of them do not have access to all the basic human rights they should have, such as clean water or the right to land. Since the organization is working long term with development, it is challenging for them to portray people as “sufferers”. With text and photos do they need to formulate messages that communicate the people’s needs in other ways, which goes in line with their image policy and which their intent of portraying people with dignity.

In order to be able to apply theories about “distant suffering” on We Effect’s communication, is it in place to have an initial discussion about “suffering” and whether people visible in We Effects campaigns are considered to be suffering or not. If someone were to decode a person in a We Effect campaign as suffering, it would probably depend on who you are asking and this person’s cultural background. A monthly donator in Sweden, for example a 65 year old woman,
living in a bigger city, having a university education (We Effect’s most common member), might have a certain life standard and when she sees a farmer digging in the soil or feeding her cows she might read and judge that the image portrays the farmer as a person suffering who is struggling in their life, because the Swedish woman compares it to what she knows and her perception of a good, desirable life in Sweden. The farmer might not consider herself as someone who is suffering but the narration from the communications department might create this image of them, and the Swedish spectator might decode them as a sufferer. Sometimes I will use the term “mediating distant sufferers” and sometimes “mediating distant others”, where the first mentioned is with an emphasis on the mediation of communicating misfortune and adversity in an ethical matter while the latter is emphasizing the challenges in mediating a distant, foreign and unknown context from one cultural context to another cultural context.

**Statement of purpose**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate each step in We Effect’s media production process and follow the different discussions, decisions and environments where the campaigns are being planned, created and distributed. Moreover, the purpose is to follow up We Effects reasonings for naming people – I want to locally anchor the discussions of ethical communication, and what that contains, with the people who are being mediated. This research will analyze the matter of name, challenges in mediating distant others, and highlight cultural differences in the media production and in the phase of decoding messages. To what extent the photographers and communicators can be aware and have impact in how the photographs will be perceived and decoded is additionally of interest for this thesis.

**Research questions**

My main question is: *How do international aid organizations communicate photographs of distant others in an ethical and engaging way, from on cultural context to another?*

Additionally will I also try to answer:

- How is We Effect planning, creating and distributing campaigns in an ethical and engaging way?
- How is We Effect mediating distant others from one cultural context to another?
- What challenges appear within the media production process?
- In which ways do cultural background influence the communication process?
Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in six different parts. The first part, which contains an introduction, background and statement of purpose, invites the reader to the essential ideas of the essay; it presents the research questions and frame work of the study. The following part demonstrates theory, theoretical ideas that the analysis eventually will be based upon and argued from without. After the theory section the method section will be presented, announcing in what way the thesis has been designed and during which practical circumstances the material selection and interviews have been made. Thenceforth the section of the analysis will contain discussions where my voice, together with the theories and empirical material, will answer the research questions. The analysis is divided into four sections, these represent the four different steps in the media production process, which will be explained further in the analysis section. Finally, the conclusion will be presented and a final discussion with suggestions for further research.
2. Theoretical framework

To be able to analyze how international aid organizations can mediate distant others in an engaging and ethical way there is a need to define the terms and concepts as a foundation for the coming analysis, partly built on theoretical discussions. This section will present relevant previous literature and discussions about compassion fatigue, media production, mediation of distant suffering, intimacy at a distance, cosmopolitanism and global culture, us and them and the other, culture, language and meaning, encoding/decoding and finally a discussion about positive and negative images. Initially will I present relevant previous literature, which the coming concepts are built upon.

Previous research within the field of mediation of distant sufferers

This section will present previous literature that is of relevance to understand the coming discussions and research. This part will present the scholars who have been dominant in the field and made an essential contribution to the research of mediating distant suffering and subsequent discussions.

In the academic journal The International Communication Gazette, do Joye and Engelhardt state “Only since around the turn of the century have there been more sustained efforts within social sciences to tackle questions about what representations of distant suffering do to audiences and what audiences do to them. A rich and diverse body of work has since emerged on the public perception of mediated distant suffering and its socio-political significance. In particular, current discussions have centered around issues of morality in the production, mediation and reception of distant suffering” (Joye & Engelhardt 2015). They mention Boltanski (1999), Chouliaraki, (2006), Cottle (2014), Joye (2013), Moeller (1999) and Silverstone (2007) as significant regarding research about mediations of sufferers (Joye & Engelhardt 2015).

Further on, Joye & Engelhardt claim that the researchers Hoijer, Kyriakidou, Ong, Scott, and Seu request research about audiences’ interpretations on media of the distant others and request more empirical work. “At the same time, this mostly theoretical literature has not yet been sufficiently matched with substantial and rigorous empirical efforts. In particular, it has been argued that the strand of research suffers from a striking lack of studies that put their empirical
focus on audiences faced with mediated distant suffering. Several authors have therefore called for more scholarly work on audiences’ reactions to and interpretations of mediated suffering “(Joye & Engelhardt 2015). From this statement is it possible to argue that my research is accurate and relevant since it has an emphasis on empirical work and audiences’ interpretations. I will also study issues of morality in the media production, as previous scholars, but my contribution will be the empirical approach and voices from the field. Chouliaraki’s work has been important for the research in mediation of the distant sufferer, discourse analysis on news media and media ethics. She wrote “The Spectatorship of Suffering” in 2006 and “The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism” in 2013, which has been highly quoted and been a base for several other scholars in the same field. Chouliaraki mentions that theories about intimacy at a distance is nothing new. Literature about princess Diana and relations between spectators and celebrities are touching upon the same areas – how you can get emotional about something or someone you have not met in your own life (Chouliaraki 2006, p.20).

Michael Forsman and Fredrik Stiernstedt researched about media production is also worth mentioning when it comes to conclusions which this essay is built upon. Forsman and Stiernstedt investigate the Swedish radio channel RIX FM and the Estonian Star FM from an encoding and decoding perspective. Through the Norwegian media researcher Espen Ytreberg are they researching “that the encoding process can be seen as a form of decoding - of a genre, a format, etc. - we argue for the need to study what actually happens in the interpretation of the format in the different contexts of stations in different nations” (Forsman & Stiernstedt 2006, p. 47). They are seeing Stuart Halls encoding-decoding model as a tool to “discuss the relation between media texts and contexts in production as well as in reception” which is a similar interpterion as the one that will be used in this research where I will investigate how the text and signs will be created, communicated and received (Forsman & Stiernstedt 2006, p. 48). They also state ”On the encoding side however there is in Hall’s model - or at least has been in the interpretations and uses of it in later research - an emphasis on the determining factors of economy or technology” which is remarkable and by importance for this study as well since the access to technology and economical limitations will be highlighted several times in the interviews (Forsman & Stiernstedt 2006, p. 48).
Compassion fatigue

Discussions of the concept “compassion fatigue” is another crucial dialogue within the field of mediation of distant sufferers.

A big part of creating engaging visual communication is to create emotions with the spectator. However, if the images are too strong - or if the viewer already is too full of images of sufferers - the powerful images can create another experience than the desired one. In 1990 Anthony Giddens did research about democratization of responsibility and television as a medium of dissemination and established the “collage effect” of television, meaning that “too much information simply becomes too much” for the spectator (Chouliaraki 2006, p.33). In summary, instead of reaching the sought-after effect - to have the spectator feeling empathy and responsibility with the person they see suffer on television - the viewer can feel overwhelmed (Ibid).

“It is these acts of identity, engaging the spectators and sufferers in various relationships of proximity and agency to one another, that ultimately construe some suffering as being worthy of our pity and other as unworthy of it. The concept of regimes of pity suggests, then, that spectators do not possess ‘pure’ emotions vis-a-vis the sufferers, but their emotions are, in fact, shaped by the values embedded in news narratives about who the ‘others’ are and how we should relate to them. Pity, by this token, is not a natural sentiment of love and care but a socially constructed disposition to feeling that, in Boltanski’s words, aims to produce ‘a generalized concern for the ‘other’ (199, p.xx)” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.11).

Chouliaraki’s discussions also stands on the shoulders of researchers such as McQuire; while talking about “evil” is he arguing that “resistance to believe has been overrun by the perception that such evil is ‘human to all human’” (1999, p.153). Chouliaraki picks up this theory and develops the idea further in 2006: “Suffering, it tells us, occurs tall the time everywhere and it has become all too common to raise an eyebrow. It becomes banal. This means that the spectacle of suffering is not doubted in terms of its veracity, but, on the contrary, passively accepted as the truth of television and, indeed, of life” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.33). These issues, of unintentionally creating apathy, feelings of distance and unconcern by the spectator are ordinarily discussed under the term “compassion fatigue”. Chouliaraki discusses these issues and uses the term “apathetic spectator” - speaking of the viewer as a person feeling that she or he has accepted injustice and evil as an “inevitable condition of life” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.34).
Chouliaraki states that these discussion of democratization of responsibility, rather has been ignored and put side than systematically addressed and developed (Ibid). However, she does argue that the discussion of compassion fatigue is present and of high relevance since this attitude, the lack of compassion and feeling of suffering, is “often held responsible for corroding the potential for civil action in public life” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.112). Chouliaraki refers to qualitative research on audiences’ responses stating that “compassion fatigue is not about the spectator’s individualism and indifference, but may be directly connected to the ways in which news messages portray distant suffering” (Tester & T 2003, p.47). The problem is that news television “present problems but not their solutions”. This results in that the spectators, even if they feel like they want to do something for a positive change in the world, they “feel inadequate about acting on a world that lies beyond their reach and their control” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.112). This opens up for a discussion about the balance of the message in the organization’s visual communication – the organization should not only focus on communicating stories with a strong message, showing need, but also make the spectator feel hope and that they can be a part of a change and a solution.

Chouliaraki emphasis is not to question the spectator’s action or non-action but is rather requiring the media production to rethink how they form new stories. She argues “However, trying to define where compassion fatigue begins (with the spectator or the media) is perhaps not as important as we may think. What matters is where, in a practical way, we can begin to reverse the process of fatigue. I would suggest that we begin not with the audience side of the argument, with compassion fatigue, but with media fatigue – television’s representation and norms of reporting. This, for me, is the political problem, rather than the capacity of the public to engage with an act on distant suffering” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.113). She means that there needs to be extra focus and emphasis on the media production, it is the methods how to evoke pity and compassion which needs to develop. While defining compassion fatigue Silverstone highlight distance, which is a central part of the theory and hence force the issues and complexity of understanding stories and messages from another cultural context. Silverstone also argues that media itself has a power and responsibility in creating content where the spectator feel compassion. “On the one hand we find ourselves being positioned by media representation as so removed from the lives and worlds of other people that they seem beyond the pale, beyond reach of care or compassion, and certainty beyond reach of any meaningful or productive action” (Silverstone, p.172).
Even though We Effect are not communicating dead bodies or helpless people in a trauma it can still be difficult for viewers to imagine themselves not having access to clean water, adequate housing or other basic needs. It can be challenging for We Effect to represent the people they work with and for the viewer to understand what they can do to support the work. The organization is willing to communicate strong emotions to make the viewer emotional and willing to react. However, there is a fine balance in how to communicate messages that generate emotions – but not too strong, partly since they might be unethical, but also since the viewer might feel apathic, overwhelmed and helpless while seeing these kinds of photographs.

**Theory about media production**

This section of the essay will focus on theory that will directly be applicable to my case of study. A study about media production will initially be presented.

Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins did a study in 1993 about the international journal National Geographic’s media production, which resulted in the book “Reading National Geographic”. Similarly to this research, the two authors and professors did interviews with all the different people doing the media production for the magazine. They interviewed photographers and asked them about the process of taking photos in new countries, asked the editors how they wrote texts, how the selection of stories and photographs were made and how they thought about publishing stories, representing “third world cultures”. In the study, they investigate different processes in the media production process and highlight the working climate and relations between the regional office and home office. They also investigate how to portray distant cultures and found out that it can teach us a lot about our own.

Lutz and Collins rise the issue of how to communicate a message you really want to transfer. “One of the issues raised by the complexity of the photo production process is that of intentionality, or communicative intent. Intentionality is not the same as consequence; an artist intent may be misapprehended or subverted. Nevertheless, in order to understand the production of a cultural object, we must be alone to make some inference about who are communicating and what they mean to say” (Lutz & Collins 1993). These reflections and the problem of intentionally communicating a message is something I will look closer into and also use Stuart Hall’s theories to analyze further. There is a challenge in the photo production to see a situation, a message, try to capture it and try to communicate that message and make the viewer read the message in the same way. The process the spectator will have of decoding the message will be
even more challenged if the person has another cultural background – another “language” and world view. I will come back to this when explaining Hall’s theory about language, culture and his model of encoding and decoding.

In interviews with photographers a discussion about when to take photos arise. At National Geographic most photographers have previously worked as photo journalists and they discuss how they still take photos “valued for their informational content” and take photos of things they see and value. “At the same time, they (the photographers) understand that their work at National Geographic diverges from this function of recording events. In discussing the differences, they often refer to photojournalists as producing ‘spot news’ or ‘point pictures’” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.58). The photographers explain that these kinds of photos only have one layer, one dimension, which is to provide information. “Photographers said that National Geographic photographs at their best are multidimensional. They are like onions, one editor told us, with many layers than can be peeled back. Though they provide information, they also have an aesthetic dimension that communicates feelings and emotions” (Ibid).

Similar to my interviews a lot of the discussion with photographers and communicators end up being about practical circumstances and how the working environment in a “developing country” can differ from what they are used to and how this will affect both the production and the final result. One photographer told them a story of when he and his team wanted to photograph “the traditional process of freeze-drying potatoes” as a part of a story of potatoes in the world. A part of the traditional process in Lima was to step on the potatoes barefoot and they wanted children’s feet in the pictures “because the size of their feet would be more in keeping with the small Andean potatoes”. However, the process of meeting the children was not as they expected. When they arrived to the location the children where in school and they had to drive them across the country, when the children reached the location, the sun started to go down and they had only a couple of hours left and they did not at all get the results they had planned to get (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.66-67). The photographers also highlighted stories how they took the first contact and asked to take a person’s photo.

As mentioned, Lutz and Collins also discuss the international relation within the company since voices in the interviews discuss the differences of being a photographer out in the filed or being “home staff”. “Within the national geographic society, there is a clear distinction between photographers and the rest of the staff. Photographers are seen as renegades, somewhat quirky, and as operating in and responding to a different world from that of the ‘home staff’. One editor
spoke of the inherent tension between the two groups. Photographers, he said, want to tell the truth about that they’ve seen, while editors and home staff may object, protesting that it is radically different from what they assume is out there” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.69). They exemplify this with an example from the Vietnam war “(...) it was found, journalists stationed in Southeast Asia were radicalized by their experiences and same to hold views that diverged markedly from those of their supervisors in Washington and New York (Moeller 1989; Gans 1979)” (Ibid). The authors understanding of these interviews and material goes in line with my discussions with We Effect’s regional staff and home staff and will therefore be background to my analysis as well.

