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Representing Poverty, Impoverishing Representation? A Discursive Analysis of a NGOs Fundraising Posters

Abstract

This article seeks to understand the production and maintenance of symbolic boundaries between the "self" and the "other" in fundraising posters by aid organisations and development NGOs. The central discussion will question why NGOs come up with such dichotomising images and will address their consequences. The article discusses the complete poster collection of 11.11.11, an annually organised, overarching Belgian NGO fundraising campaign for a whole range of development projects and aid agencies. As well as exploring the definition of the 'other' in the poster material, this paper will also reflect specifically upon the positioning of the NGO as opposed to other agencies and players in the field of development. It is argued that although particular dominant icons and narratives remain unchanged over the course of the years, symbolic boundaries between 'self' and 'other' indeed do change.

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Introduction

Every now and then citizens of the western world are confronted with images and stories of the poor in Africa, Asia and South America. Annoying confrontations may occur while strolling down the shopping street, where window shoppers are at constant risk of being hassled by volunteers of development organisations showing pictures, telling stories and asking all kinds of moral questions. In the evening, while watching television, one can also be caught by the horrifying images of hunger and starvation from a fundraising television commercial. Even at work people are regularly bombarded with email on national asylum policies or human rights issues.

Fundraising has become big business over the last decades (Smillie, 1995). Large international non-governmental organisations (NGO) are spending millions in public communication and by far the largest shares of these investments go to fundraising campaigns. In these campaigns, NGOs provide images and information statements about people in developing countries in order to convince audiences in the first world that something has to be done, that the undersigned organisation is the best candidate to do something about it, and that money is needed from the audiences to finance these endeavours. The spectacular financial results of the recent fundraising campaigns held for the victims of the Tsunami in Asia confirm this view.

An indirect result of these campaigns is, what Smillie calls, "the pornography of poverty", i.e. "the use of starving babies and other emotive imagery to coax, cajole and bludgeon donations from a guilt-ridden Northern

public” (Smillie, 1995: 136). According to Nederveen Pieterse (1992), both the western media and the established aid organisations produce and maintain a, so-called, 'aid assistance imagination' of the poor, southern, underdeveloped, or third world countries². This imagination is interlarded with western ideas and images of war, hunger and turmoil (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992, 235). Dillon & Grieshaber (1996) state that, although the media and NGOs can be held responsible for continually publicising these one-sided and biased images, notions of supremacy over third world countries are deeply ingrained in first world societies. The problem is not that starving babies do not exist, but that such pictures, when continuously repeated year after year, outweighs reality and become realities of their own. Moreover, Simpson (1984) argues that NGOs deliberately focus their attention on *victims* of poverty because, by accusing the *culprits*, they risk displeasing powerful contributors, such as governments and corporations. In order to keep everybody happy it is necessary to communicate politically neutral messages in one's fundraising campaign (Simpson, 1984, 23-24).

A number of authors on critical discussions on development cooperation, aid assistance and the role of NGOs have touched upon the negative effects of image production (Nederveen Pieterse 1992, Smillie 1995, Dillon & Grieshaber 1996, Fischer 1997, Clark 2004). However, not many authors have thoroughly analysed the image production of NGOs in fundraising campaigns (except to a

² All of these terms refer to the, so-called poor countries in especially Africa, Asia and Latin America as opposed to the countries and agencies in the rich world (predominantly Europe and North America). In order not to create confusion I will use the term 'third world' when I speak of the ones that are being assisted, and the 'first world' of the ones that are doing the assisting. These terms may not be really up to date but everybody understands the symbolic boundary that this distinction makes.

little extend Simpson 1985, Van der Gaag & Nash 1995). Many of these authors have focused solely on the portrayal of “the poor other” and left the “self-side” of the coin uncovered. An analysis over time has also been lacking in the available literature, reinforcing the idea that the imagery of the poor other remains unchanged.

In this paper, I analyse the content and nature of the messages and images that are being communicated by development organisations to the public in fund raising posters. Special attention will be devolved to the evolving representations of the ‘other’ and the ‘self’ in this material. Besides the poetics of imagery, I will also discuss the politics of imagery, or the issues of power that are associated with the institutionalised production of images and information on both the ‘other’ and the ‘self’. The central question that this article will try to answer is whether messages and images in fundraising campaigns have changed over time, or can one determine certain discourses and dogmatic images that continue to dominate the nature of these fundraising campaigns, as stated by the authors above.

In order to research this rather large topic, I have chosen to focus upon the complete collection of fundraising posters that were produced between 1966 and 2001 by a Belgian NGO named the National Centre for Development Cooperation (NCOS³). The NCOS was founded in the spring of 1966 as a joint venture of Belgian NGOs for the coordination of particular activities, such as political lobbying, public education and fundraising. The annual fundraising

³ In Dutch: *Nationaal Centrum voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*.

campaign, launched traditionally on the 11th November at 11 o'clock, is typically named "11.11.11 action". Together with about one hundred joined NGOs, the mission of the NCOS is to fight against inequality and injustice in the world. They believe that the roots of poverty are due to the unfair distribution of means and power between the third world and the first world. According to the NCOS, countries in the south receive too little for their products, while at the same time the income that they receive flows back to the north because of the high burden of debt. Furthermore, rich countries spend far too little on development cooperation and the quality of this cooperation is not satisfying. It is the NCOS' specific task to bundle the strengths of NGOs to fight against these unfair and unjust conditions by working on three aims: i.e. to sensitise, inform and mobilise the public opinion; to support and collaborate with partner organisations in the south and international networks; and to put pressure on the political and economic centres of power (Peeters & Cleymans, 1990). Although the NCOS started as a national organisation over the course of the years the Flemish and Walloon created their own overarching organisations for the third world movement. I will focus on the Flemish counterpart and refer to the fundraising campaign, as 11.11.11. The "11.11.11 action" campaign is a well-known event in Belgium as are the striking posters that are produced every year to publicise it.

The objective of this paper is certainly not to demonstrate that the fundraising work of 11.11.11 is wrong, but to critically examine the institutionalised production of images and ideas that may have significant consequences for the production and maintenance of boundaries between

notions of 'self' and 'other' in the public conception of the third world. This is important since the first aim of 11.11.11 is to sensitise the public opinion on the north-south debate.

In section two I will briefly introduce the methodology that will be followed, as well as a number of notions that will be used in this article. Section three will present the results of the analysis. I will show that when the poster production of 11.11.11 is analysed over the course of 35 years, particular icons and narratives continue to dominate the representation of both the 'other' and the 'self'. However, the poster material also highlights changes in the representation of the 'other' and the 'self', especially with regards to the emerging debates of the 1980s and 1990s on the role of governments, neo-liberalism and globalisation. This focus on power structures has included some additional actors in the poster material (especially the national government and multinational companies) and influenced the representation of the 'other' and the 'self'. Section four will close this paper with discussion and conclusions.

