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Introduction

Makeover culture is extending the traditional contexts of advertising, reality television, lifestyle programming and magazines, and the focus on remaking the body.[1] Makeover shows and forms are becoming important sites of popular pedagogy, teaching audiences how to adopt "ethical" ways of living in relation to contexts such as environmentalism, religion[2] and, recently we argue, humanitarianism. NGOs' communications are incorporating and exploiting the makeover paradigm[3] in order to raise awareness, generate compassion and mobilize monetary donation for humanitarian causes. For example, Oxfam's 2014 Food Heroes programme involved a national reality-TV style competition to raise awareness - initially in Tanzania - of women food producers.[4] Oxfam UK's 2013 See for Yourself campaign employed the makeover format to showcase the transformation of two UK women from charity-sceptics to Oxfam supporters and "good" citizens, while ActionAid's Bollocks to Poverty programme employs a range of makeover techniques and styles on social media and other platforms.[5]

How is the makeover paradigm mobilized in contemporary humanitarian communications, and what are the implications of the marriage between two seemingly contradictory communicative registers - humanitarian communication and the makeover paradigm? This paper addresses this question by analysing two recent cases of communications produced by the international development NGO, Plan, whose work focuses on the promotion of child rights and assisting children in poverty in Africa, Asia and the Americas.[6] The first is a Plan-sponsored Finnish television programme *Arman and the Children of Cameroon*, and the second Plan UK's 2013 International Day of the Girl event in London.

The paper is structured as follows. First, to situate the study, we discuss the concept of the makeover paradigm and its use in contexts such as religion and environmentalism, which are substantially different and separate (at least historically) from those associated with lifestyle and commercialized genres. Next, we focus on humanitarian communication as a field that increasingly is appropriating the makeover paradigm and

its associated formats and techniques. We briefly review current transformations in humanitarian communication and particularly critiques of its commodification and marketization.[7] Drawing on these two research areas, we exploit our cases to demonstrate mobilization of the makeover paradigm in humanitarian communication in two media: a reality television-style programme and a public event. Taken together, these case studies demonstrate how helping distant others is configured through a narrative of makeover and self-transformation, and how humanitarian communication provides a stage for the performance and exercise of a "new ethical self".[8]

We conclude by discussing the implications of marrying humanitarianism and makeover. We consider how this recent practice, which we term "humanitarian makeover", could be a potentially effective way of stimulating western audiences' awareness, ethical engagement and political action. At the same time, by situating the humanitarian makeover within broader critiques of the neoliberal transformation of media culture, we highlight the fundamental tensions in and challenges of the alliance between humanitarianism and makeover. We argue that while the humanitarian impetus is to disturb and redress global inequality and injustice, which includes exposing and interrupting the failures of neoliberalism, the makeover paradigm is intimately connected to and reinforces individualized "moral citizenship", which conforms to neoliberal values.

The makeover paradigm and the ethical turn

Media representations, discourses, genres and products that employ the makeover paradigm, showcasing and celebrating the transformation of bodies, homes, cars, pets and parents, have flourished in recent years. Gill defines the makeover paradigm as a pervasive narrative, closely tied to neoliberal ideology. It is premised on the notion that one's life is somehow lacking or flawed and, crucially, is amenable to reinvention or transformation through conformance to certain aesthetic, moral or political standards, and the advice of experts and practice of "appropriately modified consumption habits".[9] The core of the makeover paradigm is a project of self-transformation,[10] intimately linked to neoliberalism's stress on individualization and self-responsibility.[11] The process of self-transformation is understood as a necessary step towards the better, improved life that is both within reach and, crucially, is one's own responsibility. The

makeover paradigm proposes the self as the centre and agent of transformation, and the makeover constitutes a form that enables redress of the (constructed) distance between imagined social ideals and lived experience.[12]

Reality television shows are the flagship of the makeover paradigm. In their seminal analysis of this genre, Skeggs and Wood[13] discuss how such programmes produce "new ethical selves", in which particular forms of "upgraded" selfhood are presented as solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary life.[14] The authors suggest that the makeover cultural form plays a key role in the expression and attachment of values to people: coded predominantly as working-class, these shows' participants appear to display and dramatize themselves as inadequate, as needing self-investment. As put by Gill, "participants are then variously advised, cajoled, bullied or 'educated' into changing their ways and becoming more 'successful' versions of themselves".[15] Reality television reveals solutions to their deficit culture and inadequate subjectivities through future person-production; a projected investment in self-transformation that requires the participants to work on themselves and their relationships, to make up for their deficiencies.[16] This transformation is commonly portrayed (e.g. in advertising) in "Before" and "After" images; participants are shown to be released from the emotional and body dysfunctionalities which constituted their "Before" self.[17]