They also focus on one of the final steps in the production chain – the selection of the photos. This is one way to try to objectify the situation by giving both positive and negative images and try to re-create a nuanced reality. A photo editor talks about what photos they decide to use and how they go through thousands of photos and choose approximately 180 photographs that continues the process. “He looks for photographs that ‘appeal to a few of your senses’, photos that touch the viewer because they are beautiful or because they are shocking. Ideally, he said, a photograph should raise questions.” Another editor says “a picture should make you want to study it; if you saw it in real life you’d want to stop and watch” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.70). When this book was written, the media landscape did not look the same. Also, this international journal does not have the same pressure to collect money on suffering people’s behalf. But as the last editor said, they also want to catch the viewer, make him/her stop and take time to figure out the picture, but they however do not have the conflict of showing “too positive” or “too beautiful images”. If We Effect communicates pictures where it looks like people are living as developed lives as in Europe they might not donate money, this is not an issue for National Geographic. The discussion continues and the editors says that it is not only about choosing negative and positive images but also “combining frenetically active pictures with more tranquil shots (‘mothers with children’) and ‘men praying in soft light’), and considerations of focal length and portraiture.” The editor also brings up the “strength” of photos, that could be a victim of aids or someone on drugs – that could be a “strong” or “thought” photograph. Yet, the editors need to select carefully since strong photographs also can offend the viewer. “They are thus likely to generate outraged letters to the editor and cancels subscriptions” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.71).
Mediating distant suffering

In discussions about mediating distant sufferings I will use the definition by made by Chouliaraki where she states that “mediation” often is connected to medias capacity to “involve us emotionally and culturally with distant ‘others’ (Chouliaraki 2006, p.19). This is the process that I want to look deeper into. Chouliaraki is predominantly interested in the spectator’s emotions and action/non-action here, but I will mostly use the theory of mediation to understand the interviews with the media producers and investigate how aware they are of what they are trying to capture and create while mediating situations and people, others, to the Swedish target group. Tomlinson presents two different definitions of mediation. One is about “overcoming distance in communication” which Chouliaraki explains as a definition aiming to understand mediation as “not only overcoming geographical distance, but also ‘the closing of moral distance’ between people who live far away from one another.” Mediation in this understanding is “responsible for the deep cultural transformation” and the “dearterialization, the overcoming of geographical distance, as well as the compression of space and time and the real-time witnessing of faraway events” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.19). This definition argues that mediation makes people in different places and different cultures understand each other better.

The other definition by Tomlinson is arguing the opposite.

“At the same time, wishing to avoid a naive determinism that celebrates mediation as the happy bringing together of the world, Tomlinson also cares to emphasize the role that the medium plays in closing the distance between disparate locales. His second definition of mediation, then, is about the act of ‘passing through the medium’. This definition draws attention to the fact that everything we watch on screen is subject to the interventions of technology and the semiotic modes that the technology of the medium puts to use. Satellite transmission, strategies of camera work, television’s narrative and genres are some of the techno-semiotic affordances of television that affect the manner in which the closing of the distance between spectator and spectacle occurs” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.20).

Pramod K. Nayar argues that mediated suffering is “an act of facilitated communication, through mediators, translators, interpreters, for those victims who cannot speak. The intrusive camera makes it clear that what we are watching is, and always will be, a mediated version of the gruesome reality and that the camera will be between the event and our vision. If the real is what is delivered ‘pure’—with immediacy—the juggling camera, the photographer and the
lights foreground the medium or a state of hypermediacy, a condition of communication that I call ‘Manichean’, the dualism of all tele-trauma which oscillates between this immediacy and hypermediacy” (Nayar 2009, p. 153). He means that all the different steps and layers in between the situation and the spectators make the communication less authentic.

Chouliaraki also writes about how we relate to news images of distant sufferers. She questions what kind of images makes us relate to others or start to cry or switch off the television and what kind of images makes us angry and start to protest. She means that “these questions touch on the ethical role of the media in public life today. They address the issue of whether or not the media can cultivate a disposition of care for and engagement with the far away other; whether or not television can create a global public with a sense of social responsibility towards the distant sufferer” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.1). So, what is the reason why so many people became engaged during the Asian tsunami 2004? The previous secretary general of the UN, Kofi Annan said that the “unique international response” was because of two reasons: “1. Global footage – the whole world saws the tragedy. 2. Global suffering – over 40 countries lost their own citizens in the disaster.” Chouliaraki argues that what we can learn from this is “It tells us that witnessing the event and its disastrous aftermath on screen is important in evoking emotion, and thereby, a sense of care and responsibility for the distant sufferer. It also tells us how important is the fact that 40 nations, many of them Western, not only witnessed but also experienced the feeling of loss” (Ibid).

Her focus is on news media and news media’s relation to the spectators. My focus will be on the media production, however, her theories about mediating suffering are relevant since these discussions are present when organizations are producing media. When it comes to mediating distant sufferers Chouliaraki argues that it is not only the norms or institutions that affect the outcome but also technology. The relation between discourse and technology affect what message are being communicated and how people interpret the message. She says this in the context of news television but the theoretical discussion is also applicable on international organizations mediating people in one context, communicating it to another. Additionally, she is arguing, that there is an over-reliance on technology being the way to create a digitalized community where everyone has knowledge about everything, regardless of time and space. “Despite the instantaneous and global reach of visibility that such technologies have achieved, the optimistic celebration of our planet at a global village or the satellite viewer as a new cosmopolitan should be held in check” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.4).
She also studies “the choices made when creating news text concerning how the sufferer is portrayed on screen and how the scene of suffering is narrated”, which goes in line with the theoretical discussions in this research to (Chouliaraki 2006, p.3). This production process is interesting since it reflects both the norms in the production team and the organization, but also the whole society since the narration is shaped to reach the people in the society. Additionally, Chouliaraki explains why these decisions, made by the producers, are interesting “Even though such choices are part of everyday journalistic routines rather than ideologically motivated calculations, do they always carry norms as to how the spectator should relate to the sufferer and what we should do about the suffering” (Ibid).

She argues further “It is these ethical values, embedded in news discourses, that come to orientate the spectator’s attitude towards the distant sufferer and, in the long run, shape the disposition of televisions publics vis-à-vis the misfortune of faraway others” (Ibid). Chouliaraki argues that these questions are not only ethical but also political. “The mediation between spectator and sufferer is a crucial political space because the relationship between the two of them maps on to distinct geopolitical territories that reflect the global distribution of power” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.22). Nayar agrees that mediation of a distant sufferer is connected to politics and states “The discourse of suffering is a way of thinking about politics itself when we map ‘our’ part of the world, region, community as linked to another, even distant but equally vulnerable region or community” (Nayar 2009, p.159).

**Intimacy at a distance**

An obvious challenge in communicating from one context to another is the distance, not necessarily the physical distance but the mental one - especially when the different contexts are marked by different cultures since they contain different languages, norms and ideas which can be difficult for the audience to imagine and understand.

Chouliaraki makes an example where a Nigerian woman has been given a death sentence under the sharia law (a real story which happened the summer of 2002). She argues that this news story might be much more difficult for a European spectator, in comparison to a Nigerian spectator to understand and “share the same emotional and cultural experience”. Nevertheless, images from this situation might make it possible for the European spectator to enable a “modal imagination”. “Modal imagination is the ability of spectators to imagine something that they
have not experienced themselves as being possible for other to experience” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.20).

Anon defines “modal imagination” as the ability to ”imagine not only what actually exists, such as the computer screen now in front of me, but also what might have existed in the present or past, or might someday exist in the future. (..) The term modal imagination is intended to remind us of our capacity to envision what is possible in addition to what is actual” (Anon 199, p.726). This is an ability that will be challenged in the interviews when the interviewees will interpret different campaigns and try to understand images and relations from other contexts than their own. Anon argues that “We need modal imagination in order to extend our conception of reality-and, in particular, of human beings-beyond our immediate experience in the indexical present; and we need to do this in order to preserve the significance of human interaction. To make this leap of imagination successfully is to achieve not only insight but also an impartial perspective on our own and others' inner states. This perspective is a necessary condition of experiencing compassion for others” (Anon 199, p.726).

Chouliaraki states how we, the western spectators, cannot say we do not know. “We see on television how children are dying in the refugee camps of Sudan”. There are similar examples of this happening now, most recently did Swedish news media report about Syrian children freezing to death in refugee camps in Lebanon (Sveriges Radio 2019). ”No, we cannot say we didn’t know, but can we act on what we now know? This tension between a knowing yet incapable witness at a distance is the most profound moral demand that television makes on Western spectator today” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.18).

**Cosmopolitanism and global culture**

Another crucial term that needs to be defined is *cosmopolitanism* and its relation to global culture.

“The sentiment of pity, which the sufferer may evoke, raises questions of political power and cultural difference. In doing so, it organizes the deposition of the spectator not (at least not only) around the identity of the cultural consumer or the celebrity fan, but mainly around the public figure of the citizen of the world, the cosmopolitan” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.22).

Chouliaraki argues that there are two different narratives in how the media want to shape the spectators view of *cosmopolitanism*. One is the pessimistic narrative, where she with support
from Adorno, argues that television actually is trying to create a distance and that technology failures to engage the audience. “The reason for this regression is that the very technological form of the medium ‘sanitizes’ reality – that is, it cuts real life off from its raw sensations” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.24). This approach distrust technology in its task to communicate authenticity. “As this promise is undelivered, the purpose of mediation – to connect – also fails. This has dire consequences for contemporary ethical life, as spectators live the illusion of a collective existence that is simply not there; they inhabit an inauthentic reality” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.26). In opposition, the optimistic narrative brings people and worlds together, this approach believes that it is possible to close the physical gap and moral distance between “us” and “the other”. It does this in two ways; by celebration of communitarianism (born from the idea of the Global Village, if we all see the same things we will come together) and the matter of democratization of responsibility (“televisions flow of messages from around the world increase each spectator’s awareness of the distant ‘other’ and, thereby, also increase their concern for the misfortunes of these sufferers”) (Chouliaraki 2006, p.26-27).

Chouliaraki is agreeing with Stuart Hall’s reasoning about white supremacy and the power relations still present from earlier colonization’s. “Contemporary relationships of viewing reflect a similar symbolic struggle for power, territory and identity” (Chouliaraki 2006, p.5). This “viewing asymmetry” is argued to be a “contemporary mutation of the old divide between the ‘West’ and the ‘orient!’” (Ibid). That the west is constructed as a safe space and the ‘orient’ or global south as dangerous place is a build upon political power systems and is a simplification that injure the spectator’s world view. Roger Silverstone agrees with this stating that “the media have this unique role in global culture” (Silverstone 2007, p.10). He focuses to media’s capability to assist communication that does not require a physical presence but which also “undermine the expectations of responsibility and reciprocity that action and communication in face-to-face settings conventionally require” (Silverstone 2007, p.11). Interestingly he states “Distance and presence coincide in ways that fundamentally challenge the necessary proximal relations that are assumed to be a precondition for an ethical life. How the media choose to represent, or conventionally find themselves representing, the other, the other who is otherwise out of reach, becomes a fundamental issue for any kind of project seeking a more virtuous, more ethical, public space” (Ibid).

Silverstone defines cosmopolitanism as “the figure who represents the phase of late modernity that some call postmodern, and who emerges from the dynamics of the intensification of
Silverstone investigate the idea of cosmopolitanism in relation to today’s globalization and probe “The question this raises, of course, is the possibility of envisaging the media as enhancing a global cosmopolitan culture, one that might not require, indeed will not require, physical mobility, but mobility through the symbolic” (Silverstone 2007, p.12). However, there are several negative aspects with cosmopolitanism, for starters is it only possible for a limited amount of people “it is a particularly western, and therefore a somewhat exclusive idea” as well (Silverstone 2007, p.12).

In contradiction, Ulrich Beck defines cosmopolitanism as something merely positive where everyone is included;

“(Cosmopolitanism does not mean ruthlessness - the perspective of the global player, global capitalist; not recolonization, nor universalism either; because there are many cosmopolitanisms – not one language of cosmopolitanism but many languages, grammars, tongues. It is not multiculturalism either because multiculturalism resumes some essentialistic understandings of cultural differences... we all are living by birth in two worlds, two communities – in the cosmos (that is nature) and in the polis (that is, the city/state). To be more precise: individuals are rooted in one cosmos but in different cities, territories, ethnicities, hierarchies, national, religions – all at the same time. This creates not exclusivity but rather an inclusive plural membership (Beck 2003, p.6)”

Conclusively, Silverstone connects cosmopolitanism to political terms and the relationship to media; “The cosmopolitan, as an ethic, embodies a commitment, indeed an obligation, to recognize not just the stranger as other, but the other in oneself. Cosmopolitanism implies and requires therefore, both reflexivity and toleration. In political terms it demands justice and liberty. In social terms, hospitality. And in media terms it requires (...) an obligation to listen” (Silverstone 2007, p.14).

**Us and them and the other**

When communicating people from the “global south” to an audience in the “global north” the viewers will be presented with a context that might feel unfamiliar to them.

Silverstone gives an example of an afghan blacksmith, interviewed on BBC Radio, talking about Afghanistan after the attack on World Trade Center 2011. The man had not heard of the propaganda spread about his country or why there were so many bombs over his village, he
was existing in his own time and space and did not have much awareness of international politics or events. The blacksmiths lack of awareness regarding the political situation and his understanding Silverstone describe as “touching, naïve and easily patronized. Yet it was a true: a translated truth, a cultured truth…” (Silverstone 2007, p.1). Silverstone explains how his presence for the British audience “represents the appearance of the other, the strange and the stranger, in the familiarity and comfort of home” (Silverstone 2007, p.2). The man appearing in our mediated space will represent something unfamiliar, strange, as another. This might increase the apprehension of a “us” and a “them”.

Another poignant reflection is when Silverstone states that the audience will only hear the man’s voice and can only try to imagine his situation “what he looks like, where he is sitting. We can try and imagine, and will indeed imagine, because we have a stock of images and sounds on which to draw the setting (…) But can we imagine him imagine us? And can we imagine ourselves to be his strangers?” (Ibid). Further questions could be what it does to the political terms of globalization when only some parts of the world have this access to media and where only some people are made into sufferers and others into audience members. What consequences does it have that we can try to imagine a blacksmith in Afghanistan but he does not have the same information to be able to imagine us? In comparison to the ideas of cosmopolitanism, these discussions bring about “us” and “them”, which are mirroring current political relations, geographic and historical demarcations and events. Silverstone states that “the mediated images of strangers increasingly define what actually constitutes the world” (Silverstone 2007, p.4). Media could be a tool to close the gap but dependent on how the media is produced it could also feed the idea of distinctive cultures differences.

**Culture, language and meaning**

There will be several discussions born out of theory about culture and the assumptions of culture in this research. Raymond Williams claims that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams 1976, p.76). This, because of the word’s long history, both in time and place, and since it today is used is so many distinct ways. The word “culture” where used in British literature during the 17th century by authors as Akenside and Jane Austen. The definition of the word has a long and “intricate” story, also German and French literature where essential for the development, and it came for a long time to mean “civilization”. The term “folk-culture” during C90 (?) where vital for the development of the
term “culture” as we use it today: “it was used to emphasize national and traditional cultures, including the new concept of folk-culture. It was used to attack what was seen as the ‘mechanical’ character of the new civilization then emerging: both for its abstract rationalism and for the ‘inhumanity’ of current industrial development. It was used to distinguish between ‘human’ and ‘material’” (Williams 1976, p.79).

Building from that, I will use the meaning of “culture” grounded in Stuart Hall and his reasonings of signs and messages, language and meaning. He states that “culture is about ‘shared meanings’” and describes that language is where we “make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged.” Further he argues that “meanings can only be shared through our common access to language” and this is why his definition will fit impeccably while trying to investigate how people are communicating messages and decode them with different languages. “Languages is able to do this because it operates as a representational system. In language, we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings, and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the process by which meaning is produced” (Hall et al 2013, p.17).

In comparison to Williams definition, I will work closer to Halls reasoning that “In recent years, and in a more ‘social science’ context, the word ‘culture’ is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group. This has to come to known as the ‘anthropological’ definition. Alternatively, the word can be used to describe shared values, of a group or of society – which is like the anthropological definition, only with a more sociological emphasis. (…) Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings” (Hall et a l 2013, p.18). Hall states: “to say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other” (Hall et al 2013, p.18-19). Hall sees that languages work through representation and argues that language is “systems of representation” (Hall et al 2013, p.20).