Methodology and Data Collection

The poster material that functions as primary data in this research was collected on the 11.11.11 website, which can be accessed through the internet⁴. As I said earlier, I have focused the analysis on the complete poster record produced for the 11.11.11 campaigns between 1966 and 2001. On average

⁴ For additional information on 11.11.11 and the posters collection of 11.11.11 I would like to refer the reader to two websites: <http://www.11.be> and <http://www.meerskant.org/affiches/affstart.htm>

11.11.11 produced one or two posters each year. Sometimes, however, the same poster was used in the following year, and also no campaign was held in 1976. In total the poster database that is used in this investigation adds up to 39 posters. A comprehensive overview of the poster material can be found in appendix 1, in which different categories, such as the year of appearance, the financial result, the figures and the texts that are displayed, the general topic of the campaign and identity formations of 'self' and 'other', are specified for each poster.

Analysis of the Data

For the analysis of the poster material I will follow the discursive approach to cultural representations as presented by Hall (1997). The discursive approach is largely based on the work of the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault and his understanding of the term discourse. For Foucault discourse consists of a group of statements, notions and ideas that provide the language for speaking about a particular subject. This way of formulating and constituting the subject responds to specific ruling statements and ideas. Foucault believes that knowledge does not limit itself to pure meaning or language because it always operates within a historically embedded social practice. Thereby, knowledge is a strategic tool, inseparably connected to relations of power. The truth is nothing more than a claim of a dominant group of people on a particular kind of knowledge (Foucault 1980, Hall 1997).

Hall claims that this approach focuses much more on the historical contexts in which representations, discourses and truths are constructed as

opposed to the a-historical tendency of the visual analyses common in semiotics (Hall 1997, 46). Since I am analysing a series of posters produced by a specific organisation in development cooperation, this discursive approach reveals a lot of information hidden in the posters. It will not only analyse representations of the 'other' but also show that these are the result of self-notions of the institute or organisation that produced these representations in a particular historical and societal context. In other words, the discursive approach provides us not only with insights on "how" the 'other' is represented but also "by whom" and for "what reasons".

In practice, this discursive approach provided an initial inventory of the commonalities and differences between the posters. Structuring elements in this inventory were the figures or symbols that were displayed (e.g. male, female, child, hands, food, etc.), the specific problems of underdevelopment that were presented as topics (e.g. hunger, ignorance, unemployment, war, etc.), and the explanations that were given for these problems (e.g. draught, exploitation, injustice, politics, debt, etc.). The same was done for the roles and positions of the poster's audience (the Belgian public), and the NGO itself. These structuring elements created the basic material for the discourses that the posters produce about "the poor", "the public", "the NGO", and other actors such as governments and multinationals. In addition secondary information sources on the work and history of this particular NGO were used to provide the poster material with a historical and organisational context.

Development Discourse

In order to strengthen the presentation of this analysis I will link the results with critical anthropological accounts on development discourse.

Influenced by Foucault, the discourse of development co-operation has become a much-studied topic in contemporary anthropology (Grillo, 1997, 1). One of the case studies that Foucault used in his work has been the development of mental institutions and the way these institutions have come to define and control the boundaries between mentally sane and mentally insane people (Foucault, 1975). Similarly, critical anthropologists have started to research the demarcation between the people or communities that are supposed to be developed and the people and institutions that are *doing* the developing. Studies often include a critical questioning of the knowledge and ideas that lay at the basis for developing projects (Hobart 1993, Ferguson 1990, Escobar 1995, Fischer 1997). Escobar claims that the development institutions, including NGOs, exercise power over countries in the south by influencing the perception and knowledge about these countries. They define the terms in which one sees these countries and the indicators to support these views. To put it in Foucault 's terms, development institutions control the "regime of truth" about developing countries.

Economists, demographers, educators, and experts in agriculture, public health, and nutrition elaborated their theories, made their assessments and observations, and designed their programs from these institutional sites. Problems were continually defined, and client categories brought into existence. Development proceeded by creating 'abnormalities' (such as the 'illiterate', the 'underdeveloped', the 'malnourished', 'small farmers' or 'landless peasants'), which it would later treat and reform (Escobar, 1995, 41).

Being abnormal does not just mean being different, but is loaded with moral judgement, and has connotations of being illiterate, being malnourished, or being landless. Development discourse provides a moral justification to intervene and change these societies, but by misleadingly using tales that are made up in a different place and in a different context. As I will show, reflections of such popular political and academic discourses on underdevelopment are visible in the poster material.

Limitations

I would like to note that because of the size of the dataset and the ambitious scope of this study the analysis presented here only contains a broad overview. It is not my aim to provide a thorough analysis of every single poster in the dataset, an elaborate description of the history of 11.11.11 and its changing relationship within Belgian society and politics, or a study into the communication strategies of fundraising posters. In the limited scope of this article, I only want to argue that in this specific dataset of posters evidence highlights a contrasting perspective on the identity politics of development NGOs, as was described in the introduction. In the following section I will present the results of the analysis. First, I will focus on the most dominant figures and persistent abnormalities that appear in the posters. Then I will demonstrate that despite these common and unchanging aspects of fundraising posters there has been a discernable shift from relatively neutral to politically loaded explanations of poverty. In the course of the analysis I will link our findings to relevant academic literature on development discourse and development imagery.

Ignorant, hungry children

The image of a child is the most frequently appearing image in the posters. The figure that appears most frequently in the posters is the child. In about 50% of the poster material children are represented alone, in a group or with an adult⁵. In some cases it is only the children's eyes that are portrayed, the face or just a hand. As early as 1969, a British fundraising consultant provided a formula for persuading the public: "all the time show more and more babies" (Smillie, 1995,137). 11.11.11 has certainly adopted this strategy from the beginning. Using children in fundraising appears to be very effective. Everybody feels for children, has children of their own, or may even be a child himself or herself. This makes it very easy for people to identify with the child that is portrayed in the poster. Moreover, everybody understands that you need to protect a child and take care of a child because of its vulnerability and innocence.

Children do not only appear in most of the posters, they have been the most prominent figure used over the past 35 years. In their 1968 poster 11.11.11 portrayed their first image of a child (see box 2). In box 1 two similar posters are presented, both referring to famine in Ethiopia but the first one from 1985 and the second from 2000. In both posters two Ethiopian boys are the main figures, showing the innocence and vulnerability of children in crisis areas. The use of the same image in the poster illustrates the message that nothing has really changed in 15 years.