Research concerning the makeover paradigm largely focuses on modes of remaking and transforming self and body, in advertising, reality television, lifestyle programming and magazines.[18] More recently, the makeover paradigm's operation has been examined in other contexts. For example, Deller shows how reality television programmes use religion and spirituality as makeover tools facilitating a journey of self-transformation, while Lewis examines a range of Australian "eco-lifestyle" shows as sites of creative experimentation around green living and citizenship, that teach audiences to adopt ethical ways of living by moving from consumption to self-sufficiency.[19] Similarly, studies of television shows such as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* which focuses on people experiencing hardship caused by natural disasters or illness, and *Go Back to Where You Came From* which tackles the issue of racism and migration, highlight the employment of makeover modalities for "doing good" and promoting ethical causes.[20] It is argued that such shows make caring an explicit responsibility to be performed,[21] and

present care for others and community work as the ultimate tasks in the management and betterment of the self.[22]

The shift towards "ethical entertainment" is underpinned by various processes including larger economic transformations in media industry structures, a growing interest of popular culture in the impacts and risks of capitalist modernity,[23] and increased financial pressure on NGOs promoting ethical societal causes such as environmentalism and humanitarianism. Confronted by increasingly convergent production settings, greater competition and more fragmented audiences,[24] the media industry - particularly television and digital platforms – is recognizing that "ethical entertainment" and "philanthropist" programmes can add value, tap into audiences' growing interest in escaping the pressures of modernity, engage new audiences and be profitable.[25] NGOs, for their part, faced by scarce and limited resources and growing competition and criticism, see the makeover paradigm (and its associated genres and format) as an innovative framework through which to communicate and engage audiences in societal and ethical causes.

The field of humanitarian communication has undergone a series of significant interrelated and well-documented transformations whose discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.[26] They underpin a shift towards what Chouliaraki calls "post-humanitarian" communication:[27] communication which is deeply influenced by corporate logic, and adopts business, celebrity, advertising and branding models. It moves from demand for solidarity with vulnerable far-away others on the basis of pity, to articulation of this demand as irony, based on a focus on "us" in the west, marginalizing questions about justice, global inequality and the root causes of suffering.

We would suggest that it is in the context of the shift towards "post-humanitarianism",[28] that humanitarian NGOs' exploitation of the makeover paradigm should be understood. While the use in humanitarian communication of genres such as celebrity, concerts and films, has received considerable scholarly attention,[29] employment of the makeover paradigm and its communication formats have been underexplored - a lacuna that this paper seeks to fill.

Methodology

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The research employs a qualitative, in depth exploration of two case studies - *Arman and the Children of Cameroon* and the International Day of the Girl (IDG) event. They were selected for their several significant similarities. First, both cases exemplify how NGOs incorporate the logic of the makeover paradigm in their communication addressing western publics. Both examples, albeit different in genre, employ several similar tropes and strategies that are characteristic of makeover formats. They exploit a narrative of transformation of the lives of Global South subjects from "inadequate" to "improved", tied in with transformation of the western Self. Second, the contexts of the two cases are similar: humanitarianism and humanitarian communication have undergone similar structural transformations in Finland and the UK. In Finland, ever scarcer resources and an increasingly competitive market have led aid organizations increasingly to respond to and adopt commercialized forms to address the public while simultaneously reflecting on the ways in which these changes shape and alter the core values of humanitarian work.[30] In the UK, similar issues combined with government pressure for NGOs to demonstrate impact in a work culture driven by data and auditing, public scrutiny, criticism and public distrust of NGOs, have led to greater professionalization and adoption of market logic and corporate techniques in NGOs' communication.

At the same time, the dissimilarity of these cases provides useful variation of both medium and cultural context. Their media are different. Case 1 illustrates how the humanitarian makeover is constructed and operates within a television programme, which closely mirrors the reality television format and conventions. Case 2 demonstrates how the makeover paradigm is employed to communicate a humanitarian message through a public event that was part of the NGOs' broader communication and promotional strategy. There are differences also in the histories of the UK and Finland, and how these histories have shaped their national publics' relation to distant suffering and humanitarian aid. Finland was not involved in the colonial project; rather, it has enjoyed an image of "innocent outsider",[31] free of the burden of colonial and racist mastery of other peoples. In contrast, Britain's colonial past and its aftermath, especially post-colonial critique and colonial guilt, have significantly shaped its governments' consistent commitment to humanitarian aid, and influenced the thinking and practice of

UK-based humanitarian NGOs in relation to their representation of the developing world.[32] Nevertheless, Finland shares the values of western colonial thought and the sense of western superiority, and has been complicit in supporting imperial projects, specifically through international development cooperation.[33]

Thus, these case studies offer suitable and compelling contexts for comparison. They focus on the communication strategies of the NGO Plan, but illustrate practices that extend beyond that NGO, demonstrated by the links offered in the analysis to other studies of contemporary humanitarian communications.