When analyzing cultures, I will base it on the idea of cultures as socially constructed by time and space, which are under constant change. I will use the same approach to knowledge and discourses. Hall argues that “Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge
about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society (Hall et al 2013, p.21-22).

**Encoding and decoding**

Halls ways of describing how an audience read, interpret and analyze messages in media communication is by great importance for my analysis. I will go deeper than a first impression and try to understand the steps in how the media chain are trying to produce a message that touches the spectator on a deeper level. The visual communication must be easy and clear, even though it travels from one context to another. Hall criticize the most commonly used ideas in mass-communication research, the idea that communication travels in a loop or the linear idea of communication as a message, traveling from a sender to a receiver. Instead, he suggests to see the different parts of the whole process and how culture effect the production and interpretation, both by the producer and the audience (Hall 1996, p.128).

“The ‘object’ of these practices is meaning and messages in the form of sign-vehicles of a specific kind of organized, like any form of communication or language, through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of discourse” (Hall 1996, p.128). Hall is interested in all the different steps in the media production process and undermarks that it might be interesting and valuable to investigate the different relations and what is affecting what. Regarding the audience, and whether or not they can read a message in the way that the producer desire, he says “but it is in the discursive form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated – transformed, again – into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective. If no ‘meaning’ is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’” (Ibid). He writes that the challenge lies in making the receiver decode the message in the same way as the sender sees it. Hall argues that the circuit begins already in the production and says that this is the step where the message starts to be constructed. Additionally, one should not mistrust the producer’s/sender’s background and how this unconsciously might affect the rest of the chain. “Of course, the production process is not without its ‘discursive’ aspect: it, too, is framed throughout by meaning and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and
assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the program through the production structure” (Hall 1996, p.129).

Hall points out similarities between the producer and the receiver, namely that both of them are affected by their social surroundings, which will affect how they create a message versus read a message. “Production and reception of the television message are not, therefore, identical, but they are related: they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole” (Ibid). Hall goes deeper into this when he presents his encoding/decoding model. Encoding means understanding the message, denoting signs and language on a first level while decoding is about making connotations, which is about the “wider ideological discourse and meaning”, the latter one is even more fluent and connected to the receiver’s personal association (Hall 1996, p.133). Hall is arguing, with help from his model of encoding/decoding (see figure 1) that “the degrees of symmetry – that is, the degrees of ‘understanding’ and ‘misunderstanding’ in the communicative exchange - depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relation of equivalence) established between the positions of the ‘personifications’, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver” (Hall 1996, p.130). Further, this reasoning and model explains how misunderstandings can occur by the audience, but even more interesting for this thesis is how the model explains how the first phase of media production affects how the message will be created and later on encoded and decoded. The model explores how the context of the producers also affects the whole chain; the technical development, infrastructure at the current place and time, relation within and between the organizations and people and not at least the competence and interest affect how the media and message will be created and distributed. Depending on the receiver’s framework of knowledge, their relation of the production and their technical infrastructure, they will also be able to decode the message, but probably in different ways.
Figure 1. Encoding/Decoding (Hall 1996, p.130).

Hall also mentions signs and states that all signs are filled with codes and in similarity with language, are all signs socially constructed from a time and place. “There is no degree zero in language”. He reminds us that even though we might have learned a language from a very early age so early that a subject meaning might feel natural, they are still constructed. “Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a ‘near-universality’ in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently ‘natural’ visual codes are culture-specific” (Hall 1996, p.134).

**Negative and Positive images**

When it comes to understanding the discussions about “result images” and “need images” is it possible to extract ideas from Chouliaraki’s research about images with positive or negative appeal.

We Effect’s communication policy discuss when to take positive images and when to take negative images. Different messages need to be communicated dependent on the target group. If they are sending out “thank you-letters” to companies and donors do they want to show positive images showing results, that the donated money reached all the way and made a positive change. However, they are having a parallel discussion if “result images” or “need images” (images showing need) are the most engaging. I will now present Chouliaraki’s
thoughts of the two different appeals. Both ‘negative appeals’ and ‘positive appeals’ have been criticized and are part of a controversy “a critique of the emotions of guilt and indignation, in the ‘negative’ aesthetics of early campaigns that portrayed sufferers as removed from the order of ‘our’ humanity, and a critique of the emotions and empathy and gratitude, in the aesthetics of ‘positive’ imaginary that portrayed distant sufferers as people like ‘us’ (Chouliaraki 2013, p.57). She states that humanitarianism is grounded in a liberal idea born out of capitalism, even though aid organization work for global development their communications purpose is not only to spread information about the world – she argues that they also have economic interests, therefore they also want their images to be engaging (Chouliaraki 2013, p.5).

While discussing negative images Chouliaraki states that “early examples of humanitarian appeals rely on a documentary aesthetics that authenticates suffering, by representing it in its plain reality (Chouliaraki 2013, p.58).” But even though it represents reality, the photos can be taken in different angels, in different situations and also dependent of who will see the photos will they will be decoded in different ways. It was common that the images showed children, naked or half-naked. “Captured on camera, these body parts, shot from above as they are, become ‘fetishized’ (Hall 1996: 223-79) they do not reflect real human bodies with a life history but curiosities of the flesh that mobilize a pornographic spectatorial imagination between disgust and desire (Lissner 1979). Furthermore, the relationship between the spectator and the victim is anchored in a colonial gaze ‘and premised on a maximal distance between this suffering torah and the western spectator’ (Hall 1992/2001; Lidchi 1997).

Chouliaraki also states that “The logic of complicity is, in this sense, not only a primary source of negative mentions but also of the moral agency of these appeals: failure to act, it implies, is failure to acknowledge our historical and personal participation in perpetuating human suffering.” (Chouliaraki 2013, p. 60) Interestingly she also analyzes the images with a positive appeal and finds that these can lead to “inaction on the grounds of the argument that ‘everything is already taken care of’.” Additionally, she argues: “Whilst it appears to empower distant sufferers through discourses of dignity and self-determination, ‘positive’ imagery simultaneously disempowers these sufferers by appropriating their otherness in western discourses of identity and agency. Second there is the risk that the plethora of smiling child faces may be misrecognize as children like ‘ours’, leading to inaction on the ground of the argument that ‘these are not really children in need. (…) Rather than enabling action on vulnerable others, the misrecognition risks inherent in ‘positive’ appeals deepen the crisis of
pity in that they introduce an element of suspicion into the spectacle of suffering – a ‘how do I know this is real?’ Unable to resolve the problem of suspicion, however, ‘positive’ imagery runs similar risks of compassion fatigue as ‘negative’ imagery does.” (Chouliaraki 2013, p.63-64).
3. Method

To be able to investigate how an international aid organization works with their communication, I have decided to follow We Effect’s whole media production process. To get deeper insights in each part, and to come closer to the people working in the other cultural context, I decided to go to Kenya. I did not want to make the mistake of only talking about; I also wanted to talk with the people reached by the organizations aid. I received a Minor Field Study-scholarship from Sida which made the research economically possible and attended their preparation course at Sida Partnership Forum in Härnösand, a course with the aim to prepare me for international work and global cooperation. I contacted the regional office in Nairobi and they agreed on having me visit for two months, making observations and doing interviews. I did interviews with regional communicators at the region office in Kenya, as well as with external photographers and some of the people who are visible in We Effect’s campaigns. I also interviewed other staff members working at the region office and asked them if they found the campaigns to be reflecting their work, the people they work with, and also generally how they decoded the images created. Additionally, I attended two field visits in rural areas where We Effect work. There I met several groups, members in their partner organizations and got to see their work with my own eyes and with my camera, since I wanted to explore on my own what it is like to ask for consent and actually take photographs of the people We Effect work with. I interviewed two farmers who had been photographed by the organization and asked them about their experience and what they thought of the final result. Back in Stockholm I also interviewed people working at the head office, who are responsible for the campaigns. I asked them how they think while they narrate stories, what methods they have while communicating between different cultural contexts and about their experiences of the organization’s media production process.

**Qualitative research, social constructivism and approaches to knowledge**

The research is built upon a social constructivist approach and I will additionally to the theoretical background make interviews and ethnographic observations to be able to answer my research question. The interviews will be semi structured “neither an open everyday question nor a closed questionnaire” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.31). However, there will be a clear power asymmetry where I will decide in what way the interview will go and the frame of the
conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.37). For the interviews I followed Brinkmann and Kvale’s recommendation “the shortest interviewer’s questions and longest subjects’ answers possible” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.192). I wanted to open up a discussion and then let the interviewee do the talking. However, I did have to explain my questions sometimes – at some occasions I realized the questions, and what I was striving for, was too theoretical and far away (both geographically and mentally) for the interviewee to completely grasp the question. At other occasions, for example if I have asked if an interviewee found names important to the photography’s they answered “yes” and when I asked “why?” I sometimes interpreted them as struggling, trying to understand what I wanted to hear, and I had to continue to explain my question, also without trying to guide them into a certain direction. However, is it already in the nature of qualitative research, that the interviews are not reliable, valid or generalizable since they “rely on subjective impressions” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.196). Importantly, Brinkmann and Kvale highlight how the answers will be constructed; “the research interviews are a production site of knowledge. Interview knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. The knowledge is not merely found, mided, or given, but is actively created through questions and answers” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.63). While discussing knowledge Brinkmann and Kvale present four different ways of knowledge, approaches that I was aware of while making the interviews and approaches that will permeate my analysis.

**Contextual knowledge** - Knowledge is contextual and situated

**Linguistic knowledge** – “The skilled interviewer needs to master the medium of conversation – language”

**Narrative knowledge** – The skilled interviewer needs to understand what is essential in a story and can encourage stories since they are comprehensive

**Pragmatic knowledge** – “craftsmanship is learned through practice, and the value of the knowledge produced is the key quality criterion” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.344-345).

All of these approaches are relevant to how I will interpret my interviews and understand the meaning in that context. Brinkmann and Kvale’s view on language is however, directly applicable when they argue that “Language is the medium of interview research” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.64). Several of the interviews where held in English, which is not my mother tongue. This affected how the questions were being formulated which might cause an even bigger gap in what I am trying to communicate and how the interviewee will interpret my
question. This is also the case with how I am understanding the interviewee which might be impoverished because of my lack of skills in English. Additionally, the way of using the English language is different in different contexts – since Kenya is a former colony they use several old, traditional, terms that I had not come across earlier. My accent was also different from what they were used to, which might affect how they understood me and therefore the outcome of the interviews.

Brinkmann & Kvale state that “The human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.84). This is something I tried to be very aware of and I decided to present myself to the whole organization the first day there by holding a presentation where I told everyone what I was doing there, the aim of my project, my expectations and what they could except from me. When I visited freelance photographers I always analyzed some of their photographs before and brought them to the interview for an open discussion so we could hear each other analyze the same photos and see if we had similar connotations or not. When I met farmers on the field I always had people working from the partner organizations to accompany me. Even if the farmers spoke English it was good to have someone with me in terms of building relations and trust. This intermediary that we both knew from before could help to create a safe space where we, as interviewer and interviewee, felt more comfortable to talk, listen and have an exchange with each other. I often brought gifts and I was sure to thank people that I benefitted from. My experience from doing a five-month long internship in India and other travels, as well as regularly meeting people from different cultures, helped me in how to appropriately meet the new people I met in the context of Kenya. When I was going to have interviews with people about their work and when I wanted to question or challenge them, I figured that it was good to do that when we had spent some time together and built some kind of relationship and a little trust. It made me more comfortable in asking hard or challenging questions when I also knew that they knew that I respected them and their work; I was just curious and needed as much knowledge as possible for my thesis. To spend two months in Kenya was very beneficial for my interviews and research.

The authors state the importance of the role of the researcher “being familiar with value issues, ethical guidelines, and ethical theories may help the researcher to make choices that weight ethical versus scientific concerns in a study. In the end, however, the integrity of the researcher
his or her knowledge, experience, honesty, and fairness – is the decisive factor” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.97) I experienced that it was crucial for the study and interviews that I spent a longer time with both the organization and the people. If I only would have spent a day or a week, the outcome would not have been the same. Since I spent two months at the office in Nairobi and met the people at the Stockholm office several times, I had time to build up trust and also a broader knowledge. I believe my knowledge of the different contexts also made me dress, act and present myself in different ways which had an importance of the research. One cultural example is that in the middle of the interviews people could be interrupted by some colleagues that came into the room and started to chat, or they picked up the phone to answer a call or walked away to talk to someone and come back - and I knew that this was not to disrespect me, which might have been my interpretation in Sweden. In Kenya this was normal and happened in all kinds of work-related rooms, I also experienced this in important meetings and conferences so I realized that it was not an unique incident. Brinkmann and Kvale also highlight the importance of informed consent which means “informing the research participant about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of design (…) information about confidentiality and who will have access to the interview or other material, the researcher’s right to publish the whole interview or parts of it” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015 p.93). I also told the interviewees that I would transcribe the interviews, they had the opportunity to be anonymous and that they can access the thesis when it is published.

**Thick description**

“Thick description” is an approach “learning ethical behavior in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.102). Brinkmann and Kvale argue that this is important since it is not only about learning data but “learning from cases and observing those more experienced. It is about learning to see and judge rather than learning to universalize or calculate” (Ibid). The idea of thick description features four ways how to create a more ethical research (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.101-102).

- **Contextualize.** When judging an event, the researcher should put that specific event into a context and try to see the whole picture, time and place and the researcher can also place this in the right research context.
Narrativize. “If one is not provided with the kind of information necessary to narrativize – for example, if the researcher has never met the participant before and does not know her larger life story – then it is ethically wise to be lenient about one’s interpretations and generalizations and refrain from anything resembling therapeutic intervention” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.101).

Focus on the particular example. “Generalizations, as found in formal ethical guidelines, should not blind us to the crucial particularities encountered in a specific research situation. As qualitative researchers are involved in actual issues with particular people at particular places and times, they need to master an understanding of these concrete particulars in order to be morally skillful” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.102).

Consult the community of practice. In the last approach they argue that the researcher should not only rely on her/his judgment but also previous literature, supervisors, other students, the discipline at large and so on. When ethical issues arise, the researcher should ask for feedback and discuss these with others from the research community (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.102).

In line with the approach of thick description I have during the whole process discussed the ethical dilemmas of doing research about an organization with my supervisor at the institution of Education and Culture at Södertörn University. It has been helpful and fruitful to listen to how previous researchers have done in similar situations as mine and hear feedback from someone outside this specific research with a lot of competence and experience in the field. I have also had meetings with a number of other people working with communications and photography in the field of international aid, who have confirmed that my research questions are relevant, urgent and essential on a societal level.

Ethnography

What is ethnography? Hammersley and Atkinson argue that there are several different answers to that question and “qualitative inquiry, fieldwork, interpretive method and case study” are some of the labels how to describe it (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.1). The term has its
origin in “nineteenth-century Western anthropology, where an ethnography was a descriptive account of a community or culture, usually one located outside the West” (Ibid). The mentioned researcher Livingstone highlights that “mediation studies cannot simply use textual analyses, or even the focus groups of traditional reception research; mediation theory invites an ethnographic methodology” (2007, p.8). Additionally, Jonathan Corpus Ong, professor in global digital media, agrees and state that: "Ethnography is viewed as the best methodological approach to ‘follow the trail’ of media power and the circulation of meaning across different moments of the mediation process” (Ong 2015, p.43). This approach will be an important contribution to my research in cultural differences and Hall’s model of encoding and decoding signs. Hammersley and Atkinson state that: “Ethnology was treated as the core of anthropological work, and drew on indivual ethnographic accounts which were initially produced by travelers and missionaries. Over time, the term ‘ethnology’ fell out of favor because anthropologists began to do their own fieldwork, with ‘ethnography’ coming to refer to an interpretation of social organization and culture” (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.1). I studied “human social life” and collected interviews together with diary notes. “In terms of data collection, ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happened, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, p.3). They state that the study can “rely on a range of sources of data” or primarily one (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.3).