Figure 1: Posters of 1985 and 2000

Burman (1994) argues that images of children are also appealing for using in fundraising campaigns. This is due to its limited necessity for the poster to focus on the causes behind the circumstances of the child that it is showing. Using children allow NGO's to raise funds for politically loaded topics in a relatively neutral way. The posters of 1985 and 2000, as shown in box 1, sustain this argument. Despite the enormous amounts of money that were raised during these campaigns⁵, it can be argued that images like these could have negative consequences for the country to whom they are referring to. In this case for

⁵ In 19 of the 39 different posters that I have analysed children are portrayed. Together with other symbols that refer to children, such as children's hand or toys, this makes the portrayal of children more than 50 %.

⁶ Converted it amounted up to 2.5 million Euros in 1985 and more than double this amount in 1999.

Ethiopia, and more specifically for its citizens. Calvert & Calvert (2001) claim that worldwide it has mainly been starving children and Western aid activities that have been portrayed in the public media, while Ethiopian efforts to cope with the famine were underrepresented. Although local organisations were already working for months to cope with the famine, Ethiopians were stereotyped as helpless people forced to live in dry and unbearable circumstances. For example, the representativeness of the message in the 1985 poster, to that of the little boy that it pictures could well be false. The wording reads, "When I grow up I want to be a farmer". Yet one could question whether it really *is* the little boy who desires this or whether it is more likely to be the NGO that wants to show the public that with their means the boy is able to become an adult that is capable of surviving in the future. The poster assumes that the famine was caused by a lack of farmers. Given these considerations, the poster could be saying more about the way the western public would like to see the boy grow up, rather than the other way around.

Using children in fundraising campaigns symbolises the weak, vulnerable and dependent position that developing countries have in relation to the stronger, richer and more dominant developed countries. In both posters Ethiopia was portrayed as a fragile child, unable to survive without the help of its parents, the western world. One could even say that children are a pitiful subject and therefore worth a lot of money in the eyes of the NGO. Next to the abundance of children there are a few adult men and women that are portrayed in the posters, but as with the children these adults are also represented as subjects of misfortune, struggle, war, grief, and exploitation.

As we have seen in the example of the Ethiopian boy it is not without reason that particular figures are being used in the fundraising posters. The choice for a figure helps to get a message across or even amplifies the story you want to tell. In communication sciences the persuasive effects of personalised or vivid messages in different situations is contested (Nisbett & Ross 1980, Frey & Eagly 1993). Nevertheless, I assume that the use of vivid photographs and popular discourses in the 11.11.11 posters helps to get the message across. In almost every poster closed up figures are being used to draw the attention of the observer to a particular problem that third world people are facing. Often these problems correspond to popular discourses on poverty, such as drought, labour or politics, or to disaster situations, such as famines or floods that were covered extensively by the media.

The problem of famine, hunger or not having food or good food, is an ever-recurring problem in the poster material. Hunger and famine is presented in almost 45% of the posters⁷. The popularity of hunger as a narrative to represent poverty can be explained by the fact that everybody understands that hunger, or a lack of food, is a severe problem. The theme of 'hunger' and of the unequal distribution of food worldwide, have been very much at the forefront in the starting years of 11.11.11, most often by presenting confronting statistics or images. Hunger returns at odd intervals, mostly in years when the news of famine has had large media coverage. This was the case in 1973 when an extreme dry year caused harvest failures in many African Sahel countries and in

⁷ In 17 of the 39 posters images, symbols or statements refer to situations of famine and hunger.

1984 and 1999 when famines in Ethiopia caught the attention of the media⁸ worldwide. In these years the producers of the posters cannot resist the persuasive powers of humanitarian emergency situations and deviate from the more structural themes that are presented.

The problem of hunger and famine is also represented with other figures, such as adult men and different explanations are given for the absence of food in different posters. Examples of these different associations and causes of hunger include: lack of knowledge, drought, labour, politics and exploitation⁹. Many of the posters only bring up one of the possible causes that may lay at the basis of famine, while in reality the causes may not be that easy to pinpoint. In reality, the causes for famine are a complex interplay of different factors. In fundraising it is easier to provide people with a simple and direct reason for “giving” instead of a complex story. A complex story may easily give people the feeling that their money will not directly contribute to improving the situation.

⁸ Note that in the posters of the last two cases in Ethiopia pictures of children suffering during the famine are used in the following year, when the famine (in many cases) is already over and when the children that are portrayed may not even be alive anymore.

⁹ Examples can be found in illustration box 3, 4 and 6.



Figure 2: The posters of 1968 and 2001

The poster of 1968 in box 5 is a good example of the use of child figures as well as the theme of hunger and famine. The subtitle of the poster – “help the hungry to take care of themselves” - shows another implicit recurring theme in the poster material, i.e. the idea that people in developing countries do not have the right knowledge or enough technology to survive. Here hunger and poverty is explained by the extreme conditions in which people live and by the lack of knowledge and technology in order to cope with these circumstances.

Hobart speaks of two kinds of knowledge that are competing in the field of development. On the one hand you have the, so-called, local or indigenous knowledge's - knowledge shared by the people at the grassroots level. On the other hand there is knowledge, characterised by "an idealist theory of rationality and a naturalist epistemology", shared by the western agencies that are involved

in the field of development (Hobart, 1993, 3). Hobart claims that the latter constantly underestimates the value of *local* knowledge's. This undervaluation is inherent to the development industry because working in development always includes an element of intervention in which 'the developer' claims to know better than those who are to be developed (see for example the poster of 1985 (see box 1). The poster of 1968 (see box 2) is an early explicit version of this under estimation, or ignorance, of local knowledge. Although more recent posters do not explicitly raise the issue of ignorance towards the knowledge and technology of third world people, implicitly this issue is present in every poster where the recipients of aid-assistance are portrayed as helpless and passive. This is clearly visible in the different notions of 'self' and 'other' in the appendix. According to Hobart, ignorance is an unavoidable aspect of development discourse, which serves to justify how interventions are planned in third world societies.

The portrayal of the 'other' as helpless, ignorant and passive is amplified by the fact that the 'self' is represented in a rather active way (see appendix). One has to understand that fundraising posters have the purpose to convince the public that financial support is needed to solve a particular problem that cannot be solved by the people at stake. Therefore 11.11.11 constantly asks the public to become active, to make a choice and to support their work. The poster of 1968 asked the public to help the poor to become self-sufficient. The posters of 2000 and 2001 (in box 1 and 2) both proclaimed that "you give more than money" when you support 11.11.11, convincing the public to take an active stance against the inequalities suffered by the people that are portrayed in the

posters. In the same time they continue to portray the 'other' as helpless and passive, standing in line to be rescued by the NGO.