We treat these case studies as cultural texts - sites of symbolic power that shape moralities by offering specific ways of perceiving humanitarian situations and relations to distant suffering.[34] **Case study 1**: the 50-minute long programme *Arman and the Children of Cameroon,* broadcast in April 2014, was digitally stored and analysed by Author 2, with detailed notes on scenes with time-coding. The related online material on the websites of Channel Jim and Plan Finland were also digitally stored and analysed by Author 2. **Case study 2**: Author 1 observed the public IDG event, taking detailed notes, photos and videos during and after the event, conducting informal interviews with the event's organizers and participants, and collecting online and printed materials publicizing and reporting the event (e.g. Plan UK's website, blogs, Twitter).

We used qualitative analysis to examine the textual, visual and audio-visual material collected within each case study separately. The analysis was informed by an interest in the construction and operation of the makeover paradigm and its focus on a narrative of self-transformation. We then juxtaposed our analyses, looking for connections showing how, across the two cases, the makeover paradigm was used to construct the humanitarian message. Note that some differences between the two cases are made apparent through the description of the analysis. However, their juxtaposition highlights aspects that resonated *across* the two cases, in relation to the central characteristics of the makeover paradigm and in order to address the key research question of how the makeover paradigm is mobilized in the humanitarian message*.*

Analysis: Humanitarian makeover in action

Case study 1: Arman and the Children of Cameroon

The 2014 Finnish television programme, *Arman and the children of Cameroon* (hereafter *Arman*), sponsored by the Finnish branch of the charity Plan and produced by Armanin maailma (Arman's World), is a vivid example of the ethical turn in reality television production, combining makeover with a humanitarian message. The programme's host, Iranian-born Arman Alizad, is famous in Finland for his streetwise, outspoken and extreme reality television series on the Finnish commercial channel, Jim, and an acclaimed adventure reality series *Arman and the Last Crusade*, aired in 2013. The latter followed Arman's experience of extreme and dangerous situations in different parts of the globe, e.g., hanging out with Brazilian crime gangs, living in a slum in Manila, Philippines, and begging for money with street children in Cambodia. Using reality television-style footage and emotional on-camera address, Arman exposed the dire conditions of global inequality to Finnish viewers. Capitalizing on the host's previous television successes, recognizable persona and unpretentious streetwise reporting style, *Arman* seeks to increase awareness of the plight of children living in poverty in the developing world, and to promote the child sponsorship programme of the children's development charity, Plan. As the following analysis demonstrates, Arman acts as a typical makeover expert who simultaneously exposes and accentuates subjects' misery and flawed lives while voicing concern about and care for them, and offering ways to "fix" them.

From the outset, the programme's narrative is framed as makeover: a personal and ethical quest for transformation of the Baka people, from suffering subjects, whose misery is caused by a multinational, logging industry-driven environmental catastrophe, into improved, salvaged selves. "I am here to find out how to improve children's lives on grassroots level and most of all, I am here to find my god-child Assanga", Arman states in the opening, slow-motion, dramatic music-backed scene, showing him dressed in casual black shirt, scarf and khaki cargo trousers, walking along a street in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon.

The programme presents a ritualized journey from Before to After, structured around the key phases of the formulaic regularity of the makeover show.[35] The first part of the

programme constitutes the *initial shaming of the pre-made "inappropriate" subjects*. Arman is seen visiting the slums of Yaoundé, accompanied by Jazz, a local NGO worker collaborating with Plan International. The visual composition of this visit vividly constructs the lives of the slum dwellers as lacking and inadequate, characterized by extreme poverty, misery and danger. Arman's voiceover anchors this construction by relating how the Cameroonians, lacking skills and education, were uprooted and forced to move to the city, and now live in slums. Jazz and Arman walk through narrow slum streets as the camera pans out to include children and occasional residents gazing at them. Slow motion images of young men sitting on the margins of rundown streets and children passively staring at the camera are accompanied by dramatic music, constructing a sense of misery and despair. In close-up, Jazz explains to Arman the risks of life in the slums, disease and forced marriage and prostitution especially affecting girls.

The camera then cuts to a very different image and we glimpse the results of a successful Plan-sponsored project involving microloans for female entrepreneurs. Arman is seen sitting next to a silent, middle-aged woman dressed in a colourful skirt and a pink T-shirt who is making pastry. "The baking business is making profit and now she even has some savings […] Only 60 Euros changed her life" Arman explains, addressing the camera. Thus, microloans are presented by the expert as the path to successful self-transformation, to transporting lives from misery to salvation – the crux of the makeover journey. The inclusion in the early part of the programme of these glimpses of alternative, improved lives, symbolically sows the seeds for the tenet of the makeover paradigm: a narrative of transformation. The images suggest that the Baka people can (and should) be "re-invented" from helpless victims to empowered, resilient agents – a familiar (and much criticized) trope of humanitarian discourse,[36] which capitalizes on the makeover construction of misery transformed by self-investment.