During my two months in Nairobi I spent most of my time at the regional office. I attended every Monday meeting where everyone at the office presented their previous and coming week for the group. I also presented what I did for my thesis the previous week and explained what my coming week looked like. I also participated in several staff meetings, regional meetings and one partner meeting where people from all over Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda attended. Additionally, I facilitated a workshop for the staff at the office, a training in how to take good photos with your mobile phone. It was well received and it felt good to be able to give something back. I also kept a diary in which I wrote down my daily reflections from meetings, conversations, discussion and ideas which will be implicitly or explicitly visible in the diary. In general, I spent approximately 3 to 4 days a week at the office. When I was dependent on a strong Wi-Fi connection I studied from my apartment were the WiFi connection was remarkably better, and sometimes I had interviews in the city. The staff at the office were very social and there was a familiar feeling among them and they were a tight group: most people
had been working in the organization for around 10 to 15 years and knew each other well. I did two field visits, one on my own initiative and one together with the regional communicator and head of communication from Stockholm. It was incredibly rewarding to first spend time with the regional communicator, hear and experience his reality and then get to know the Swedish head of communication based in Stockholm, hear about her understanding and then go out together all three of us and meet some of their partner organizations and see how they interacted. Also, when I got back home and spent some time with the Stockholm office I still felt as if I had one leg in each context which gave me a valuable ground for further analysis about how to communicate from one cultural context to another.

**Visual communication**

I will look at the organization’s external visual communication – by this I mean video, photographs and text visible on We Effect’s digital web page and social media. I have an interest in the visual communication, especially photography, since it is a powerful tool that easily can be used to strongly create emotions and create meaning with the spectator. However, since it is a powerful tool it is also easy to cross ethical lines or the viewer can in their fast judgment misunderstand the photographs intended message. “An image says a thousand words” might be true but it says even more together with text. A headline or a quote can guide the spectator and direct them in their feelings and thoughts, therefore, am I not only looking at the photographs divided from the text but will analyze campaigns and social media posts in a holistic way. However, the eight examples of photographs are more directly discussed in the analysis free-standing photographs without any text. The material the discussions were based on and more in-depth information on how the interviews looked like will be presented under the section “material” in this method chapter.

Gillian Rose writes in “Visual Methodologies” about “visuality”, how it is about “what is seen and how it is seen is culturally constructed” (Rose 2016, p.3). Also, Hal Foster states that visuality is about “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (Foster 1988, p.9). Rose highlights that “for some writers, the visual is the most fundamental of all senses” (Rose 2016, p.3). For example, John Berger, suggests that this is because “seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (Berger 1972, p.7). Rose argues that this shift to the power of visual media is a part of the move from a pre-modern society to a modern society; before, there were not as many images to build
information from but now “many claims that this process has reached unprecedented levels, so that Western nor interact with the world mainly through how they see it” (Rose 2016, p.3). Also, Barbara Maria Stafford underlines this by saying “in a process beginning in the eighteenth century, the construction of scientific knowledges about the world has become more and more based on images rather than on written text” (Stafford, 1991). John Urry wrote 1992 about the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1992) and Guy Debord argued that the world has become a “society of spectacle” (Debord 1995). The western gaze and the visual creation of ‘the other’ is something that will be further discussed in this thesis.

**Interviews**

As mentioned I choose to have interviews with different people involved in the media production process to be able to answer my research question in a way that is anchored in different people’s experiences. I got in contact with Åsa and Lotta since they are the ones with longer experience and influence in communication production and the Stockholm office. I also reached out to Rebecka, since she works with social media and therefore have a specific experience in creating the narration of the stories in their communication as well as in the conflict of simplifying clear messages that are graspable and at the same time engaging and ethical. At the Kenya office I did an interview with We Effect’s regional communicator, Mårten, as well as their sister organization Agroforestry’s regional communicator Elin. Even though Elin works at another organization they have the same boss (Åsa) and are working under the same directions. Elin and Mårten are facing several common challenges in their work, but there are also differences, which are interesting to compare. Other staff members at the Kenyan office that I decided to conduct interviews with were George, Faith, Shadrack, Jonatan and Dorothy.

George is the new regional director at the organization, his voice will not explicitly be heard in the analysis but his culturally based interpretations of the photographs are a contribution. Faith, Shadrack, Jonathan and Dorothy do not work directly with communications but they were interested in analyzing and sharing comments about We Effect’s communication and whether they experience that the photographs are ethical or engaging. The communication should arguably reflect the work that they do and represent the people they meet; therefore, I also wanted to hear their opinions. Jonatan and Shadrack had the interview together, in comparison to all the other interviews who were individual, this was because I wanted to see if they felt
more relaxed and comfortable sharing their opinions. I experienced that the discussions got livelier and their conversation turned into several interesting interpretations of the images which are visible at the end of the analysis. In the interviews with staff from We Effect in Kenya I initially asked questions about the current persons’ position and relation to We Effect’s campaigns and photographs. In the second part of the interview I showed photographs from We Effect’s communication and campaigns published on We Effect’s social media.

Table 1. Names of the people who are interviewed, their position and base:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Titel</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mårten</td>
<td>Regional Communication Officer, We Effect</td>
<td>Kenya/Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Elin</td>
<td>Regional Communication Officer, Vi Skogen/Agroforestry</td>
<td>Kenya/Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Åsa</td>
<td>Head of Communication, We Effect</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tobi</td>
<td>Freelance Photographer</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fredrik</td>
<td>Freelance Photographer</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dorothy</td>
<td>Regional Program Coordinator, Kenya</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. George</td>
<td>Regional Director, We Effect</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Faith</td>
<td>Program Officer, We Effect</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Jonathan</td>
<td>Regional Program Coordinator, We Effect</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Shadrack</td>
<td>Program Officer, We Effect</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Lotta</td>
<td>Production leader, We Effect</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection of material for image analysis

When I was collecting the material for discussions I searched through We Effect’s Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, from two years back until today. I went two years back in order to get a multifaceted ground for discussion; the time limit was also because of the limitations on some digital web pages where they could only browse posts two years back. Also, I only wanted to use material from eastern Africa since the people I was going to interview are and have been present in that region. For example, when I asked them if the pictures felt genuine and authentic I wanted them to be able to compare it to a context they have seen, which makes it easier for them to see and feel if something is staged or not. I also wanted to limit the research to eastern Africa since that was the cultural context I was seeing, learning and experiencing. Furthermore, I chose a selection of images, published in reports, to get a broader foundation of material. Some of them are 10 years old and some of them from last year. I also chose these with the interest to see if there has been a historical change in what kind of photos have been used, if the interviewees could see any differences and if they could describe the change. This was especially interesting for the discussions about “result images” and “need images”, I wanted to know if they could see the change and describe their opinions about this decision. I wanted to focus on campaigns on social media to the biggest extent possible. Printed annual reports are external communication as well, but they are designed for another kind of target group: to donors, potential donors, other organizations, Sida and the Swedish foreign policy department. In comparison to “the public” which are We Effect’s main target group on social media, big international donors and institutions already have a pre-knowledge and perhaps deeper interest in the issues that We Effect work with, therefore they do not have the same demand for being engaging. Those images do not have to evoke the same kinds of feelings as the images in the campaigns visible to the public. The target group reading the reports already
have an interest and knowledge and will continue to read the reports more likely because they have to (as a part of their work) or they can understand more complexed situations and multifaceted issues. The target group, the public in Sweden, have arguably a low awareness of the political issues and development matters present among east Africa’s cooperation organizations.

**Limitations**

Because of time limitations I did not have the possibility to discuss the photographs and campaigns with Åsa, Rebecka or Lotta. The limited time also made the planned interview with Rebecka change into an email correspondence. George’s interview is not incorporated since our discussions came to be about the challenges for the regional communication, which is interesting and relevant in terms of budget and prioritization, but because of the space limit I had to do demarcations and this is one of them. The interviews where either held in Swedish or in English and 11 of 15 interviews where recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, and email correspondents which were not recorded or transcribed, I took notes which were summarized in a document afterwards. All Swedish interviews are translated into English by me, which mean that there is a risk that words are wrongly interpreted or translated. However, I have tried to understand the essential messages in all conversations to the best of my ability. In addition to the mentioned interviewees, I also met Paul Hansen, photo journalist and freelance photographer, and Erik Nahlén, head of social media at Sida. I did not record or transcribe these interviews but they helped me with inspiration, insights and reflections which I carried with me during my other interviews and my whole process while collecting material, voices and insights.

**Cultural differences**

It has been challenging to arrange interviews, especially with people visible in We Effect’s media campaigns. My initial idea was to mostly interview Kenyan farmers and show them campaigns published for the Swedish target group and ask what they thought of the final result. However, I realized after a couple of weeks that this idea was even more challenging than what I had expected. I also thought that there would be field visits that I could join, but during these two months there were only one field visit planned for the communicator at We Effect (when the head of communication came for a weeklong visit). None of his work had either been
published so far so I could not follow up his work and meet the farmers he had met before. The other visit I was able to arrange by myself and after more than one month three people at the office and two people working with the partner organization helped me to visit the farmer Beth. Instead of taking one hour to drive to the village did it take three hours, since there were new people joining us on the way. Even though Beth spoke English well (she was a retired English teacher), they recommended me to have a translator with me and also someone that knew her who could help to build up a safe space and make it easier for her to trust me.

These challenges were valuable in order to understand the communicator’s work environment and daily challenges to produce the media content that the head office in Stockholm are asking for. However, since the people working at the office in Nairobi were happy to be interviewed and share their opinions, I decided to instead go deeper into the media production process and focus on the cultural differences in how people decode the photographs and the challenges and opportunities in the media production. After interviewing two Kenyan farmers I also realized that it was very challenging for them to theorize about these photos of themselves being published as campaigns in a foreign context. The cultural differences had a big impact on my research, even to that extent that the essential investigation came to be about how people from different cultures interpret media in different ways. The practical circumstances that in one way limited my work was also very profitable and gave me more insight into working in one cultural context and communicating to another one.

**Note**

The organization We Effect has been extremely helpful while supporting me to fulfill my research ideas. They have met me with a lot of patience, belief and time which I am forever thankful for. Despite this, the reader has to have in mind that the organization will read this essay and I might have, unconsciously, left out some material that could present the organization in bad light. This is nonetheless not by purpose and the aim is to provide the reader with as close an account as possible.
5. Analysis

In the analysis I will investigate how We Effect are planning, creating and distributing campaigns in an ethical and engaging way. I will also explore how they are working to mediate distant others from one cultural context to another and finally I will study if cultural background influence how the media producers and spectators decode photographs. The analysis will go through the whole media production process, from the first phase of creating communication plans and visions to the last step while narrating stories and publishing campaigns. In the analysis voices of staff working at the fundraising department in Stockholm will be presented, as well as that of regional communicators in Nairobi, and that of independent photographers mediating the organizations work, together with farmers visible in We Effect’s communication. The analysis is structured in four different parts: 1. The relation between the fundraising department in Stockholm to the regional communicators in Nairobi. 2. The relation and meetings between the regional communicators, partner organizations, photographers and farmers on the field who are visible in We Effect’s communication. 3. The communication between the regional office and head office, accompanied with examples of image analyses. 4. The process between the head office and the public.

1. Fundraising department in Stockholm to regional communicators in Nairobi

At We Effect’s office in Stockholm 18 people work with communications at the fundraising department. Some of them are Åsa, head of communications, Lotta, production leader, and Rebecka, communicator in charge of social media. They tell me that they base their communications campaigns on a content plan, a strategic document they build together with the regional communicators in Nairobi. In Stockholm they have an image bank with photographs, videos and interviews and when they want new or complementary content to make new campaigns for social media or the web, they give an order to a regional communicator, asking them for specific media content for a specific deadline. We Effect, and their sister organization Agroforestry, have a common guiding document which explains how the regional communicators should work and collect material. The guiding document says “The purpose to collect material from our work around the world is to create a solid ground to be able to tell about the need to combat poverty, increase equality and show how the life conditions have improved for the people in the countries where we are working” (We Effect 2017). The collected material should be used to “engage the Swedish public and should be used to most of
the communication channels, from collecting letters and company presentations to web articles, social media and articles in the members organizations magazines” (We Effect 2017). The guiding document is also telling the regional communicators to collect material as broadly as possible so that We Effect can reuse the material at different times and in different channels. “The general guideline is that the communicators should deliver a ground/raw material in text, images or video to the head office. I.E. primarily not finalized texts adjusted to one certain channel or communication situation. The head office is responsible for the finalized work expect at certain agreements, for example stories and news to the web and texts to Vi-bladet/Effekter (member magazines)” (Ibid).

The relation and the idea between the Stockholm office and regional communicators is that the regional communicators should collect raw material (photographs, video and interviews) from the field and send to the Stockholm office where they narrate the stories and publish them strategically according to the communication plan. The first step in We Effect’s media production chain is the contact between the head office and the regional communicators, which is an interesting relationship since they are working towards the same goal but they are present in different cultural contexts and are experiencing different realities. On this note, Lutz and Collins describe National Geographic’s relation between the “home staff” and “regional staff” in a similar way as I understand We Effects home and regional communicators. Lutz and Collins describe how one editor says “Photographers want to tell the truth about what they’ve seen, while editors and home staff may object, protesting that it is radically different from what they assume is out there” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.69). I experienced several discussions where I interpreted the regional communicators and home communicators to have different ideas of the work that they do in the field, the target group they should try to reach and also in what way they could do that in the most engaging and ethical way.

How do We Effect mediate long-term work in an engaging way?

Since We Effect is an organization working with long term development work and social cooperations, not humanitarian catastrophes, it is challenging in how to engage their target group. It is much easier to collect money if you are a humanitarian organization since the viewer will directly understand the need and understand that it is an urgent situation; the viewer will see the big contrast between the distant others’ extreme situation and their own privileged position and clearly understand that if they donate money, their contribution will directly go to
help these sufferers in need. We Effect are working with land rights, gender equality, farming cooperations and developing work that takes time and which are not as easy to mediate as i.e. nature disasters where people lose their home over a night. Åsa, head of communication, tells me that the humanitarian organization are the organizations on top of the lists of the organizations that collect most money in Sweden. She says that most of the human rights organization have some kind of humanitarian approach since that is the most efficient way to collect donations and engagement by the public.

Since the organization has low public awareness and is doing work that is challenging to mediate they have to think strategically regarding how to engage the viewer and how to stand out in today’s extreme media landscape. They want to create engaging campaigns but still do it in an ethical way. We Effect have, in similar to several other international aid organizations, internal discussion about whether to communicate so called “result images” or “need images” where the first named are images with a positive appeal, representing the result of the work and aid. These images are communicating progress and well-being but could however been interpret like “everything is taken care of”, the spectator might not understand why they should donate money to an organization working with people who are smiling and who are living a good life (Chouliaraki 2013, p. 63). Because of this has the discussion been raised and the people at the fundraising department claim that “need images” are evoking bigger engagement by the viewer since they can see the need and understand that their help is needed. They have not been able to show me statistics of this but says that they built this argumentation from recommendations by their media bureau where they can see what campaigns that are generating the most engagement (Rebecka). However, it is arguably a fine balance between images showing needs and images showing victims. Arguing from a postcolonial perspective, it is important for these kinds of organizations, especially funded in solidarity, to not reproduce harmful power relations, stereotypes and ideas where “people in Africa” need white western help.