The portrayal of predominantly hungry children in crisis situations, as opposed to the active representation of 11.11.11 and the public, produces and maintains a dichotomy between the 'self' and the 'other'. Table 1 summarizes the prevailing dichotomy between the 'other' and the 'self' that can be derived from the inventory of the poster material in the appendix. As many authors claim, these representations contribute to and reinforce existing, patronising, colonial stereotypes (Coulter 1989, Broch-Due 2000.)

| The "other" | The "self" |
|-------------|----------------------|
| -Child | -Adult |
| -Ignorant | -Wise, knowledgeable |
| -Passive | -Active |
| -Helpless | -Helpful |

Table 1: Striking dichotomies from the posters

From 1996 until 2001 the subtitle of the posters has consistently been "Fight against injustice". However, giving money to buy off the feeling of guilt that is raised in the posters would seem a rather passive and minimal reaction that can certainly not be considered to "fighting" for their cause. Paradoxically, the ones who are doing most of the fighting and surviving are the ones who are being portrayed as passive. Given these considerations, although fundraising posters represent third world people as ignorant and passive, one could be more inclined to accuse audiences in the first world for being ignorant and passive

towards the realities of poverty and underdevelopment. The poster material acts as a catalyst for contributing to this situation.

We have seen that images of children and famine are ever-recurring themes in the poster material, providing a politically neutral strategy for raising money for aid and development projects. Another strategy is to “blame the victim” by passively portraying poor people in difficult climatic and geographical circumstances or crisis situations. Providing a clear perspective on the causes of poverty that lay largely outside of the political field has certain advantages. The solutions that are provided by the NGO can easily be justified to the public.

Examples of this politically neutral approach are the posters of 1970 and 1975 in box 3. An analyses of these posters suggests that it is almost as if they are telling one single story. In the poster of 1970 we see a poor hungry man that is not able to grow food in the dry circumstances in which he lives. Below the image the public is asked to help him to deal with these severe conditions. The poster of 1975 can be understood as the answer to the problem given in 1970. It indicates very clearly how the water wells and the outboard engines that were brought to the poor changed their capability to survive. Thus it communicates that this problem can be overcome by simply bringing them the knowledge and technology. Case solved. I have to note that this is one of the only posters that focus on the results of the projects executed by the NGO.

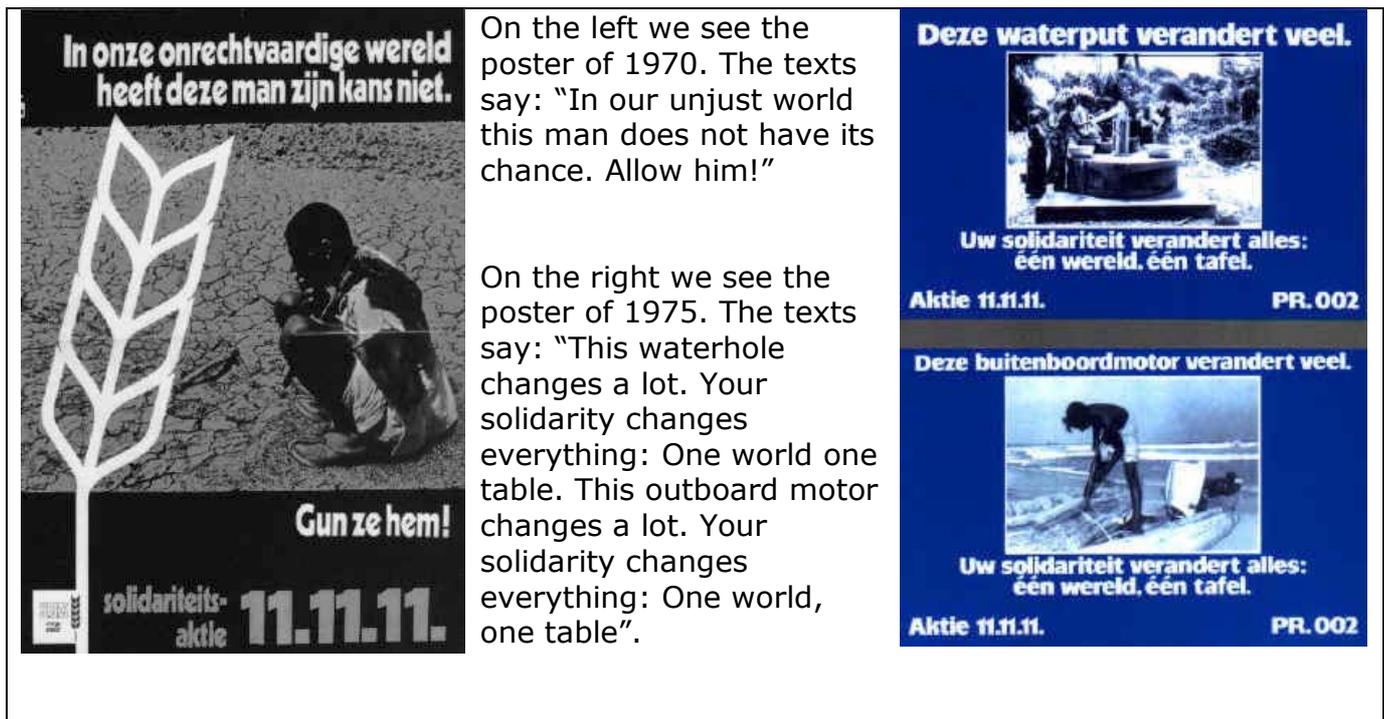


Figure 3: The posters of 1970 and 1975.

Swift (1996) comes up with a similar point of view when analysing, what he calls, the narrative of desertification or rapidly degrading dry lands. According to Swift, the problem of desertification is a western scientific construct that has been linked, to a very large extent to explaining famine and hunger, an explanation that is not as accurate as these scientific studies and reports suggest. He claims that the narrative of desertification provided a convenient point to suit the interests of aid agencies, national governments and scientists.

The famines of the early 1970 's (...) captured enormous attention in the media and in aid agency thinking (...). The trouble was that famine had inconvenient political ramifications, and was regarded as a political minefield by donors. (...) Desertification, on the other hand, was seen as related but politically safe, and a lot of the feelings of guilt, and the energy and resources, of donors, were channelled into desertification as a surrogate for doing something about famine (Swift, 1996, 89).

In the poster material there are several examples of the desertification narrative that Swift points to, particularly in the period till 1980. Afterwards, explanations for poverty and famine are much more sought for in the political field.

Political and corporate power

In 1980 it was decided that more unity and coherence was needed between the theme of the 11.11.11 campaign and the political demand of the NCOS to the Belgian government (Peeters & Cleymans, 2000, 65). As the appendix shows this decision instigated a whole series of politically flavoured posters during the 1980s. The idea of poverty shifted from being without food, knowledge or means, to being without power to gain capital and means. The posters produced in this period often pointed at the political powers that were held responsible for these unequal relations, including the Belgian government. The most important strategy to influence the government was to convince the Belgian voters. This trend is in flat contradiction with earlier analyses of "aid assistance imagination" presented in the introduction.