Following the symbolic establishment of the Cameroonians as subjects of misery whose lives are in need of and amenable to transformation, the programme then moves to what Weber describes as typically the second phase of makeover shows: *moments for surveillance by audience and experts*. Through the combination of voiceover and Arman's on-camera address, viewers are invited to scrutinize the plight of the Baka people. For example, one scene shows a class of school children playing on their own, with Arman's

voiceover highlighting the desperate need for teachers. Their plight is further authenticated by showing Arman, breathless, accompanying the Baka children on their daily, rough and very long journey to school. Together with a Plan expert, Arman relates a list of facts about lack of school equipment, loss of land and livelihood, and increase in teenage pregnancies. Other scenes similarly spotlight the local people's everyday lives as extremely difficult, impoverished and inadequate. As in makeover programmes, the focus is on individuals whose 'Before' selves are constructed as flawed, providing the basis for their transformation later in the programme into improved After selves. In one of several on-camera addresses, Arman voices his concern for the Baka people, and solidifies the need for change with the help of Plan: "If they decide to move to the city and they have no education, no job, nothing. The only place where their children will end up is the slums" (see Image 1).Thus, capitalizing on the premise of the makeover narrative, these images of hope tell viewers that transformation is not just required, it is easily achievable by following the advice of experts - humanitarian aid organizations such as Plan - and practising appropriately modified behaviour – becoming entrepreneurs and gaining education.

Arman performs what Weber describes as unique to the makeover narrative, namely the "combined gesture of care and humiliation"[37] from the makeover expert who exposes the misery of the subjects in order to facilitate their transformation. Arman plays the role of humanitarian "mediator" who "authenticates" the victim and offers viewers a lens to observe closely the misery of the Baka people. On the one hand, this symbolic surveillance is predicated on and reinforces clear power relations; the western "saviour" gazing at and coming to the rescue of the needy Other. At the same time, the programme seeks to diffuse this unequal hierarchy. Arman is constructed as low-key, casual and down-to-earth, a construction reinforced by his continuous on-camera explanation of what is happening and what will happen next. Unlike many celebrities who have assumed central roles as mediators in humanitarian communications,[38] Arman is himself an "other" - an Iranian immigrant, who through his fame as a television persona has come to represent "us" – the Finnish people, and bridge between Finnish audiences and far-away others in developing countries.

[Insert Image 1 here]

The bridging of distance is enacted in several scenes where Arman is seen playing with the children, joining a festive dance, and fishing with the villagers. In "post-humanitarian" vein, these scenes blur self and other, stressing similarity and common faith rather than difference and distinction between "us" and "them". In this way the programme exploits Arman's outspoken and streetwise style to diffuse the unequal power relations between Western humanitarian organizations and the Global South. Through jokes and sometimes foul language, Arman injects the hierarchical humanitarian address with informality and ordinariness, thus turning it from a top-down, explicitly normative demand for ethical action, to a causal, unpretentious approach, spiced with some humour and excitement. This distinctive mode of address, reinforced by the show's makeover narrative and Arman's straightforward style, infer that not only is transformation required, easy and achievable, it is also fun.

Thus, rather than patronizing western "heroes" who "save" the victims - a construction that has attracted harsh criticism, Plan and Arman are constructed as humble, unassuming and trustworthy partners – implicitly capitalizing on the image of Finland and its people as the "innocent outsider". This construction, coupled with an informative documentary style and forms of product placement (frequent images of Plan logos on vehicles and clothing), function to authenticate and validate Plan's work.

As Arman arrives at the village, he finally meets his sponsored "god-child", Assanga, who initially is reserved and distant towards her western sponsor. Dressed in a brown checked dress she stands submissively next to Arman who interprets her emotions to the audience: "She is tense and distant towards me", he explains. Rather than the emotional high-point towards which the narrative has built, the encounter between "benefactor" and "beneficiary" is devoid of feeling. This reserved, unsentimental scene departs from the narrative of grand emotion, which, historically, characterized the humanitarian pledge,[39] proposing instead an unpretentious, "authentic" and low-key narrative. The scene also diverts from the dominant humanitarian communication paradigm (encapsulated by the considerably critiqued Live Aid Legacy), which casts the western public (benefactor) in the role of "powerful giver", and the African public (beneficiary) as "grateful receiver".[40] Assanga is neither grateful nor ungrateful, but rather, like her family members, is suspicious and guarded, avoiding eye-contact with Arman and the camera.