Both Chouliaraki and Hall is arguing that these power relations still are very present and that this “viewing asymmetry” reproduce the idea of “the ‘west’ and the ‘orient’” and that this is built on white supremacy and the history of colonization (Chouliaraki 2006, p.5). Even though We Effect genuinely want to support the development of better a livelihood in these regions and need to collect money to be able to do so, the photographs they spread are also of relevance and vital as a part of the global social development. Silverstone argues that “the media have a unique role in global culture” in that sense, it is arguably possible to state that how We Effect
are positioning their photographs have an influence in how Swedes position themselves and distant others/Kenyans in the global culture (Silverstone 2007, p.10). To make people engaged, Åsa argues that the campaigns need to evoke emotions. She says “People are not logical; we do not even decide what car brand to buy build on logical grounds but on emotions. This is nothing new but we as an organization need to think what emotions we want to create and how we create them. We want to create emotions of anger – maybe get the viewer angry about what the world looks like and the conditions of life these women have, maybe emotions of sadness and emotions of hope. And that we have resources to do something about it. When we make big campaigns, we want to generate a bit of a crying-effect, you should feel emotionally touched. A lot of this is about story-telling, to touch the viewer and to make the viewer feel humanity.”

Chouliaraki however states that by showing images with a negative appeal they also communicate failure; “failure to acknowledge our historical and personal participation in perpetuating human suffering (Chouliaraki 2013, p. 60)”. But maybe the spectator does not stay long enough with the campaign to be able to feel that amount of compassion, guilt or shame. Åsa says she wants to generate emotions with the viewer and to make them feel humanity. This goes in line with the optimistic approach of cosmopolitanism that Chouliaraki present; a cosmopolitanism that is arguing that people and worlds can come together. The communitarian approach and idea of global village meaning that media can help us to close the physical gap and moral distance between “us” and “the other”. But what happens if that gap would be totally closed? Then there would not be a visible need because communication based on that cosmopolitan idea would only show our similarities and our connection, that we all are members of the same unit. But if it is possible to have a balance, reaching that fine line between mediating all of us as global citizens but still remaining the message of “us” and “them”; communicating that we are equal but at the same time showing that these people need our help, then it might be possible for the spectator to both feel pity and compassion for the sufferers.

**Engaging campaigns and ethical dilemmas**

To evoke emotions by the spectator may be the most engaging way but what about the ethical perspective? Elin, regional communicator at Agroforestry in Nairobi, says “If I get the trust to listen to some one’s story hold an interview with someone, then I want the spirit in some way to reach through. I don’t want someone telling me that the crops are growing so much and everything feels great and we can send the children to school and we have learned so much
about agriculture and we think it is so much fun… if I get to hear all this in an interview and then the person also mentions that she has lost a child for example, because they didn’t have an insurance and so on, but the spirit is still… I mean you rather talk about what is good, often you are very proud, often if you didn’t have that much and then went from nothing to something, then you are proud!” (Elin 2019).

From an ethical approach there might be a conflict here since the viewer might feel more engaged if she/he read about the mother who lost her child because of the insufficient insurances in Kenya (and therefore donate money) but the mother herself want her story to be about her success and how she, despite of that tragic incidence, are happy and does progress with her agriculture. The regional communicator also understands their meeting as a positive meeting while the final campaign might be narrated with a totally different angle than Elin’s experience. Regarding Chouliaraki theories about how to portray beneficiaries as a homogenous group in the “global south” and Silverstone’s arguments about the cosmopolitan responsibility, it is arguably problematic to mostly communicate needs and to spread images on social media and public spaces of black people in need of western money. Elin says “I think it is extremely important, especially if it is people how are coming from poverty or difficult relations, a group that usually is not visible or are listened to, that they at least now can be listened to as strong individuals. That is very important. Not as victims” (Elin 2019). Disregarding what images are most efficient, could it be more ethical to communicate positive stories? As mentioned, positive images can be interpreted in a way which suggest that need is not necessary or as that the western organization is appropriating their otherness and recognizing them only through “the western discourse of identity and agency” (Chouliaraki 2013, p.64). Chouliaraki even states that “positive’ imagery runs similar risks of compassion fatigue as ‘negative’ imagery does” (Chouliaraki 2013, p.64).

However, for We Effect to be able to support their partner organizations and for the farmers to get the positive development the organization needs money. Rebecka, working with social media from the Stockholm office, says that they build their campaigns from what they have seen create the most engagement. As mentioned, they work with a media bureau who gives them format recommendations built upon numbers on what campaigns gets the most likes, comments and shares and what campaigns make people become monthly or occasional donors. “For example, we can see that people tend to get more engaged when a single person is highlighted in the communication. For example, the problematization about women’s right to
land, a complex issue We Effect work with, simplified, is about that women use the land to farm but the men take all the money. The video ‘Theresa strikes’ is one of the cases that has done the best on social media, since she has a strong expression and she gets to represent the problem in this case. This is something we can see in similar cases – when we shine a light on the problems through individuals, the target group can relate” (Rebecka 2019).

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 2.** Video published on We Effects Facebook 2018. The text says “Why is Theresa Marwei on a strike? Watch the video and read her story”

**Economical and technical limitations**

The people working with fundraising and communication in Stockholm might have a clear view of what ethical and engaging communication is for them and how they can work and communicate in line with this perception. For them it is possible to work quite close to guiding, regulatory documents and from a desk chair narrate the story they want to communicate. To create the media content in a planned, desired way is however more challenging for the regional communicators. When someone at the head office has an idea, they communicate it to a regional communicator and then this person starts to plan the visit to collect the requested material. Often the regional communicator contacts a partner organization and asks to meet 1 to 3 members in that organization, corresponding to the profile in the order from Stockholm. As both Hall and
Silverstone argue, technology and money are two determining factors in the media production. In similarity, something returning in discussions with the regional communicators is the lack of recourses. They mention lack of time but also the lack of technical equipment as something that is limiting their work. Mårten, regional communicator in Nairobi, says “I have never had an external photographer because we didn’t have the money. I like to photograph, so I have liked to take photos but the equipment has been very insufficient… I had a water damaged camera that didn’t take sharp photos so that has been pretty limiting. I don’t know if this says anything about the resources or prioritization but when I asked for a new camera they responded ‘a new camera is not the first priority.’ (…) I would also like to travel so much more but the budget doesn’t allow me” (Mårten 2019).

The communicators say several times that the budget is restricting them from doing their work in the way that they desire. The understanding of the different contexts might be visible here as well since it appears to be a disagreement in what practical conditions are necessary to produce the ordered communication. Elin agrees with this, saying that she would like to do more video but that it is not possible because of the time limit and since she is working all alone with collecting material for Agroforestry’s communication, both regionally and to the Swedish audience. “When I go out I don’t have a photographer with me, it’s quite expensive but Stockholm often think that it is cheap since ‘it is Africa’. For example, when Mårten did his movie, that was very expensive, it is a big expense to do a video together with someone” (Elin 2019).

The discussion of budget and technology also arise in the interviews with the photographers I have met who have been working for We Effect. Tobi, who works as an independent photographer and who has done a lot of work with international NGOs says “I’ve heard communicators say ‘why spend money on photographers, we have a camera in our smart phone’ those photos won’t do anything! What I found disturbing is that they are going in the wrong direction” (Tobi 2019). Both him and Fredrik, another independent photographer based in Nairobi who have been working for We Effect, argue that the organization’s communicator’s mobile photographs cannot be compared to professional photographer photos. He says that “I know that the organizations I’ve worked with don’t send me out on all of their works but there is always that comment ‘oh, it gets so good when you have a real photographer!’ They are thinking that a mobile camera can replace a photographer… Or, I think that was a way of thinking which emerged, but now people are realizing that it is so much more than just a camera.
It is my way to take photos and that I’m an educated photographer – it is more than the equipment that I use” (Fredrik 2019).

If the organization decide to have professional photographers they have photographers that partly have education in how to take good looking photographs but they might also be more aware of how they can mediate people in a way that speaks to people, photographs that evoke emotions and engage. Tobi says “Real photographs are not a compliment to a story; a real photograph leads the story” (Tobi 2019). Lutz and Collins also argue that the best photographs are multidimensional; “They are like onions, one editor told us, with many layers than can be peeled back. Though they provide information, they also have an aesthetic dimension that communicates feelings and emotions” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.58). This is something the professional photographers might have more knowledge in; however, it might not be economically possible for the organization to have external photographers. However, Tobi argues that the organization have to take risks to get some value back. Maybe if the organization want to communicate strong emotions that makes the viewer engaged they should focus on qualitative photographs. Nonetheless, how aware the photographers are of their mediation of the “distant other” and how they are thinking in terms of capturing emotions are something that will be discussed in the next section where the step between the media producers (photographers and communicators) and farmers (people visible in We Effect’s campaigns) is discussed.

2. Regional communicators, partner organizations, photographers and farmers in the field

The second phase in the media production process is when the regional communicator contacts a partner organization and tries to set up a meeting to make video, take photographs and do interviews for the image bank or for specific cases that are going to be published as campaigns on social media, the web, newsletters or communication for the donors. As mentioned, if the budget allows, the communicators sometimes bring a photographer or videographer with them to produce the media content. The people being mediated are people who are members in We Effects partner organizations. In this section I will go through the theoretical and practical challenges in communicating from one cultural context to another with reasonings supported by theory and voices from the field.
The regional communicators experience and challenges

Mårten, regional communicator, describes the process and challenges after receiving an order from the Stockholm office.

“Maybe you have a very clear idea of the order when you go out but when you eventually get there, it might be several factors that you can’t affect when you’re there. Maybe the person you thought you were going to meet doesn’t show up or suddenly there are three men there instead of one woman which was the initial idea and you have no idea why, you are just wondering ‘what is happening now?’ (…) You might not have a common language and to be able to make them understand why they should look in a certain way on a photograph… ‘the people in Stockholm think you should look happy’ or ‘you should look happy but not euphoric’ to try to direct someone who might not have been to school one day in his life and you have no language in common… ‘why do you want to take an image of me?’ try to explain that… like ‘we want to show who you are and give support to this project but you are supposed to look like this and this…’ the ambition can be there but then how to actualize these might be difficult (…)” (Mårten 2019).

Mårten’s experiences and challenges are similar to the ones described in the research by Lutz and Collins where they see how regional communicators and photographers are struggling with actualizing their ideas when they try to capture stories in another cultural context. There is another cultural idea of time, different knowledge in technological practice and media production, different language etc. In the western culture taking photos is a part of our society, as well as to publish photos, and it is common to have an identity online. If someone wants to take a photo of you, you might have a pose or a way you want to show yourself and you can easier visualize why this is needed and how this will look like online because you have seen digital campaigns on social media before. Silverstone is also mentioning this complicity when he is giving the example of the Afghanistan man, who was interviewed by BBC Radio, and how the British listener can imagine him, the unfamiliar other, but he might not be able to imagine us (Silverstone 2007, p.2). The global culture and technology might only be accessible for some people and when these two different cultural contexts are trying to work together, challenges arise since people in different places also live different kinds of lives. Some because they have chosen to, and others because society has given them certain economic and social conditions because of political history. Even though some people in eastern Africa would like
to have better technical development is it not currently possible because of the history of colonization, which has weakened the state and where corruption enervate several development processes initiated from the local citizens.

Another example is how Mårten mentions how he often asks to interview 1 to 3 people from the organizations but when he arrives, there is most of the times a big group meeting him where everyone want to participate and be visible in the photos. This could also be culturally connected where societies in eastern Africa are built on groups where you care for the collective in comparison to western societies where we generally care for the individual. This might be partly because we want to, but also since the industrialization and economic development has created societies where we no longer are dependent on the collective. When it comes to reaching the Swedish target group the African scenery might however have to be adjusted so that the Swedish target group can identify themselves in the campaigns.

The balance between communicating what you see and at the same time be aware of the Swedish target group is an ongoing challenge for the regional communicator. As mentioned, Lutz and Collins describe how an editor said “photographers want to tell the truth about that they’ve seen, while editors and home staff may object, protesting that it is radically different from what they assume is out there” (Lutz & Collins 1993, p.69). This is something crucial and relevant in the discussion of an organization working in different contexts, trying to collect content in one cultural region and communicating it in another. The staff might be part of the same company and have a similar background but after being stationed in different contexts and being tinged by a new culture they might argue that they see one situation from different views. Mårten says that he might get one experience when he is there, meeting the farmer, but then he has to think strategically “you are standing there with your printed paper from Stockholm and then you have to be like ‘okay, what are they saying now in Stockholm? Ok, they also wanted a standing photo and video of this person saying something like ‘my husband used to hit me but now he is hitting me less’ while not looking into the camera… so there is pretty much to think of and a lot of different pieces that should fall into place” (Mårten 2019).

Mårten describes it as challenging to go to the field and collect the requested material. Sometimes it can also be difficult to make the angel that is requested. He tells me one example when the Stockholm office request a “need case” connected to insurance and Mårten worked four months to get an interview. “Everything was settled and done but once I got there not a
single parameter was as planned. The man that the partner organization had arranged me to meet had nothing to say about insurances, he had 16 cows and was not worried at all. The partners do not want to show bad examples... To make a story out from that meeting was like wringing water out from a stone” (Mårten 2019). He also highlights the challenges in visualizing their work. “This (insurances) is something that is so crucial for our work...but how do you visualize a motorcycle insurance case? Should I take someone to a hospital and photograph them there or... this is what we are working with but how do I mediate this? Also, networks working with politics and economics in their local societies, this is what our partners is working with but there are just women sitting on white plastic chairs and someone is standing talking... how do you visualize that in an engaging way?” (Mårten 2019).

The photographer’s experience and theoretical awareness

As mentioned, professional photographers can have theoretical knowledge in how to create photographs that communicate a desired tone. Fredrik says “if you photograph someone from above or from underneath, that can give different perspectives. You can give a person strength if you have a photo that is taken a bit from underneath.” He continues “Also, I think it is important as a western photographer, living in Kenya, working in Africa, to convey different kinds of stories. Or at least I would like to do that. Organizations want positive images for the most of the time. I think it is nice that it not like it was in the 80s, these classical images... now it is different kinds of images... more strength in the images of those you are portraying” (Fredrik 2019). Tobi also says “Now they want more optimistic photographs. I think there has been quite a move away from ‘poverty porn’, lying in a puddle of filth looking sad. I would even say that no one wants that image any more. They want a dignified representation of whoever you are photographing” (Tobi 2019).

When it comes to discussions about how much influence the photographers have over the final campaigns, Tobi and Fredrik argue that when they arrive to the place they are sent to they take as many photos as possible, and later on they are the ones making a selection of photos they will send to the organization but in the end of the day, is it up to the organization to make the final narration and create the story that they want to publish. I am interested in to what extent the photographers are aware of theoretical discussion while they are out in the field and so I ask Fredrik what he is thinking about mediating emotions and suffering. He says “Sufferings? The stories I do… I think if I just show it how it is then the reader can read on their own. Those are
the strongest images I have seen at least. And the images where you can see people’s love for their families and children. So, I don’t really… I’m just photographing what I see actually. And if the situation is that people are suffering, then I think that it will shine through” (Fredrik 2019). I ask if he reflects upon how the audience will see the images and how it will affect them. He says “Yes, yes, I do that. I want to mediate as much emotions as possible. I do that in the selection of images, by choosing the images with certain facial expressions or by choosing certain images to build a narrative. I want to affect the spectators as much as possible” (Fredrik 2019). Conclusively, the external photographers might use some of their education and experience in how to capture people’s emotions in a subtle and powerful way. The discussions with Fredrik and Tobi do however show that they “photograph as much as they can” and then it is up to the communicators at the head office to narrate the stories.