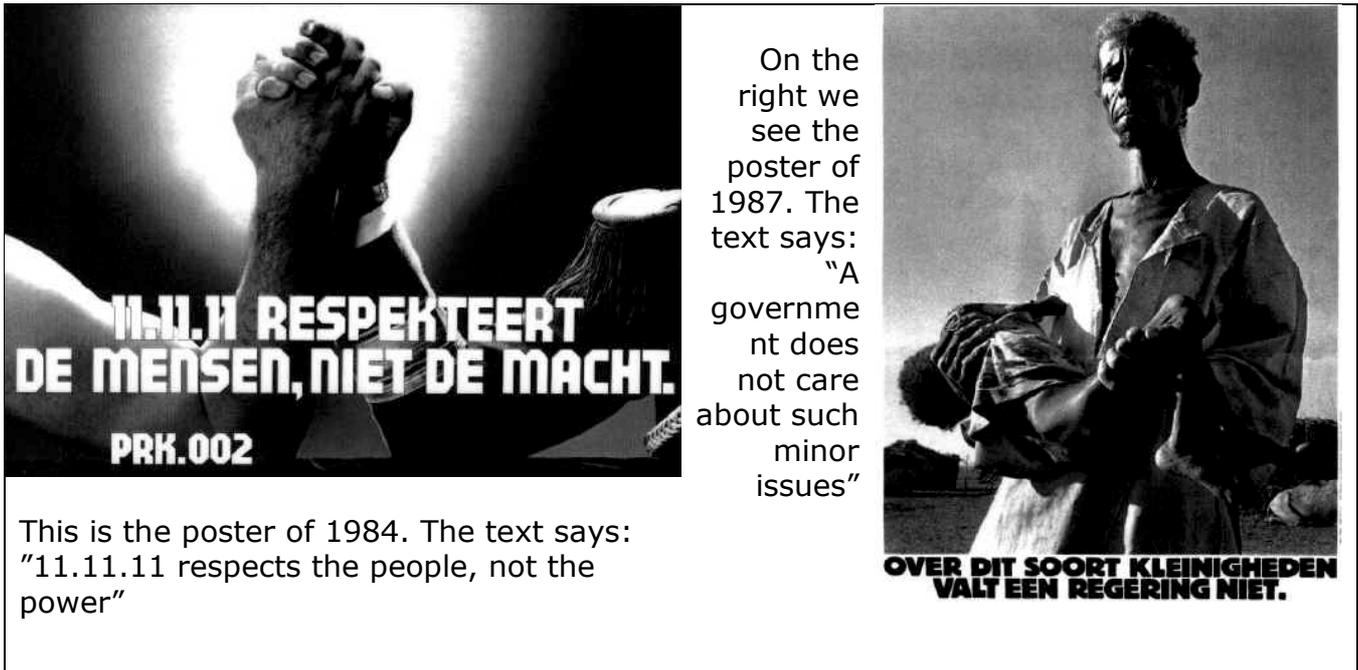


Figure 4: The posters of 1984 and 1987

The poster of 1984 in box 4 is an example of these early political posters. 11.11.11 explicitly claims that it "(...) respects the people and not the power". It is, however, not clear whether 11.11.11 distances itself from these power struggles between north and south (represented by white and black), or that it takes on this arm wrestling bet with the power (represented by some African military leader) on behalf of the poor. In the 1980s the NCOS was very active with regard to the humanitarian situation of the Mobutu regime in Zaire, and the accomplice roles of the United States and former coloniser, Belgium (Peeters & Cleymans 2000, 81). In 1984, the accusations by the NCOS led to threats by the then Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs Leo Tindemans to cut down the subsidies that the NCOS was receiving from the Belgian government (Vervliet 1984). These threats would not stop the NCOS in their political lobby work and its reflection in the media as well as in the 11.11.11 fundraising campaigns.

The poster of 1987 in box 4 is another example of a political flavoured poster in the 1980s. Here, a father is portrayed with a dead child in his arms, for which the NGO holds the Belgian government responsible. This poster was produced in the light of the NCOS lobby for a 0.7% of GDP government spending on development cooperation¹⁰ (Van Bilsen 1989). It refers to the low priority that the Belgian government gives to international development cooperation in contrast to various national "minor issues"¹¹. The focus on the 0.7% of GDP for development cooperation was continued in 1988 and 1989 with striking posters stating: *"Are you almost debating, dear politicians?"* and *"Our government thanks the third world for its generosity"*. These political campaigns were a great financial success and created more awareness in the media and amongst the Belgian public. However, the official Belgian spending on development cooperation remained between 0.4 and 0.5% (Peeters & Cleymans 2000, 88).

¹⁰ International consensus in the 1970s agreed that donor countries should spend 0.7% of their GDP on developments cooperation. In reality only a few countries, including the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands complied to this agreement.

¹¹ Ironically, in 1987 the Belgian cabinet did fall because of problems in the "Voerstreek", a small part of Belgium near the city of Liege, under Flemish government, where the majority of the population is French speaking.



Figure 5: The posters of 1992 and 1994.

In the 1990s the political nature of the posters continued, now only shifting towards issues such as debt crisis and economic globalisation (see the posters of 1992 and 1994 in box 5). The message in these posters were that powerful donor countries (governments) and multilateral donors, such as the World Bank, are making life more difficult for developing countries because of the enormous debt they end up owing to these donors. Several of the posters ask the Belgian government and the multilateral donors to remit the debt of these countries and relieve the suffocating grip in which they are held. The poster of 1994 is another example of how power relations are related to poverty and, in this case, famine. Centres of power, both in the west and the third world, are generally represented in a negative way.

Other examples, in the poster material, in which this shift in political activism is illustrated are representations of labour and private sector bodies. As

I showed in earlier posters, in the 1980's labour consisted mainly of working and farming in rural areas where, due to difficult geographical and climatic circumstances, life is very difficult (see the poster of 1986). In latter years, however, the discourse of labour is represented more and more in an urban and industrial setting. This urbanisation and industrialisation can be explained by the settling of multinational companies in (certain) developing countries in the 1970's and 80's as a result of the oil crisis. Moreover, urbanisation and industrialisation have long been characteristics in the third world - as in the first world. From the middle of the 1990's the issues of power suddenly shifted from governments to multinationals and industries. The problems of third world people began to take place in urban settings, such as slums, rubbish dumps and factories. Issues such as child labour, the exploitation of cheap workers in multinational industries and the low prices on the world market for coffee, tea and cacao are raised in the posters. The problem of survival in agriculture portrayed mainly masculine figures (see the poster of 1970) whereas the issues of cheap labour and urban exploitation are mainly covered with the use of female and child figures (see the posters of 1996 and 1997 in box 6).