By showing the tension and distance between Arman and Assanga, the programme seeks to underline both the sincerity of its message and the challenge that the process of transformation entails. From this point onwards, Arman's efforts to reduce the distance between Assanga and himself, her sponsor, propel the narrative, and facilitate the move into the following phase of the makeover: *subjects' surrender to the makeover*. From images of deserted streets, and lack of school equipment and educational tools, the camera begins to document the transformation provided by Plan's work to the lives of the Baka people as they surrender to the change: modern school buildings, a new well in operation, children being taught how to farm corn and cassava to provide their daily meals, and children carrying new school books - the humanitarian commodity which symbolically encapsulates the promise of a better life.

Significantly, the Baka people are shown as willingly and happily submitting to the humanitarian authorities – Plan and Arman. The camera shows cheerful pupils queuing for their class, studying their new books and clapping and singing with Arman in the classroom. Accompanied by dramatic music in a close-up scene, Arman and Assanga write their names on the blackboard, a scene that dramatizes the transformative power of education provided by the benefactor, Arman, who is embraced by the beneficiary Assanga. It is on the basis of the programme's construction of Plan and Arman as down-to-earth, trustworthy and, thus, validated and legitimized, that the Baka people are seen to "surrender" willingly, to be "made-over" from illiterate and inadequate into educated, improved selves.

However, the emotional tension and distance between Arman and Assanga lingers, disturbing realization of a full surrender. Resolving the relationship becomes a necessary step to complete the surrender and lead towards transformation. One of the final scenes depicts a fishing trip when Assanga finally connects with Arman. As Arman and Assanga walk from the river towards the village Arman offers his hand to Assanga who eventually surrenders and grabs it. The significance of the moment is underlined by slow motion images and dramatic music. It is followed by a close-up of a smiling Arman saying to camera it "feels amazing". This is, the "moment of truth",[41] of surrender and connection, which resolves the makeover narrative and confirms the recipient's acknowledgement of the value of her makeover, which is linked intimately to humanitarian aid and her benefactor's good intentions and actions. The makeover

narrative and completion of the surrender serve to legitimize, authenticate and approve the "good-doing" of western benefactors and international aid organizations such as Plan. As a rebuttal to the growing criticism of international aid NGOs' misuse of funds, and questioning of the viability and legitimacy of international aid more broadly, we see Assanga's personal transformation – from reserved and suspicious to trusting, reinforced by Arman's constructed authenticity and sincerity. In a voiceover, Arman states that they found a mutual language through doing, rather than talking, echoing the leitmotif of humanitarianism as that of being on the ground and engaging in physical action.[42]

The transformation achieves full closure in one of the final scenes showing Arman buying rice, soap and salt in a local store, and carrying these heavy sacks to Assanga's family and the villagers. This scene exemplifies for viewers "ethical citizenship" and caring for those in need through donation and the physical effort of doing good. Arman's donation is met with celebration as grateful villagers gather to thank him. The former silent, passive and reserved villagers are transformed into a joyful community that embraces its Western benefactors. In her After-body/self, Assanga, dressed all in white, presents a bunch of flowers to her benefactor, to show her gratitude. The villagers rejoice with Arman in a collective ritual dance, which operates as the makeover's "reveal ceremony",[43] suggesting that the new subjects have gained access to a better self and an improved life (see Image 2). The makeover message is confirmed: "subjects need the transformation made possible by the program since without the aid the makeover provides, subjects would be compelled to live abjectly in their Before-bodies [and selves] forever."[44] This final moment of the programme when benefactor and beneficiary dance together signifies what Weber describes as the culmination of the makeover: the "euphoria of the new improved subjects and satisfied experts".[45]

[Insert Image 2 here]

Thus, the programme's makeover narrative operates at two levels. The lacking lives of the Baka people are transformed into purposeful, cheerful and "empowered" lives. Simultaneously, this transformation is enabled by and, in turn, facilitates the self-transformation of Arman and the viewers, who, by donating time and money to help far-away others, transform their selves and become improved "ethical" citizens. Like other

"doing good" reality makeover programmes, *Arman* draws on a promise of empowerment that is realized through individualized practices of volunteerism and philanthropy.[46]

Case study 2: Plan UK's International Day of the Girl event

On 11th October 2013, to mark the International Day of the Girl (hereafter IDG) and to promote awareness of the plight of the 65 million girls around the world who are denied access to the basic right of education, the children's charity Plan UK held a "spectacle" in London's Trafalgar Square. The event centred on the unveiling of a massive billboard erected in front of the National Gallery, displaying an image of girls working at sewing machines, signifying a sweatshop (Image 3).

[Insert Image 3 here]

The magnified image of the girls acted as an opening "judgement shot".[47] Similar to a reality television shot presenting the "failing", insecure and vulnerable participants, the girls in the image are visually signified as victims of oppressive patriarchal rule, somewhere in Asia. Their shoulders are bowed, their bodies are slumped and subdued, and they gaze intently downwards. They are fairly uniformly dressed and wear some sort of luminescent label on their blouses, reminiscent of an identity tag. A threatening man, dressed in what appears to be a black jacket or Macintosh, hovers over them. But it is the figure of the girl positioned at top right that captures the audience's attention. She focuses meekly on her work, her face suffused with an expression of submissive dreaminess. The black and white image adds to the sombre atmosphere of the room and renders it devoid of liveliness or hope.