When the photographers definitely have a clear assignment, and are expected to adjust to guiding documents, is when it comes to consent forms. This is another discussion that affect We Effect and other international aid organizations’ communications work. We Effect is partly funded by private donors and companies’ donations but most money comes from Sida and Postkodlotteriet. Postkodlotteriet have a policy saying that the organizations they support need to have written consent from the people they photograph. The challenge is certainly immersed and even more complex because of the different cultural contexts. Recently Postkodlotteriet have also started to demand not only oral agreements but written agreements or consent that are taped on video where the communicator or photographer read a text for the person being photographed and ask for her/him to sign. We Effect also argues that giving people a name is of big importance in terms of ethical communication. When I highlight the discussions of designation with the photographers Tobi, Fredrik (and Paul) they however agree that these written consent forms are something for the people on the organizational side.

**Consent forms – ethical consideration for the farmers or for the organizations?**

The people in the field have for most of the time no idea what “Postkodlotteriet in Sweden” means. They might even be illiterate and unable to write down their name, which can also be a situation that makes them feel uncomfortable, or at least makes the photographer uncomfortable, which is something that both Tobi and Fredrik have experienced (Fredrik 2019, Tobi 2019). Tobi says “it can be quite an intimidating thing to confront someone with. They can be illiterate or so far removed from your kind of world that you're popping this piece of
paper in front of them with this legal lease on it, even if they can read it they are probably not going to entirely understand the consequences of it and then forcing them to sign it... It is a way to legally cover yourself, I think, I’d rather be based on initial conversations and initial trust and say ‘I’m here from this organization is it okay if I photograph you” (Tobi 2019). On the same note Fredrik says “I have never experienced that someone said they didn’t want to sign it. I think there are very few people who wouldn’t sign it. You go out with an organization and these beneficiaries that you photograph are a part of this project so there is a matter of course that they sign. And sometimes you leave a note with an email address to someone in England if they want to take back their consent. This is mostly for… I don’t know if I should say this but… this is mostly about themselves, mostly about the organization trying to save themselves. Not so much about consent, or of course it is also for the people to try to make them to understand what they are a part of, but I think it is mostly used so it won’t have any consequences for the organization” (Fredrik 2019). Both of the photographers mention that there are other ways, more natural ways, when both the photographer and the person being photographed, feel like there is consent – it could be just eye contact, a nod or oral explanation why they are there and how the photos will be used. The reason why Postkodlotteriet wants to have a filled in consent form is to make sure the person is okay with being visible so that Postkodlotteriet or the organization will not be sued. Another reason is if a person is being photographed and then later in life change their mind it should be possible for them to pull back their consent. When discussing #AllaHarEttNamn, stating that only every second black African get named in Swedish media regarding international aid, Tobi also undermarks the practical reasons and says “I think it is often a more practical manner than anything else. (…) If there is a room full of people it is very hard to get everyone’s name for the captions. I think what people don’t realize is that often as a photographer you’re taking 2000 photographs a day and getting everyone's information for those photographs is impossible” (Tobi 2019).

Conclusively all of the photographers and communicators do agree that it is very important to ask for consent and have the name to the people they communicate about. One exception is children, where all of them agree that you need to be careful and only write the first name, not surname or specific details as the name of their school. Several of them mentions stories where orphan children have been kidnaped or physically abused when organization have exposed children with their personal information. However, to even spread photographs on children under 18 years without parents’ consent would rarely be possible in a western context. But as Chouliaraki and Hall argues this is seen in another way, maybe partly because the context is
different, there might not be any consequences, the distance makes it too abstract and maybe because there are still consciously or unconsciously distinct ways in how to see black bodies and white bodies. When it comes to the photographer’s role in producing media in terms of culture, language and meanings, they might not be aware of how their background will influence their judgment and how they will capture the reality, but it surely will affect the outcome.

Hall argues that culture effect partly the decoders interpretation of a message but also how the producer decides to communicate a message (Hall 1996, p.128). If the photographers get told to take positive images they might decide, from their language, that smiling faces will represent a happy person. However, I noticed that people in general in Kenya did not smile just to be polite, they waited until they felt genuinely happy – and then they laughed without any restrictions. Since the photographer Fredrik have a Swedish background and is communicating photographs to the Swedish audience (at least in the work he does for We Effect) he might ask the person to smile because he has been taught that smiling is a sign that has a meaning, it represents being happy in his cultural language. This might sound like something universal but as Hall states “Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a ‘near-universality’ in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently ‘natural’ visual codes are culture-specific” (Hall 1996, p.134).

**Do the matter of presenting peoples name have a societal impact?**

We Effect also argue that this has an impact in how people will see each other, how people in Sweden will look at a distant sufferer. It is important that the beneficiaries, the people born in a less privileged condition, not are reduced into objects. As the production leader in Stockholm, Lotta, says “I think it is extremely important that everyone visible in photos will be there as people, not as illustrations of something, therefore I found it very important with names.” They might argue this partly because this is an organization founded in solidarity values and partly since people tend to care more and give more money to a personal portrait where you can feel an identification with the person, in comparison of a nameless object in a group. Åsa agrees saying “our whole work is built upon a human rights-based approach, we want to treat people equally, and then black and white need to be named in the same way. This is a part of our policy work. Additionally, the relation also gets clearer than if it is an average black person without
name in comparison to a ‘Beata’ in ‘this place’ in ‘this village’, then the viewer come closer” (Åsa 2019).

I ask Åsa about the consequences on a societal level and she continues “Yes, this is important, without names we just see the people as a mass far away, so we have to do what we can to change that. There are a lot of challenges in We Effect’s communication and one of them is that all of people that we work with are very far away. It is easier for Stadsmissionen (red note: Swedish organization working with homeless in Sweden) when you see the people on the street. So, we have to work in different ways so that the people feel a connection to people in Asia, Latin America, Africa… it is so far away! And the Swedish donor gets more and more focus on donating and engaging locally. This is something that have been visible when donor analyzes have been made. This has to do with anti-globalization nationalistic spirit, xenophobia, resistance to migration and refugees. People think like ‘Nope, I’m not going to help someone in Asia, we are having it difficult enough here at home!’ This challenge has been there all the time but it gets harder and harder” (Åsa 2019). Here she links the political and societal challenges together with the theory of mediation of distant others and demonstrate the difficulties in a clear way. The challenges of capturing people in the field and communicating these images to a specific target group is not independent of the current societal circumstances and norms. This discussion will be investigated further when analyzing the challenges in the last step at the communications department in Stockholm.

Voices from farmers visible in We Effect’s campaigns

To be able to analyze the whole media production process I did find it important, in the spirit of ethnography, to also ask the people the organization communicate about. After several turns I got the possibility to meet the farmer Beth, she lives in a village outside of Machakos, two hours away from Nairobi. I brought the photographs and video of her that We Effect have published on social media two years ago. I ask if she remembers the meeting two years ago and the experience of being photographed and also how she felt being visible online and in Swedish media.

“I remember. It was nice. We walked into the garden to take some photos there. I don’t know, I did not even ask where they were from. Not until today have I asked why they were here and what happened with the photos. Later someone said ‘I saw you in the WhatsApp, what where
you doing there? (laugh) I thought it was only for their own interest. I didn’t ask for the purpose. I don’t remember. I think I was told that the photos were supposed to be published in a magazine. That they would use the photos in the magazine. Yeah. Since the CEO (of Kakuyuni FSC) told me that they were visitors and that they liked me and that they would like to take some photos, I did not have a lot of worries that they wanted to take some photos since it was through the organization which I’m also in. They told me they wanted to know about life here so I thought the photos were going to be assisting in that kind of sense” (Beth 2019).

I asked her if she had seen the photos before and she described to me that she was a bit disappointed since the photographers promised her to send her the final result but she only got one photograph which was a photo of them all together, not the photograph that would be published online. “I got the photos. But I only got one, and it is in my telephone.” I show her the photo that was published and if she thinks they are authentic and mirrors the reality. “Yes, yes it does. It is taken just here outside. It is where we used to meet but we have transferred, our secretary gave birth, she was still breast feeding. Us members, sitting there. A good group. They told us to do this (giving money to a person in the group) while they took the photo.” I asked her how she felt and what she thinks of the photo and she said “Umm…. We felt that it was okay.” (Laughter). I think it is good. It was me who were saying, maybe the visitors would like to see my goats.” (Laughter). “Here, I’m feeding them. We cut branches and bring them there.” I ask her about the process and how it if felt to be recorded. “In fact, I did not even think. At first, I was a bit nervous, I was not used to being filmed. But then, I got some courage (laugh) and felt alright. I have trained public speech in school and also for me, when I was very young we used to be trained to do public speech. They could tell us ‘stand up and lead!’ I was not much used to talk in public” (Beth 2019).

Beyond that Beth seemed a bit disappointed that she did not get the photographs after the communicators visited, she seemed happy and pleased. I tried to ask here how she thought people in Sweden would think and feel when they see the video. “Actually, I might not know because I don’t know their interest, as they see a Kenyan woman. I not even know what the difference is, between our way of life, and the Swedish way of life. So maybe they get to know more about what we do in Kenya.” I ask her if she thinks it is important to have her name on the photo. “I don’t know whether to say yes or no. But I think it is important. Maybe sometime you can invite me to your place, also so I know what you do there. (…) If you need it, I don’t have any issues. According to me it doesn’t matter. If you really think it is important for the
name to be there it is okay for me. I don’t know if there is a problem, that is why I can’t tell. If it is in your interest then I don’t mind” (Beth 2019). Also, when I ask her if there are any photos that she is missing, she says she doesn’t know. I ask her if there was something she would have liked them to take a photo of and she replied that she showed them what she had. This also shows the approach that you have what you have and that is it, from my context and background I am so used to being able to change how people perceive me but she might not be used to that, I get the impression that she thinks “she is who she is” and that she is pleased with that.

It was challenging for her, as a farmer who has not been thinking about media in a theoretical way before, to express herself and to have thoughts about media ethics or even what she thinks and feel about photos. She was happy to talk about her community, her life and her crops, but she is not aware and does not especially care about the photos that have been taken of her. However, I do think it is remarkable that when Fredrik (photographer) and Anna (previous regional communicator) came, people that she remembered and liked, she thought that they came as private persons and took photos for a magazine. She did not even know what the purpose of the photos were. When I told her how the photos will be used she had an “aha-moment” and I felt like she understood something she had not understood before. It could be that Anna and Fredrik gave insufficient information but it is most likely that they explained it well. It is more likely that she did not understand their work and context and there is also a chance that she forgot what they told her since she mentions that she is getting older. Beth said that “If it is no problem, it’s fine” and that she liked the photos. She also said that she did not know if it could be a problem that she was visible and had her name exposed, and therefore could not answer what she thought about it. It makes sense, you cannot have an opinion or a feeling of something you do not have knowledge about. In the same matter she did not know what to answer when I asked her about how she thinks the Swedish audience see the pictures. How could she when she does not know about the Swedish cultural context, or as Hall would say – their language, meanings and culture. She does not know how people from a western culture interpret messages and therefore she cannot know how they will decode the photographs and videos of her.

Diary reflections and observations from the field
In my diary notebook I also reflected after the meeting with Beth “I feel the distance so much. The cultural distance, mental distance, geographical distance. One reality here in Kenya and one reality there in Sweden and now I have one foot in each? Why even try to spread these stories online – is it possible to share stories from one cultural difference to another? When I saw the video and read the article online I didn’t feel too much. After I met her, when I have eaten the food she has cooked for me and walked in her garden and seen her pet her animals and had heard her tell her stories... now I understand everything so much better. The struggle she has been trough and what she has today. Her will for other women in her community to get the same valuable training and support. How she wants other cooperations to also receive money to support other women so that they could get the same development. How can these feelings I’m having now be mediated? I bought a basket from her and felt how the money will go directly to her and people in her community and their development. However, they do not only need money but also education and capacity training, which We Effect’s member organizations can give them, in a long term and sustainable way” (Diary notes 2019).

Another noticeable reflection from that meeting: “When I started the interview and showed Beth the pictures she realized that she wore the same dress as in the article with We Effect two years ago. Everyone laughed and she wanted to change her dress. And who wouldn’t have done that? I also took pictures on my own and I could recognize and agree with things the photographers Fredrik and Tobi had said. You go there and do your best, some details might come up, you sometimes get the possibility to choose to take a photo from an angle from below instead of from above. But there were also challenges, people were joining from other organizations, sitting and waiting, and after some time they suddenly wanted me to be done and that we should leave. Another challenge was the lighting. Beth felt comfortable though, very calm and she was proud to walk around and she wanted to show me a lot of things. She was prepared, she had chosen the clothes she wanted to wear. A detail I saw was that the zipper in the back of the dress was broken. I realized that this could have been a moment where I, as a photographer, could decide to capture her with a broken dress to make the viewer feel sorry for her, pity her, that her nicest dress was a broken dress. I could also have chosen to write an article about how she told me that her husband had started a fire in their garden, aiming to set the whole place on fire and leave, which could also have made her into a victim of a man’s deeds. Something that might have been graspable for the Swedish audience since men’s violence towards women is a global issue and a Swedish issue just like a Kenyan issue, and maybe
therefore easily understandable. Yet, the raised price of mango and avocado may affect her even more today but that might be difficult to mediate. However, the reality I felt after our meeting was that it would be difficult to present here as someone in need, she was truly pleased and happy. She showed me her big mango trees and cows, so that was what I took photos of. But would those kinds of photos be chosen by the fundraising department for the final selection or would images of her with the broken zipper be more engaging? The practical work while taking photographs and meeting her on her farm gave me theoretical insights as well” (Diary notes 2019).

I also visited another farmer, Millicent, living in a village outside of Kenya, and ask how she felt when she was being interviewed by We Effect. She said that she felt privileged to interact and meet Swedish visitors. When I ask her what she thinks of having her name connected to the photo of her she says “do you want it, is it usable for you? For me it doesn’t matter but it is important for me that you say ‘thank you’, you have benefitted a lot from me now, right?” I ask her how she would feel if the photographs We Effect took would be spread in Sweden and she says “if I get money it is okay” (Millicent 2019). She laughs and jokes but there is some seriousness to her as well. I explain to her that the purpose with the photographs are to show people in Sweden that she, and other people in Kenya need support to be successful farmers and to live better lives and then she gets happy and says if that is the case, it is fine.

**Do the farmers care if they get their names published? Does it matter?**

The two farmers that I meet and talk with do not have a specific care in the matter. When I ask photographers, communicators or other people working at We Effect in Kenya they say the same thing – they do not care. My experience was additionally that it was common to have several different names “some people call me this, but other people call me that” or “this is my official name and this is another name I have”. The name did not seem to have the same significance on a local level as it might have in the Swedish context. However, even though farmers on an individual level do not care, is it ethically justified to not publish their names? No, since:

- We Effect, and other similar aid organizations, are built upon a human rights approach and should therefore treat everyone with the same weight. A story is important and
should have weight and a personal connection independently if it comes from a white person or a black person.

- Because of colonial history and current power relations organizations and news magazines should be thorough with getting all peoples names, also correctly spelled, even though the person might not see the final product.
- Finally, no, since this will affect how people on a societal level understand and position themselves and others. If the viewer/reader get a name connected to a photo they can build a stronger relationship to the person in the photo and maybe understand the content better.

The farmers that I asked might not have the analytical ability to think about how the discussions of names and consent forms could be put into a societal level or global level. They did not care about if their name was published or not, but if they understood the effects on a big scale and how it could lead to increased inequality they might see it from another perspective.