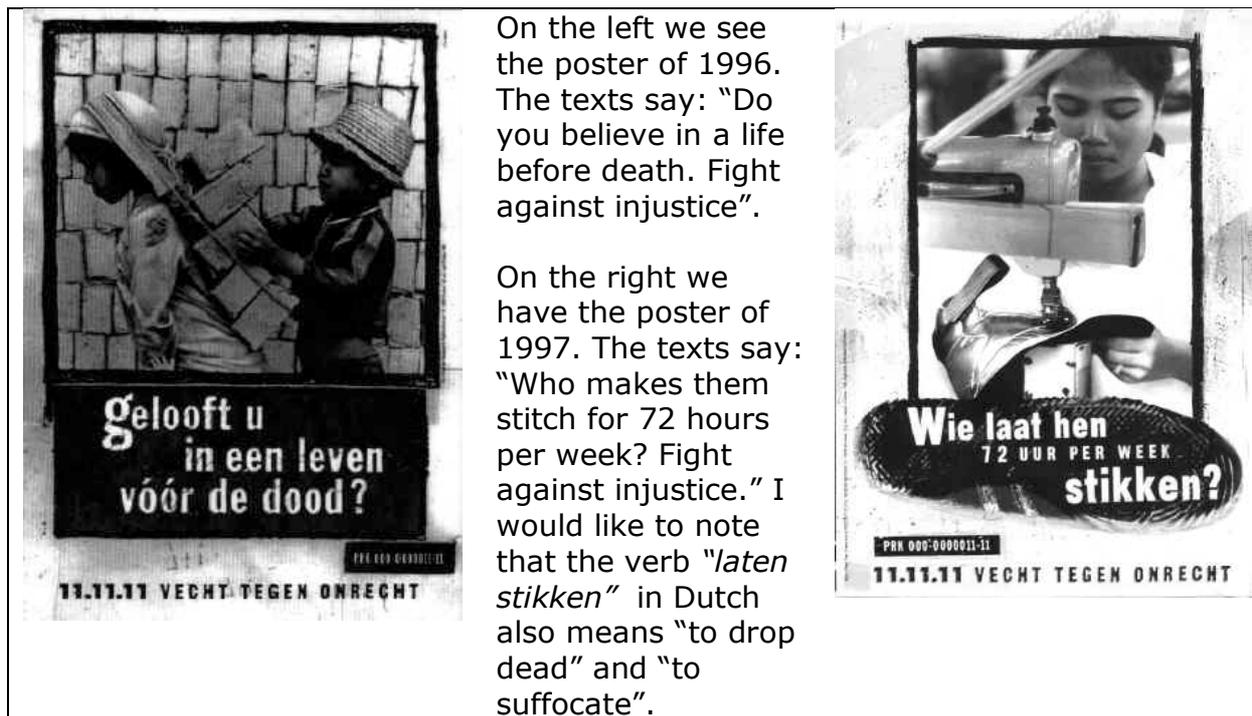


Figure 6: The posters of 1996 and 1997.

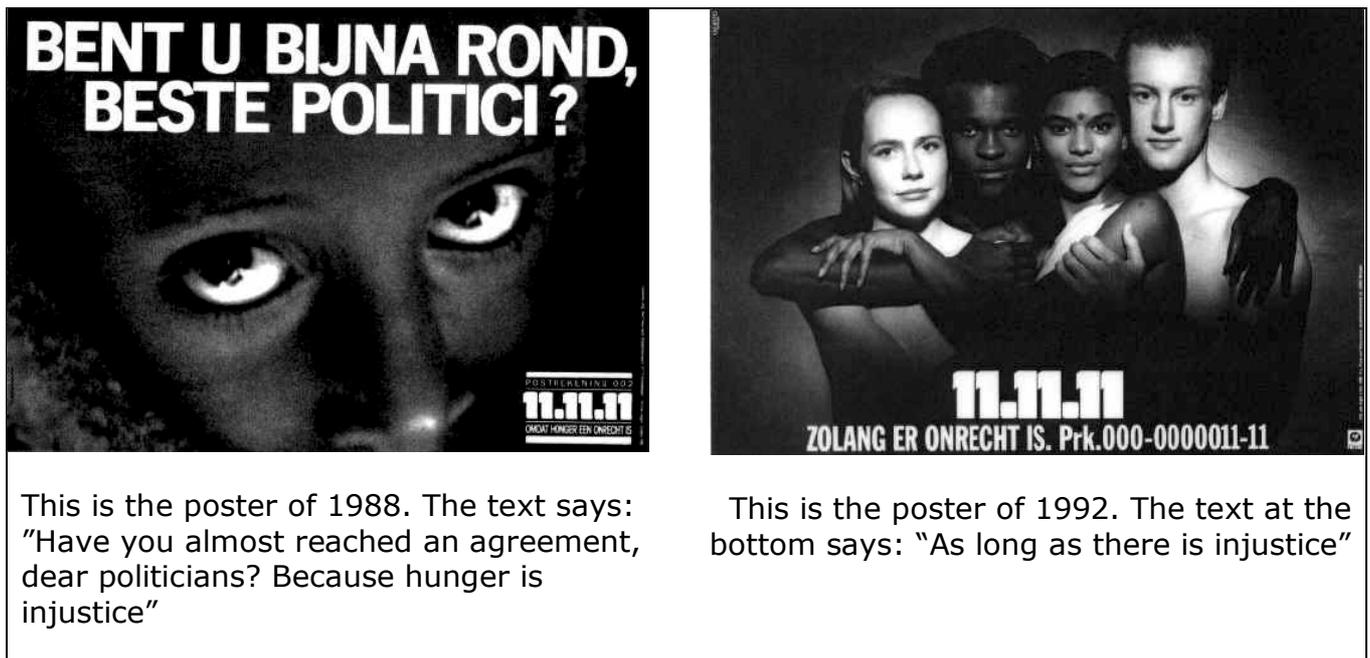
Many of the posters produced in the 1990s can be seen as critical reactions of the NGOs on the neo-liberal structural adjustment discourse of the bilateral and multilateral donors. The compulsory frame of reference of the free market creates a situation in which NGOs have to re-establish their role in the development world (Aertsen et al. 1994, 9). 11.11.11 chooses for a strategy of blaming passive governments and exploiting multinationals to justify their role in the development world as defenders of the poor.

Towards an 'other' notion of 'self'

The focus on the role of powerful institutions on poverty and underdevelopment did not only change the nature of the problems that are presented, but also redefined the boundaries of 'self' and 'other' in the posters. As I said before, since the 1980s governments and multinationals were

introduced as actors in the posters against which 11.11.11 reacted furiously. They clearly distinguished themselves from these bad forms of power and presented themselves as the trade union of the poor and the suppressed. Many authors point at these definitional struggles by discussing the many different acronyms that exist for development organisations (Smillie 1995, Fischer 1997). Examples of these include NGO (non-governmental organisation), NPO (non-profit organisation), CSO (civil society organisation) and CBO (community based organisation). Many of these acronyms refer to the things that these organisations are not, namely 'governments' and 'companies'. Others are based on aspects that are *only* part of the work of these organisations, such as the fact that they are rooted within civil society, or that they work primarily with local communities. The posters make clear that the money that is raised by 11.11.11 is meant for the people that really need it and that do not serve any political or commercial purpose.