The depiction is typical of contemporary NGO imagery, which has moved away from the realism of photojournalism that characterized earlier communications,[48] and offers an illustration that deliberately does not identify the girls' exact location. They are, in Boltanski's terms,[49] "exemplary", "standing for" all the girls denied access to education. The girls in this magnified image are detached from the particular contexts and sets of relations that make up their experience of the world.

These "representative" girls now are placed within another set of relations; "replanted" in the heart of a western global metropolis, displayed as objects for the gaze of

spectators, of Plan staff and supporters, of UK schoolgirls who congregated in Trafalgar Square after a march to celebrate the IDG, and of TV presenters, tourists and passers-by. The poor, oppressed, docile girls pictured on the magnified one-dimensional board are set against the impressively large, multi-dimensional National Gallery building, immediately below its iconic columns. Against this background, which epitomizes learnedness and European culture, this opening "judgement shot" of the girls transports them from their existing social position to radically different conditions, and offers the promise of transformation. The speeches delivered (discussed below) explicitly articulate the contrasting environments – "here", the UK, and "there" the developing world – a contrast which is a common feature of makeover forms[50] and provides a symbolic foundation to the promise of transformation. The caption accompanying the magnified image anchors this message of transformation as not only possible and desirable but crucially *easily* achieved: "Erase the barriers to girls' education. Take action with Plan UK to help 4 million girls transform their futures". It tells western spectators that it is both within their reach and is their responsibility to translate the current "Before" version of the picture to an imagined, but possible "After" version. These notions of the *need* and *ease* of transformation, which are at the heart of the makeover paradigm and, as we saw before, constitute the *Arman* narrative, run through the entire IDG event.

Once a substantial crowd had gathered in front of the image of the girls, it was responded to by "experts", who, displaying a sense of shock and urgency (similar to makeover shows, see Skeggs),[51] called for transformation and security. The event started formally with addresses from a series of "experts", including the UK International Development Minister, television presenters, Plan UK's Chair and two members of Plan's Youth Advisory Panel. The speakers delivered their speeches standing alongside the billboard, leaving the magnified seamstresses in clear view. The speakers made repeated references to Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who has become a symbol of self-transformation: the "southern" girl/heroine who courageously spoke out and stood up for her right to education in the face of the violent and oppressive Taliban regime. The speeches included familiar tropes of the "girl-powering" of development and humanitarianism, reiterating the notion of girls' "empowerment", "sisterhood", and the economic rhetoric of investment in girls,[52] and

depicting the "problem" of girls' exclusion from education, in highly individualized and personalized terms. For example, TV presenter Gillian Joseph invited the audience in Trafalgar Square to repeat after her (echoing a therapeutic self-help meeting) the statement "I am a girl and I matter". Aimed at emphasizing the humanitarian ethos of "common humanity" (similar to *Arman*), and invoking the imaginary of the global working girl,[53] this individualized rhetoric simultaneously promotes a blurring of the difference between western and southern girls and obfuscates the radical differences in their life experiences, conditions and structures, rather than allowing recognition of the differences among them. The "girl power" rhetoric was reinforced by the various speakers' frequent self-congratulatory style of address to the audience. For example, the CEO of Plan began by encouraging "all of you, girls and young women who walked this morning to celebrate the second International Day of the Girl, give yourself a great cheer!",[54] a call that drew cheers, applause and exclamations from the audience gathered around the billboard.

Thus, the opening of the IDG event was based on a series of techniques employed in both makeover shows (based on Skeggs)[55] *and* humanitarian communications: *evaluation* of the other (the "judgement shot"), *dislocation* (symbolic "transporting" of the girls from the developing world to London's Trafalgar Square), *reification* (stripping out of identifying particularities to render the girls "under-qualified"[56] and standing for a million others, and *objectification* (objects of spectators' gaze). The convergence of these techniques, supported by discourses of "girl power" and tropes of humanitarian communication, evoked a sharp distinction between the flesh and blood UK audience in Trafalgar Square and the "performers" - the *paper* girls in the sweatshop. At the same time, the opening "judgement shot" of the girls on the board and the ensuing speeches, which position the (predominantly female) audience as "sisters" of the southern girls, were geared towards eroding this distinction. One of the key techniques employed to blur the distinction between spectators and performers/others was *identification*. A 13-year old girl member of Plan's Youth Advisory Board said in her speech that "If I were born in Bangladesh, I could have been forced to marry or wouldn't have been able to go to school". Another young member of Plan spoke of her happiness, and her desire to share it with her far-away sisters in the developing world. This exposition facilitated the

transition to the central makeover activity on which the event hinged: erasing the board/erasing barriers - from sweatshop to school.