3. **Regional office to head office**

In the third step in the media production process I will investigate the relation between the regional office and the head office. As mentioned, both We Effect and Agroforestry have decided to end the Swedish communicators’ contracts and instead employ local regional communicators. An interesting theoretical question is: will the photographs look different depending on the cultural background of the photographer? Hall says that the challenge in communication lies in making the receiver decode the message in the same way as the sender understands it, but is that possible if the message is traveling from one cultural context to another? In interviews with staff from the organization both in Sweden and in Kenya, I ask them to interpret 26 previous photographs and campaigns that We Effect have been communicating. An interesting conclusion was that they decoded the images differently depending on their cultural background. It was possible to see that the interviewees, depending on their nationality (which in this specific case equals culture), saw different things in the images. It was also interesting to see how the communicators, with one foot in the Kenyan culture and one in the Swedish, could interpret the images from an even more multifaced point of view. Additionally, their work experience, thematic and geographical, also mattered. What follows now is a discussion of eight images where the interviewees’ answers showed that their cultural backgrounds played a part in how they interpreted the photographs.
Photo analysis – does the cultural background matter in how the spectator decodes the photo?

I ask the Swedish communicator Elin, based in Kenya, to tell me what she sees when she looks at this photo that is a part of an article about adequate housing on We Effect’s website. She says: “This one is a “need photo”. What I can be critical towards here is why we are taking this photo – is it to show that ‘this is how they used to live’ then it’s a relevant image but to use it like ‘this is how it looks like in the poorest area in the slums of Nairobi’… then I don’t know… or is it to show climate change? That could also be the case… But I don’t like that you take photos from this perspective or take them out of the conversation. (…) If it is to show ‘this is how other people are living’ then I don’t think it’s good” (Elin 2019). The people I interviewed only saw the photos individually, in most cases without any context, this is to make them focus specifically on the language of photography, which is in focus in this thesis. Elin can analyze the photograph from different ways but as a Swede in general, I agree with the interpretation of this as a photograph showing need, perhaps showing contrasts, but it is a photography with a negative appeal. It might additionally reproduce stereotypes of “how people live in Africa” if there is not a context, showing an alternative and multifaceted reality as well.
Shadrack and Jonathan, staff at We Effect in Kenya, do together with other people with a Kenyan background, say that they really liked this photo, that it mirrors their reality and shows the life conditions of the people they are reaching out to with their work. Shadrack says “this is reality, on the ground”, Jonathan agreed and said “this is the target group we are working with, showing the need” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019). Their comments and non-mentioning of stereotypes in the interviews could be because they might not know the Swedish target group and the influence these kinds of photographs, consciously or unconsciously, can have on the audience. Mårten and Elin are having an easier time to theoretically and critically analyze photographs, problematize and see potential outcomes since that is a part of their profession. At the same time, if people from the region think these are good photos to spread and the communications department in Stockholm states that need images generate higher engagement, which leads to more money for the business, is that not the final goal for everyone? How damaging is it to communicate stereotypes and who decides whether it is a stereotype or not? According to which cultural context? This a discussion that will return, the ethical aspect in relation to engagement and economic interests is something that will be discussed further in the fourth and last section of the analysis.

Figure 4. Post published on We Effects Swedish LinkedIn 2018
This is a post from We Effect on LinkedIn. I translated the text to the people who did not speak Swedish and everyone questioned the relationship between the photograph and the text. Jonathan and Shadrack says that they depict the photo as a bit disconnected. Jonathan says “it does not actually reflect what we do, it looks like it focuses more on children, maybe they see it as children in Africa and think that We Effect are working in the African continent” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019). This image is decoded as a photograph with a positive appeal by the local audience that I interview, Shadrack says “what I can depict from this photo, is more of a relaxed environment. It shows the work of We Effect as conservation of environment. The kids are in a relaxed environment, they are eating sugarcane” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019). Dorothy also says “this is real action, it is full of… I think real life. It gives you a bit of a sense of what real life is about for these children. They are just relaxing, eating their sugarcane. This one (one of the children in the photo) is curiously looking at what is happening… I think the photo itself is good. The fact that the camera is isolating this one (focusing on one person) creates a lot of interest – what is she looking at, what is happening behind there. So, for me the photo is quite telling and it is full of life! Optimism! The people are just relaxed and are enjoying themselves” (Dorothy 2019). The Swedes who I have showed the photograph to have however seen the photograph as a “need image”; where children are outside, alone, walking on the fields. Elin says “you should feel something in your stomach, these children have to struggle, they have to carry their own siblings” (Elin 2019). The interpretation of this photo is arguably based on the relation the spectator have to this environment and context.
This is another example where the photograph has been decoded in different ways depending on the cultural background of the spectator. Swedes see a woman in an empowering pose, that she looks a bit cool, people from the region however reply in similar ways as Jonathan: "This photo shows tough conditions, the lady looks tired, she is barefoot, she has a watering container, maybe she is taking a rest. The environment in which she is, is a bit dry also… it looks like difficult conditions” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019). Faith, a staff member at We Effect, says “you could see she is really suffering, she is not happy, she is in poverty” (Faith 2019). Dorothy says “I feel like she is tired! She has gotten to a point of being tired. You can see that she is barefoot and the surroundings is a bit difficult for here. She has a water can, there is not much green“ (Dorothy 2019). A Swede might not know how challenging the drought can be in Mozambique (where the photo is taken) and the difficulties this environmental issue will bring and therefore not interpret the drought in the same way but instead focus on her body language, the pose from down under, which is arguably empowering and something that is common in western imagery while trying to mediate someone in a powerful way.

Figure 5. Photo of Maria Nsindo, published in the report “Race for Land” by We Effect, Forum Syd and Afrikagrupperna, 2012. Photo: Kajsa Johansson (We Effect 1).
Something worth noticing is the fact that even though all Kenyan people I interview are local, they are still not a homogenous group, they also have different backgrounds. Dorothy is born in Kenya but has been traveling with work to western countries for several years and might be influenced by other ways of thinking in comparison to some of her colleagues who have not left the country. This study does not interview enough people to make the answers generalizable and Dorothy confirms that when she does not only interpret the image as negative but also states that: “In terms of representation she looks like she is in control of the situation, this picture does not introduce her as vulnerable. It represents her being strong, she is in charge.” (Dorothy 2019).

Figure 6. Housing cooperative in Uganda. In the middle Henry Kibuuka, secretary in the cooperative, next to him the cooperation’s president Betty Nakiberu and the project leader Hamida Nantume. Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd. (Kakuli)

This is a photograph that is a part of a story and article on We Effect’s website about a housing cooperative in Uganda. When Shadrack explained how he saw the meaning of the photograph he said “this is a polygamous man because the two ladies are almost the same age so you cannot say one is the daughter, for me it depicts a polygamous man” (Shadrack & Jonathan 2019). In east Africa is it much more common with polygamous relationships than in Sweden, especially in the way you would communicate it publicly. In Sweden is polygamy not according to the norm so it might be more distant to make that assumption and decode the image in that way in comparison to how someone in Kenya would see it. A person from a Swedish context would
arguably read from their faces that something is going on, the dark colors and broken power outlet implies that there is no electricity which a Swede most of the time take for granted and therefore might think that these people are living in poverty.

Figure 7. Betty Nakiberu. Housing cooperative in Uganda. Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd. (Kakuli).

Figure 8. Betty Nakiberu (to the left) and Zaitun Namuganza (to the right). Housing cooperative in Uganda. Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd. (Kakuli).
Jonathan and Shadrack both see this as positive images while Elin sees them as very negative. She understands the photograph on the top as an angry woman and that she is struggling while Jonatan and Shadrack says “she has water now”, maybe they read that she comes from tougher conditions and are in a better place now. Regarding the photograph on the bottom Shadrack said: “the women are participating in construction of house, they are carrying sand, it is positive. The women have been empowered, they can build, initially this job was for men, now you can see how women are building.” Additionally, Jonathan said: “they don’t look tired or exhausted, they are happy” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019). Dorothy agrees “This is team work and they are happy together. Two are better than one. And the fact that there are ladies in construction it also tells a bit, that even women can also do construction work here” (Dorothy 2019). Elin mentions that she thinks the editing is to strong with it comes to contrasts and she thinks they are too dramatic (Elin 2019). Both the staff and the regional communicators mentions they houses and thinks they are very modern. Initially Shadrack and Jonathan do not think that this actually is a place where We Effect work. However, might these houses be easier for the Swedish target group to relate to in comparison to the houses in the first photo. The first photo might evoke emotions of extreme differences and compassion fatigue, ‘this is so bad and unfair that some people still have to live like this”, in comparison to this photo where the Swedish audience might be able to position themselves and think ‘good that women can work as well and everyone deserves to live in good houses’. Or, they might think ‘poor women that have to work with these physical tasks and who have to carry water long distances. The narration and context might be determent on how these photos will be used and interpreted.
Jonathan, who is working with gender equality do several times under the interview surprise me with gender analyzes and different approaches, observations that stands out from his colleagues. Shadrack states that she is a woman with money and a house “the woman that have been empowered economically and also have adequate housing” while Jonathan can another layer of analysis saying “Yes, it is positive for women, maybe? But probably, she would be having some children around, right? Most of the time she is never alone and even the money she has is not her money, most of the time she spent the money on the children, her man, and food. So, yeah. But it looks positive. But again, the project is still a bit high end” (reds note: he is referring to the well looking houses) (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019).

In Sweden if you would see the picture you might think that this woman gets more money now, she is counting them and smiling. It looks like it is new money and that she is happy about it. However, if you know the context better you would know that there is a current discussion about women being empowered, women suddenly earning money or learning about feminism and gets more, new, power and new influence, something that effect the power balance in her family and village. Through people at the office I learn that this drastic change can also be contra productive for the woman in short term. Maybe the (Swedish) photographer (based in
Kenya) did not think about this while capturing the moment. Obviously the Kenyan audience thinks about this, but the photo is meant for the Swedish target group so it might not be an interpretation that any Swedish viewer will do. Even if they will, it might be okay to have photographs that have both a negative and positive appeal.

Dorothy also mentions that the woman is sitting there alone and says that: “being alone does not depict the work as such” (Dorothy 2019). A Swedish audience might not reflect upon her being alone since the Swedish culture is characterized by individualism where Swedes (generally) have the economic condition to get by on their own, they are not dependent on the group in the same way as many people in Kenya are and how people in Kenya choose to be. From my understanding; in Kenya, being part of a group is a part of the culture. Because you have to and because you choose to. The communicators say it is difficult to arrange photos with just one person in it. This is a photo that Stockholm is requesting, maybe since this is what Swedes want to see and recognize themselves in. In the region, however, as many people as possible want to be photographed. So, the regional staff reflect upon that and conclude that the woman looks lonely on the blanket.

Figure 10. Man and Agness Simon. Photo: Edward Echwalu (Kakuli 1)
This is another interesting example where the Swedes I have discussed the photographs with sees a happy couple working together as farmers. Jonathan, coming from the Kenyan culture and with a gender perspective, mentions that the woman has soil on her fingers and that the man is having other kinds of responsibilities on the field. He says “look at the lady, she was the one working, you can see that on her fingers and the man is having a pen, it also looks like he is the one explaining. The woman is just smiling. So… when it comes to working, the woman is the one to work and when it comes to doing the explaining in the family the man takes over. I don’t know why he is not working but it also shows some level of inequality because the lady is working and the man is not” (Shadrack & Jonatan 2019).

A report by UN Woman/The World Bank states that “In developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, women typically work 12 to 13 hours more per week than men; yet, women's contributions are often 'invisible' and unpaid” (UN Woman 2015). The National Geographic writes, based on numbers from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and World Bank, that woman in East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa make up nearly 50 % of the agricultural labor force (Nowakowski 2014), which are different numbers from how many realities looks like. Another article by the UN states that “women grow most of the food but rarely have secure rights to land in their own names” (Kimani 2008). These power relations and gender structures between men and women in agriculture are something unknown to most Swedes and we might interpret this couple in similarity to our own ideas of farming and equal labor. As previous discussions show, this simplification might however be necessary. If all the different, multilayered power relations where explained in the campaigns, the Swedish audience might not stop their thumb while scrolling on social media.

In conclusion the photo analyses above confirm that cultural backgrounds have an influence on how the spectator will decode the photographs in We Effect’s communication.

**What consequences do these finding have?**

This means that the coming local regional communicator has to be aware of Swedes cultural language since they are the ones interpreting the communication material that will be published in Sweden. This research shows that Swedes, because on their cultural background, decode images in another way than Kenyans do. These conversations might be difficult to have with a local regional communicator. Additionally, conversations about “need” and “result images”
might be even more challenging since the local communicator cannot have the same reference frame as a Swede. Even though the communicators in Stockholm realize that they have to work more with the material, they might find it challenging to get the communicator to even capture a raw material that goes in line with the Swedish directive. In the case of Beth, would the local communicator understand that a broken zipper in a Swedish context definitely would signalize poverty or that barefoot children playing in forest would be decoded as poor orphans because these are the images Swedes have been fed with when they have been taught that “people in Africa are starving”?

One reason to change the Swedish communicators to a local one is that it would be more cost efficient, additionally this person might have a stronger local network, maybe know more languages and understand the region even better. However, a majority of the regional communicator’s work is to collect media content that will be communicated to a Swedish target group and therefore decoded by Swedes. Elin, regional communicator at Agroforestry, says: “I think it might be difficult to get a regional communicator that can understand the Swedish target group and understand in what way you should communicate. (…) I think it will be difficult to understand a target group that you never lived with or met. Additionally, I think more money will be put on the Swedish communication and less on the regional. From here it is argued that by employing a regional communicator it would be more focus on the regional communication but I don’t think that is the truth because it will be more difficult to communicate towards Sweden and therefore it will take more time - and less time will be left for the regional communication. (…) I also think it will be difficult to get in to a Swedish organization in the same way as it is difficult to get into a German, Kenyan or American organization. There are cultural differences, there is no way to deny that” (Elin 2019).

Lotta, production leader, also agrees with this challenge and says “I think it will be difficult to say ‘we want this and we want to communicate that to this target group and in this context’ maybe it will be more be like ‘do a case from this occasion’ and then we will receive images and text and then we have to work more with the text” (Lotta 2019). Åsa, head of communications, however argue that the change to a local communicator goes in line with their policy work and ethics: “I strongly believe in having as much locally employed people as possible. In terms of policy we want as few people posted abroad as possible, the work should benefit in the country where we’re working, this is not only about communicators. We just got a new local regional director for East Africa and that is great in so many ways. It is expensive
to have someone from Sweden and we also want to employ local people to support the country where we work” (Åsa 2019).

Beck does however define cosmopolitanism as all of us people “living by birth in two worlds, two communities – in the cosmos (that is nature) and in the polis (that is, the city/state)”, he argues that we have this in common, independently what context we are coming from (Beck 2003, p.6). This can also be connected to Chouliaraki’s and Anon’s reasoning about modal imagination, the ability for spectators to imagine something they have not experienced. Even though the local communicator has not been in the shoes of a Swedish person she or he might have that ability. When I asked the farmer Beth about the Swedish audience she could not have that imagination but maybe an educated and traveled communicator perhaps could. From a theoretical perspective with cultural understanding in mind, would it be beneficial to have someone with good cultural understanding in both perspectives, one foot in each context, so that the person can understand both backgrounds distinctive interpretations. These reflections are in line with Lutz and Collin’s statement about the challenges in transferring messages in a desired way. It is difficult to know how it will be interpreted by the receiver and as Hall argues, is it even more challenging if the other person has another culture – another language where they decode messages in another way.