One of consequences of these endeavours such as distinguishing themselves from governments and industries is that the continually exposed poor figures in the posters have shifted more and more towards the self-side of the dichotomy. Earlier, posters represented the aid recipients as abnormal 'others' desperately in need of help, whereas in more recent times the focus has been much more on distinguishing humanity in general from the powers that suppress or exploit humanity. The posters in box 7 are two examples of this new definition of 'self' that can be derived from the poster material.



This is the poster of 1988. The text says: "Have you almost reached an agreement, dear politicians? Because hunger is injustice"

This is the poster of 1992. The text at the bottom says: "As long as there is injustice"

Figure 7: The posters of 1988 and 1992

The poster of 1988 distinguishes between 11.11.11 and the politicians. The politicians are depicted as representatives of the 'other' institution in the field of development, who are talking too much and not dealing with the problem of the child portrayed in between. The poor child is obviously looking despairingly up at the Belgian politicians and questioning their (lack of) action. In contrast to the posters that I presented in earlier paragraphs here the government is portrayed as passive and a slow moving agency. The poster of 1992 clearly points at the idea of a common humanity. The message that is presented can be formulated as '*different colours, one people*'. From 1992 onwards several posters appeared with images of a group of people, closely together, coming from different corners of the world. The poster seems to communicate the message that despite the differences between people in the world humans still stand as one and that one needs to take care of each other. In the 1992 poster the people are even naked, symbolising the 'naked truth' of both otherness and similarity. Their message

seems to say that despite our differences humanity forms one unity and should therefore care about the fate of our fellow men and women and fight against the powers that are inflicting injustice.

The poster is cleverly making a political statement and is forcing the reader to choose a political stance or form an opinion on the role of the politicians in this. In contrast to earlier posters these more recent posters appear to be making a much clearer statement as to who is responsible for the images that they are depicting. From the second half of 1990s 11.11.11 did not focus their posters specifically on 'other' powerful institutions, such as governments and multinationals. It seems as if they realise that their most powerful tool should be utilised to its fullest potential, namely the confronting images of poverty. The posters of 2000 and 2001 demonstrate that the images of crisis situations, refugee camps and helpless children return as well as the calls to the public to fight against injustice. At the same time however, they also keep presenting "united humanity" images, like the poster of 1992. Both identity formations, representing people in third world countries as 'other' and 'self', are present in the posters.

Discussion: NGO's discursive power

In the last 35 years the NCOS and 11.11.11 has established itself as a well-known institution within the Belgian society. In fact, the revenues from their fundraising campaigns have risen from about €121,000 to more than €5 million. Various strategies are used in the poster material to get the right message across. But the most important factor is to set the stage very clearly for the

observer. Limiting the use of too many different human figures and raising too many themes and problems can do this. As a result, fundraising posters usually present simplified explanation or poor representations of poverty.

The first section of the analysis has proven that there are certain dominant icons and stories that are continually being told by the 11.11.11 posters. In all the posters a clear difference can be made between notions of the 'other', or client categories as Escobar terms it and notions of 'self'. In many cases there is a picture of a figure representing the 'other', mostly children, combined with a line of text referring to one of the problems that third world people are facing, for example hunger, child mortality, or war. We have seen that the 'other' is defined as innocent, vulnerable, ignorant, passive and helpless. The 'other' cannot be represented without simultaneously defining and positioning the self-side of the story. 11.11.11 unifies itself with the public to take action against the fate of the poor. The rather active definition of the 'self' only amplifies the boundaries between 'other' and 'self'. The creations of these abnormalities are necessary to justify the interventions by NGOs into third world communities to solve their problems (Escobar 1995, Swift 1997, Broch-Due 2000). In this way, they assert that there will at any time be a legitimate reason for this NGO to exist and to keep on working.

The representation of poverty is not as blunt and one-sided as many authors claim. When looking at the complete production of posters of 11.11.11 one has to acknowledge that a diversity of problems and themes have been communicated to the public over the past 35 years. Moreover, the notion of

'other' is not only defined in terms of the ones that need to be helped, but also in terms of the ones that are causing the problems of injustice and inequality in the third world. Politically sensitive topics have not been avoided. Three main culprits for the misery of third world citizens are illustrated in the posters, i.e. power structures in developing countries, multinational corporations, and (most frequent) the Belgian government.

Despite their public rejection and accusation of power structures, non-governmental organisations are themselves powerful institutions in both the first and the third world. One has to understand that NGOs like 11.11.11 have the power to make discursive knowledge claims about themselves, the people they want to reach in the third world, and of other powerful institutions. In other words, NGOs are institutions with considerable powers. We have seen that 11.11.11 deliberately portrays governments and multinationals as bad forms of power in order to represent themselves as the 'good guys' and the more humane player in the field. However, I have to note that because of their ambiguous position in the field of development cooperation NGOs have been subject to similar critiques during the 1990s (Aertsen et al.1994, Smillie 1995, Fischer 1997). According to Nederveen Pieterse (2001) NGOs suffer the same problems as any other organisation, such as bureaucratisation, dependency, corruption, and amateurism. Moreover, they may claim to be independent providers of "goods" but still "move within the orbit of their funders, state or private, and their cultural and discursive agendas" (Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 84). The NGO presents itself as the institution that brings equality and equivalence in the world by helping the helpless and empowering the powerless. But in this way NGOs

like 11.11.11, can be criticised for the creation of a 'development discourse' that is biased towards presenting their own needs.

One should not fall into the same trap, and leave the reader with the idea that developmental NGOs and 11.11.11 in particular are deliberately maintaining and even reinforcing stereotypes on the 'other' in developing countries. We are dealing with a particular kind of material that was designed for a particular purpose. These posters are designed to raise funds not to tell the truth about the projects that are being done or the living conditions that people are coping with. This paper has proven that NGOs find themselves in a difficult split between sensitising public opinion and simply raising money. If one looks at it from this perspective, it has to be admitted that striking images of poverty are probably the best means for achieving this end. It has to be acknowledged that these discursive practices are inevitably part of the work of NGOs. As we have seen, raising funds is a delicate exercise in which different stakes are carefully balanced out. It becomes clear that the successes and failures of the NGO work should not be emphasised too much¹². Focusing on either the misfortunes of the poor and the failures of other actors in the field appears to be most effective. These means can be justified through education as well as through other efforts that are being done to sensitise public opinion.