The Trafalgar Square audience was invited to approach the billboard and to rub out (Image 4) the image which then revealed a full-colour image of the same girls, sitting in a classroom. Scratch-off cards with similar "before" and "after" images were distributed to the crowd.

[Insert Image 4 here]

The activity of "rubbing out" the billboard picture resembles the makeover montage sequence of girls in the 1980s' teen films analysed by Wilkinson.[57] In those filmic scenes, the girl's body is surrendered to the hands of external experts; experts treat her with specific products that help transform her body. At the IDG event, the girls displayed in the magnified image, are *literally* in the hands of western girls and experts, whose physical act of erasure "transforms" their docile black and white sweatshop worker bodies into colourful, happy proud learners in a classroom.

[Insert Image 5 here]

The transformation scenario is profoundly structured by class relations. In television makeover shows, "often upper middle-class women are brought in to provide 'expert advice' […] repeating a long legacy of using 'advice' to civilise".[58] Similarly, the sweatshop workers, coded as lacking and in need of improvement, are set against respectable and aspirational female experts, such as ITV presenter Becky Mantin (Image 5) whose vitality, clinging red dress and blonde hair contrast starkly with the colourless depiction of the girls. The transformation of the pictured girls from passive, sad sweatshop workers ("before") to active, happy school students ("after")- depends on the experts' erasing their former "selves".

However, unlike the makeover programmes analysed by Wood and Skeggs,[59] in which rules and advice are offered (often by experts) as holding the key to the transformation of the failing (working-class) participants, in the IDG event, the labour investment needed to transform the lives of the southern girls is completely masked. The rubbing out of the picture on the board to reveal the new image is more akin to the makeover home and gardening DIY programmes analysed by Philips:[60]

> [T]he emptying of the room and the removal of traces of the subject's own possessions and tastes are speeded up as though this were a trivial part of the procedure. The majority of the programme is devoted to the teams carrying out the designer's instructions towards the final goal of a transformed space, with the work of transformation achieved in speeded up, fast edited sequences. The final unveiling is structured as an all round confirmation of the success of the enterprise and the wisdom of the expert.

The IDG event aspired to a smooth transition to the final moment of the transformed image, confirming, in a self-congratulatory manner, the "success" achieved by the audience and the experts, including Plan, the event's organizer. The event's participants adhered to this unwritten behavioural script, applauding one another's successful scratching out of the first image, taking photos of each other, and selfies of themselves contributing to the rubbing out. These acts constitute a public display of emotion, which, as Skeggs[61] (drawing on Foucault) observes, is key to expression of the moral project of the self: taking photos constitutes an explicit act of demonstrating one's "proper" "ethical", "good" citizenship in a public space, performing an ethical self for the camera, and for the audience of these photos on social media, and the crowd in Trafalgar Square.

Thus, the grand humanitarian project of erasing the global barriers to girls' education is converted into and articulated through a "cool", fun and self-centred activity that demonstrates what Chouliaraki[62] calls "post-humanitarian" sensibility. It privileges a self-oriented form of solidarity, of short-term and low-intensity, fleeting engagement with distant others, whose particular life contexts are marginalized, foregrounding the pleasure of the (western) spectators as effective in making a difference to distant others' lives.

This "post-humanitarian" event moves away from earlier forms and modalities of humanitarian communication, e.g., by consciously avoiding the much-criticized photojournalistic realism of images of "distant others" and using, instead, an illustration. However, the IDG event similarly capitalizes on the established "western saviour" trope in humanitarian narratives, re-establishing the western spectator as the powerful agent whose magic (eraser) wand, seemingly is able to transform the lives of those far-away

others in need. Incidentally, Admiral Lord Nelson, a great British saviour, looks down on the scene from his column in Trafalgar Square!

Drawing on the makeover paradigm, the IDG event, like *Arman*, makes change appear easy were the subjects given a chance and be willing to try. The "performers" (the sweatshop girls) are presented as lacking or flawed in some way, and as requiring reinvention and transformation. However, unlike the process of transformation in makeover programmes, which occurs through conformance to discipline and rules of behaviour, the IDG "post-humanitarian" event hides the laboriousness of the process and its implications for those "in need" of improvement. Rather, it presents the solution as easily achieved through the audience's fleeting, amusing and labour-free performance of the self.