**Proud cotton pickers in Zambia – aggrieved target group in Sweden**

Another example underlying this is from 2015 when We Effect decided to communicate photographs from a partner organization in Zambia. Lotta tells me “we had a great photographer who was traveling around to our different partner organizations in the south of Africa and he spent some time with cotton farmers who are members of a cooperation we support. He took beautiful photos and we decided to have those in a campaign visible outside on public spaces, on social media and in printed magazines. What we couldn’t expect was the strong feedback we got since people in Sweden and members of the Afro-Swedish Association (Afrosvenskarnas Riksförbund) connected these photos to the American south and its history of slaves. It didn’t help how much when we explained that these are not slaves, they are farmers who have decided on their own to harvest cotton, it could just have been cornstalks or whatever, for them it didn’t matter, it just had a too strong connection” (Lotta 2019).
This is also an example where the lack of diversity gets very visible. Except from a few exceptions, the whole fundraising and communications department is made up of white people with Swedish sounding names. If there was a bigger diversity of the people working with their communication, these cases might arguably be easier to foresee since people with different backgrounds obviously see, interpret and decode images in different ways.

4. Head office to the Swedish target group

The final step in the media production process is when the head office in Stockholm formulate stories from material they have received from the regional communicators. Photographers and communicators have emphasized that this is the time when the stories actually are being shaped; the selection of stories, the narration and the context where the stories are published (media channel, text, timing) are crucial. The people working with communication generally want to simplify the campaigns and make them as understandable as possible so that the spectator can understand the issue and need and feel like they can be a part of the change. However, the people working with the programs are asking for more substance and are sometimes stating that the campaigns that I showed were too superficial and hollow. Could it also be an ethical dilemma in simplifying the people in the field’s issues too much?
Rebecka, who works with social media at the head office, confirms that it is a challenge to communicate about complex societal issues in 15 seconds and at the same time make people engaged and want to become monthly donors. “It can be difficult to tell a story in a very short format that partly should include a personal story connected to the general problems we want to raise. In that sense I sometimes feel like we’re simplifying too much. Yet we often have cases on the web where you can read more about the story and get a bigger picture” (Rebecka 2019).

When I ask Elin if she sees ethical conflicts in simplifying the work as they do, she says that it can be a struggle. She has previously worked as a journalist and claims that she used to be able to communicate what she saw. To have regional communicators and photographers that used to work as journalists is something that Lutz and Collins also highlight, saying that they used to take photos for “informational content”. However, in strategic communication work photographs with a lot of information are not valuable per se; they need to communicate a strategically chosen message to the target.

Elin continues: “But actually, you don’t do that as a journalist either! Since you are always putting an angle on all the things you do. You choose what parts you want to highlight and we decide to highlight trees. And at the same time some things are being visible as well as a tail and I think that is good” (Elin 2019). She continues: “We need to simplify, not so that the information will be wrong, but we have to say things in a more unified and simple way. For example, when my colleagues here hold interviews they are making everything so complicated... They may not have the competence enough to be so communicative. They (red’s note: her colleagues) talk as they were talking with a professor who have all the knowledge about an issue. That’s problematic. The easier we can get through with our message, the easier it will be spread with the wind, and I think we are still lacking a bit there” (Elin 2019). Also when I ask Lotta, the production leader at the head office, what the most challenging part in the media production process is she says: ”It is to make a recourse mobilizer to understand that we have to express ourselves in a certain way to make it understandable. The part to explain that we talk in different ways, that is okay, but maybe it is not possible to cavern down in something printed. (...) Their job is to collect facts and my job is to make it understandable for the receiver” (Lotta 2019).

Elin present upcoming conflicts while discussing the future of We Effect’s and Agroforestry’s communication. “Also, people are getting better and better livelihoods here and we like to communicate a stereotyped image of extreme poverty and how terrible it is, but that could also
be a problem... How do you get people to continue to donate money when the conditions are getting better here? In 20 years it might not be so many people here still living in a mud hut. In 20 years we are not supposed to exist according to our secretary-general, but if we are still going, that might be the case. If you are looking at people living in mud huts today, they have mobile phones. So, the development is going forward, which is fantastic, but with that being said - you could still wonder if people will continue to send money if it is not as extreme. A lot of people are also donating money to humanitarian organizations since there are a lot of wars and climate disasters, and we work long-term, which is problematic for us if we need to collect money“ (Elin 2019). This is part of the initial discussion about how to be able to communicate in an engaging and ethical way and the challenges for long term development organizations, when the work leads to positive development it might be even more challenging in the future to present “need stories” and to find members that can match the requested profile from the Stockholm office.

**Can the photographs be authentic?**

Dorothy, working as regional program coordinator, is born and raised in Kenya and puts another local dimension to the discussion of simplifying the reality to make it understandable. She highlights the importance of building trust to your audience. In Kenya - a country strongly marked by corruption - trust, honesty and reliability are the core of making relations and collaborations. If someone should trust you, you have to earn it. This might be why the discussion of un-authentic images make Dorothy very passionate “a photograph is equal to typed information, it communicates information and it should communicate the truth. (…) If you are not trusted no one wants to partner with you, no one wants to fund you, no one wants to chat with you because you are living a lie” (Dorothy 2019). This might be more of a matter for the regional communication since Swedes might not be able to tell if a picture from Kenya is authentic or not. Nonetheless, unauthentic images are a matter on a societal level in Sweden as well, since too simplified images also increase a skewed world view in the same way as black beneficiaries portrayed without name. Regarding context, Chouliaraki presents an approach in cosmopolitanism meaning that technology cannot communicate authenticity (Chouliaraki 2006, p.26). It lies in the nature of technology. There might be a disbelief, especially by people who are not working directly with communication, that there is a possibility to mediate the reality. Chouliaraki also argues, in line with Dorothy’s reasoning, that the viewer can get “an element of suspicion” when she/he sees a photograph that is not as expected. She is also arguing
that images with a very positive appeal can make the viewer feel like “how do I know this is real?” and this might create a disbelief in the organization (Chouliaraki 2013, p.64).

How much is it possible to simplify the work before it gets unethical?

Several international aid organizations are having very simplifying campaigns, describing complexed world problems with a few worlds. For example, another international aid organization - Action Aid - have a popular gift shop where you can buy goats, mango trees, bikes, chicken etc. that the organization will give to people in need. It is clear for the viewer to understand that it will help a person if they buy a goat to someone who is hungry and poor. However, in reality, the money is not earmarked to go to that specific product, the money will go “where they are most needed” (Action Aid). This is an efficient way to make clear marketing where the spectator will see a specific need and are offered in a specific way to support the distant sufferers in a clear and painless way. In contrast to the images of mango trees is Action Aid mostly working with education; to get girls and women to get self-provision and train them in how be aware and claim their rights. They also do policy work, trying to influence governments to change discriminative laws and “make multinational cooperations to take more responsibilities in the countries where they work” (Action Aid). These things are, as Mårten have argued, more difficult to mediate in clear way and Action Aid are generally known by the public “where you can buy a goat and contribute to a better world”, which seems to be a successful concept. The idea of “buy a goat” is something people from We Effect and Agroforestry are mentioning in interviews, Agroforestry have “buy a tree” which Elin claims to be very successful.

The communication for the Swedish target group is present in the Swedish market and is therefore naturally compared to likeminded organizations. The way the Stockholm office decide to narrate the stories is arguable also tinged by the social norms in that context. Chouliaraki argues that “Even though such choices (in how to arrange texts) are part of everyday journalistic routines rather than ideologically motivated calculations, do they always carry norms as to how the spectator should relate to the sufferer and what we should do about the suffering” (Ibid). How the current norms are and the level of understandings of international relations might also affect what stories are being narrated. Åsa says “There are a lot of challenges in We Effects communication and one of them is that all of people that we work with a very far away. It is easier for Stadsmissionen (Stockholm’s city mission) when you see
the people on the street. So, we have to work in different ways so that the people feel a connection to people in Asia, Latin America, Africa... it is so far away! And the Swedish donor get more and more focus on donating and engaging locally. This is something that have been visible when donor analyzes have been made. This has to do with anti-globalization nationalistic spirit, xenophobia, resistance to migration and refugees. People think like 'Nope, I’m not going to help someone in Asia, we are having it difficult enough here at home!' This challenge has been there all the time but it gets harder and harder” (Åsa 2019). So, just as Chouliaraki argue, do the campaigns have to be suited after current norms and it is not only a matter of ethics but also politics (Chouliaraki 2006, p.22).

It is also in this final step where the head office can decide what emotions they want to create with the campaigns. However, they need to be careful so that the campaign is within their guidelines and that they do not evoke too strong emotions. Lutz and Collins mention how the magazine editors have to be careful not to lose subscriptions or get outraged letters. This is also a balance that We Effect need to have in mind, they want to show strong photographs that shows a need – but they can only do that to a certain limit, not only to be sensitive towards the suffering person but also to the viewer, so that the feeling of compassion fatigue does not arise.

**Do We Effect’s communication close the gap between the cultural contexts?**

A final discussion connected to Chouliaraki and Silverstone is whether We Effects mediation of the distant other is closing the gap, metaphorically and geographically, or not. When they communicate stories, people with names, evoke emotions – do the viewer feel like they are closer to the distant other and that they can recognize themselves? The photographers and people working with communication mentioned humanity and that this is something they want the spectator to feel. They want the viewer to think “that could have been me”. Maybe the communications also economically benefit if the images succeed in closing the gap. However, Nayar argues that the reality the viewer will take part of from the screen is not “pure” (Nayar 2009, p. 153). The reality the Swedish target group will see is a part of a strategic content document based of partly solidarity values but also economic interests. Something Chouliaraki straightforwardly states while saying “humanitarianism is grounded in a liberal idea born out from capitalism” (2013, p.5).
An international aid organization’s communication can never be purely authentic and the mediated distant other will still be culturally different. Because of globalization will the geographical and mental distance shrink, but since different cultures take on globalization in different ways might this not either be equal. A person from Sweden might have the ability to imagine Kenya but it will be further challenging for a person from Kenya to know about Sweden. This again, is something that Silverstone highlights with the Afghanistan man who was interviewed by the British radio, who lived in Afghanistan but did not know about September 11th. Tomlinson however talk about techno-semiotic affordances and there might still be an ethical conflict, an imbalance, that people in the west, through their technologies and screens, can close the gap and take part of both realities while people in the global south, cannot.
5. Conclusions

This research shows We Effect’s media production process from Kenya to Sweden and illustrates that it can be categorized in four steps: 1. Head office to regional office, 2. communication between the regional communicators/photographers and people in the field, 3. regional office to head office and finally 4. head office to the Swedish target group. The head office is in charge of planning the external communication and the regional communicators collect material from the field. The photographers and regional communicators have ideas of how they want to capture and mediate the reality they experience, but practical limitations and cultural differences challenge their work. The media production process is later on characterized by the head office narrating and simplifying the stories they receive from the regional office where they adjust the message from the cultural context in Kenya to the cultural context and target group in Sweden, which this thesis demonstrates might be the most influential step while trying to make engaging and ethical appropriate campaigns.

This study shows that it is challenging in several regards to communicate from one cultural context to another. Initially, there is a lot of practical difficulties to arrange meetings in another region than the one you are used to. Moreover, to collect specific material that has been requested from people with another understanding, view and experience than yours is difficult as well. Additionally, there are a lot of different voices, opinions and competences that should be heard and taken into consideration. This might make the work relatively tardy but arguably well thought through. Another challenge that the analysis of this thesis shows is how the head office has to relate to an economic market, position themselves to competing organizations and act in a media landscape affected by current social norms, global and regional politics.

Another conclusion is that cultural background does influence how the media producers and spectators decode photographs and messages. This is a challenge for the current communicators since they want to represent the people they work with in an authentic way and at the same time communicate clear and understandable messages to the Swedish audience. For a local regional communicator, who does not have one foot in each context, this might be even more challenging. The example with the campaign with cotton farmers in Zambia also show that it is of importance to have diversity in the communications department while trying to make communication that is ethical and engaging. In a team where people have several different
backgrounds it is easier to foresee reactions and how the target group will decode the photos. That campaign did however receive a lot of engagement and what a good campaign contains and where the line of sensitivity within political correctness can be drawn is an expansion of this thesis discussions. Nevertheless, it is preferred to have an idea of how the audience will decode the communication since it is desired to have control over what values you, as an organization, spread out and how you will be perceived.

In addition, theoretical discussions about global culture, cosmopolitanism and how to mediate distant sufferers, anchored in scholars as Chouliaraki, Hall and Silverstone, have been presented in this thesis. From this, together with empirical material, conclusions can be drawn that it is challenging to mediate distant others from one cultural context to another in a sensitive and clear way. It can be difficult for viewers on one side of the planet to get emotionally involved in a story of someone far away, but if we have the ability of modal imagination it might be possible for cosmopolitans to act and contribute to a fairer world. However, it is important to oversee the ethical aspects and be sensitive with what photographs and messages communicate. The campaigns should be clear and understandable but at the same time not too strong or insensitive since this might be immoral towards the person portrayed, evoke the feeling of compassion fatigue by the viewer or damage the organizations’ trust. Chouliaraki’s reasoning about images with a positive or negative appeal, in relation to discussion of ethical and engaging images, was applied to We Effect’s discussions of result images vs need images. The conclusion that could be drawn is that these cases has to be dealt with sensibility and has to be individually judged in each case; guidelines and regulatory documents cannot always be suitable when it comes to ethical dilemmas.

As mentioned, is the intensified media landscape another challenge. International aid organizations should however not get carried away with this or modify their ethical values or guidelines. Nonetheless, might it be important to oversee the whole media production process and estimate how the desired message can be communicated in the best possible way. In conclusion, this essay appoints that it is challenging for a message to travel between different cultural contexts, especially with today’s political and societal circumstances. The farmer Beth said “Maybe sometime you can invite me to your place, also so I know what you do there” (Beth 2019). This frames the unfair distribution of knowledge and technology, but also access to cosmopolitanism. The discussions of mediation of distant others, culture and the balance between ethical and engaging communication needs to continue.
Discussion and suggestions for further research

This thesis demonstrates the general challenges for organizations communicating stories from one cultural context to another and shows specific examples from We Effect, an organization that is aware and value their presence in international development work. The conclusions withdrawn from this research might be of relevance for several international organizations working in different cultural contexts. Additionally, the conclusions could be vital for other organizations interested in communicating with an ethical approach, not only when it comes to the matter of naming but also in discussions of how to narrate and simplify stories in a way that is conscious and fair.

We Effect are doing policy work about issues they find important, such as highlighting the importance of giving everyone a name. They do this partly for the people in the regions where they work and partly on a global level, making sure that people are being equally treated and recognized. What issues they should prioritized is however another discussion; who sets the agenda for what should be a policy matter, what issues should be communicated and who decides what ethical communication contains? These are discussions which would be interesting topics for further research.

Another suggestion for further research is to continue from the last step analyzed in this research and investigate on a deeper level how the Swedish audience interprets the photos, if they get engaged and act and why they do so with some campaigns, and why they do not with others. It would be interesting to interview the Swedish audience and ask them what kind of photographs that makes them engaged and why. It would also be interesting to do a historical research and continue from Chouliaraki’s most recent literature about the ironic spectator and postmodernism and discuss the direction of the modern communication by international aid organizations. Further on, it would be interesting to see how global participation and donations online has changed the over last five to ten years. How has the campaigns and the audience’s engagement changed in relation to globalization, increase of refugees, xenophobia and right-wing politics? Climate-refugees are anticipated to become a future crisis and how will international aid organizations try to mediate that? Is it even possible for long term development cooperations to continue to work long term and not add a humanitarian approach to their work, when it comes to be able to collect money? Will the physical and mental gap between different
cultures expand or shrink because of the digital globalization? In a media landscape where the media consumers are getting more and more overindulged and jaded, will people online spend time to really try to understand someone else’s reality and misfortune? There are many questions left to be asked about the future of ethical and engaging communication by international development organizations.
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