In their efforts to raise vital funds development organisations may become blind to the indirect, and often unintended consequences of fundraising. The images and slogans we may see in the streets or in the popular media contribute

to a pre-existing dominant discourse of poverty that feeds 'structuring dichotomies' and maintain boundaries between the West and the Rest. Organisations like 11.11.11 have to be aware of these kinds of unintentional but negative spin-offs that are consequential to their campaigns. Ironically, most of the 11.11.11 posters are in black and white. In a global media society the representation of poverty and under-development may not necessarily lead to progress and improvement, but it does unavoidably seem to provide us with "black and white" representations.

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¹² In 35 years of poster production only one poster appeared that showed the successes of NGO work, no posters appeared on its failures.

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Appendix: Overview of the poster material.

| Year | Result (In Euros) | Main figures | Text and description | Main themes | Self/us | Other/them |
|------|----------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1966 | 123.947 | No figures | "Every year famine kills 35 million people. Famine must be killed" | Famine/death | The famine killer | The hungry/dead |
| 1967 | 793.259 | Bread | "3 of every 5 people suffer from famine, 1 of every 3 die of famine. Do you approve with that?" | Famine/death | The approver | The hungry/dead |
| 1968 | 1.289.046 | Child | "She eats regularly... once every three days. Help the hungry learn to take care of themselves" | Famine/hunger | The helper | The hungry/ignorant |
| 1969 | 1.189.889 | Child | "November 11: a human life depends on you. The world hungers for bread and knowledge" | Famine/hunger | The helper | The hungry/ignorant |
| 1970 | 1.041.153 | African man | "In our unrighteous world this man has no chance. Give them a chance!" | Famine/drought | The helper | The chanceless |
| 1971 | 1.487.361 | Mother and child | "Their happiness, a question of right. I say yes" | Happiness/rights | The approver | The future generation |
| 1972 | 793.259 | Young men | "Sharing, dare to acknowledge" | Awareness/solidarity | The sharer | The less fortunate |
| 1973 | 1.660.887 | Dead tree | "S.O.S. Sahel" | Famine/drought | The rescuer | The dry Sahel |
| 1974 | 1.834.412 | Child | "Decide for the future. Your vote, your support" | Future | The decider | The future generation |
| 1975 | 1.016.363 | Water well and boat | "This well changes a lot. Your solidarity changes everything: one world, one table. This onboard engine changes a lot. Your solidarity changes everything: one world, one table" | Technology/solidarity | The giver | People that lack sufficient technology |
| 1977 | 1.140.310 | Hands | "These hands also want to work. Give them a hand" | Labour/rural | The helper | The chanceless |
| 1978 | 1.214.678 | Rural women | "Confidence that grows there should | Confidence/rural | The changer | The insecure |

| | | | | | | |
|------|-----------|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1979 | 1.636.097 | Child | also grow elsewhere. Your will for improvement" | Future | The decider | The future generation |
| 1980 | 2.131.884 | African farmer | "Their future depends also on your choice. Your will for improvement" | Future/rural | The supporter | The brave workers |
| 1981 | 2.578.093 | Children | "They prepare themselves for their future. Support them. Your will for improvement" | Econ. crisis/famine | The giver | The survivor/grateful |
| 1982 | 2.627.671 | Mother and child | "Those who are still alive thank you in advance. Because famine is injustice" | War/peace | The actors | The victims/refugees |
| 1983 | 2.850.776 | Boy | "Peace is no matter of words but of actions" | Power/politics | 11.11.11/people | The powerful |
| 1984 | 2.528.514 | Arm wrestling | "11.11.11 respects the people - not the power" | Power/politics | 11.11.11/people | The powerful |
| 1985 | 2.553.303 | Child | "11.11.11 respects the people, not the power" | Famine/labour/rural | The aid givers | The innocent/worker |
| 1986 | 2.751.618 | Farmers | "When I grow up I will become a farmer. Because famine is injustice" | Famine/labour/rural | The judges | The hungry/workers |
| 1987 | 3.197.826 | Father and dead child | "Famine: They should have worked harder? Because famine is injustice" | Politics/poorest countries | The Belgian government (gov.) | The unimportant |
| 1988 | 3.693.614 | Child | "A government does not fall over such minor issues" (the verb to fall refers to: taking care and the falling of a government coalition) | Politics | The debating gov. | The waiting poor |
| 1989 | 3.966.296 | Hands | "Are you almost finished debating, dear politicians?" | Politics/exploitation | The grateful gov. | The giving poor |
| 1990 | 3.991.086 | Mother and child | "Our government thanks the third world for its generosity. Because famine is injustice" | Politics/exploitation | The deciding gov. | The unimportant |
| 1991 | 4.189.401 | Dead man bones | "Weighted by our ministers. But considered too light" | Politics/debt relief | The undertakers | The buried |
| 1992 | 4.486.873 | Hands | "Bury the debts, not the third world" | Politics/debt relief | The receiving | The giving |
| | | | "Dear politicians, turn this poster | | | |

| | | | around. Remit the debts” | | gov | |
|------|----------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| | United young people | | “As long as there is injustice” | Solidarity/humanity | United humanity | Injustice |
| 1993 | 4.362.926 | No figures | “Famine is an attack, not a drawback” | Famine/hunger | The guilty | The attacked |
| | United young people | | “Straightforward against injustice” | Solidarity/humanity | United humanity | Injustice |
| 1994 | 4.486.873 | Skyscrapers | “Many famines start here” | Famine/power | Power centres | The hungry |
| 1995 | 4.288.558 | Chocolate Africa | “Africa tastes so good that it’s almost finished. All for Africa” | Exploitation | The helpers | Exploited resources |
| 1996 | 4.452.168 | Child labour/construction | “Do you believe in a life before death. Fight against injustice” | Child labour/urban | The fighters | Exploited children |
| | Child labour/garbage | | “Do you believe in a life before death. Fight against injustice” | Child labour/urban | The fighters | Exploited children |
| 1997 | 4.486.873 | Woman/sewing machine | “Who makes them stitch/suffocate for 72 hours a week. Fight against injustice” | Labour exploit/urban | The fighters | The exploited workers |
| 1998 | 4.504.225 | Doll | “There is injustice from Asia again. Fight against injustice” | Labour exploitation | The fighters | The exploited workers |
| 1999 | 4.933.081 | Father and dead child | “Died in the gap between rich and poor. Fight against injustice” | Death/wealth | The fighters | The poor/dead |
| 2000 | 5.205.764 | Small boy | “You give more than money. You fight against injustice” | Famine/confidence | The money givers | Helpless children |
| 2001 | Not mentioned | Queue of hungry people | “Belgium European chair. And what’s on the menu for them. You give more than money, you give a signal” | Politics/famine | The money givers/alarmists | Helpless hungry people |
| | United young people | | “You fight against injustice” | Solidarity/humanity | United humanity | Injustice |