As in makeover narratives, the IDG event dramatically visualizes a problem: girls around the world being denied access to education. The event was a loaded and coded situation in which the Asian girls ("beneficiaries") were dislocated from their cultural resources and objectified and reified - strategies that highlighted their radical difference from their western "sisters" and established their indigence and need for transformation. However, the IDG event constructed the transformation of developing world girls' lives as exclusively reliant on western girls' and experts' exercise of makeover techniques. Unlike the (working-class) participants in makeover shows, who are exhorted to salvage their failed selves by investing in the necessary skills and psychological techniques, in the IDG event it was the western spectators – many of them London schoolgirls, who were required to perform the act of transformation. This transformation of the distant others is superficial – achieved as effortlessly as cleaning the board of a picture, or attacking a scratch card. Rather than transforming the unjust conditions of many girls' lives in the developing world, the IDG event provided a platform for western girls' and other spectators' self-performance as cosmopolitan "sisters" and compassionate consumers. Like the makeover scenes in teen films, what was celebrated was the western teenage girl's ability to construct and perform her own subjectivity. While the IDG spectacle undeniably performed a pedagogical role by stressing the fate of being a girl, it obscured the complex lived realities of the one-dimensional, monochrome placard girls, and the immense difficulty, let alone

legitimacy, of imposing universalist western values and judgements on their "failed" lives and selves.

Somewhat ironically, the weather on the day of this highly orchestrated and planned event was wet, and the supposedly erasable image, after being rained on, resisted initial attempts to rub it out. Transforming the "before" image into its desirable "after" proved a longer, more arduous and time-consuming process, and the final result was far from a perfect clear image of schoolgirls in a classroom, a symbolic reminder of the limits to the communication of humanitarianism within the makeover paradigm. In the discussion section, we reflect on these limits and the potential avenues opened by humanitarian makeover.

Conclusion: The makeover of humanitarianism?

In line with other studies of current "post-humanitarian" communications, our analysis shows how employing the makeover paradigm to communicate humanitarian causes transforms a communication whose core concern is social change – tackling and redressing the misfortune and unjust and unequal conditions of the other, becomes an entertaining experience emphasizing fun and easy transformation of the individual. Why are NGOs, whose commitment is to expose and interrupt systemic inequality and help redress global injustice, turning to this genre, which is grounded on and promotes the seeming opposite: neoliberal values and in particular a focus on the self and its transformation, self-responsiblization, self-empowerment and self-governance?

As mentioned earlier, humanitarian NGOs are facing growing distrust of their efficacy and legitimacy, and criticism of their communications as patronizing, orientalizing and dehumanizing. The makeover paradigm offers them new ways to convey their messages. Echoing and building on the demotic turn of communication, the makeover helps NGOs to attract attention, engage audiences, and endow both message and messenger with a sense of ordinariness, ease, simplicity, unpretentiousness, popularity, accessibility, authenticity and, especially, credibility and trustworthiness.

The makeover's self-transformation narrative is exploited to communicate the bigger, complex and often hard-to-explain story of transformation which propels the

humanitarian project: in *Arman*, the adventure surrounding Arman's personal quest to find his sponsored child and transform her life (through monetary sponsorship), is tied in with and used to tell the bigger story of the need to transform the lives of the Baka people by fighting the destructive global logging industry. In the IDG event, the humanitarian project of removing the barriers to education for girls in the developing world is articulated through a cool, fun and self-centred activity of erasing an image, making this highly complex project of social and political transformation appear easy and smooth, if only benefactor and beneficiary are given the chance and are willing to try. In their attempts to communicate a "bigger-than-self"[63] problem, both cases build on the makeover paradigm, presenting transformation as easy, and fun, and proposing the self as the centre and agent of the transformation.

As the analyses of the two case studies demonstrate, as part of the broader trend towards "ethical entertainment", the "marriage" of makeover and humanitarian communication opens up opportunities for new pedagogical ways to engage existing and new audiences with humanitarian causes. Humanitarian communication is a profound site where value is produced; it is a discursive space loaded with value and moral distinctions between "us" and "them", "here" and "there", "deserving" and "undeserving", and good and bad. The makeover paradigm provides humanitarian organizations with a productive model to express and legitimize these values and communicate solutions, ways to resolve the humanitarian problem. It proposes a narrative of improvement of one's own and distant others' lives, while blurring the boundary between "us" and "them" and promoting a sense of shared experience, kinship and "sisterhood".

Crucially, the makeover paradigm provides NGOs with a communicative structure that purports to address, and offer a corrective to, criticisms of humanitarian communication's past failures. It seems to replace patronizing, infantilizing, orientalizing and normative discourses and modes of address, with an eye-level, unpretentious, light-touch and egalitarian communicative approach. The normative educational tone of humanitarian campaigns is substituted by an "authentic", casual and accessible entertainment style. Like humanitarian NGOs' use of "intimacy at a distance" in their communications,[64] the makeover paradigm, too, serves as a discourse and a technique to achieve credibility, authenticity and ethical authority, at a time when NGOs

and humanitarian aid are being subjected to considerable scrutiny, criticism and public distrust. Indeed, both cases analysed were reported by Plan to have attracted attention and generated donations (though it would be valuable and interesting to explore whether and how audiences negotiated the communications' meanings).

However, the seemingly smooth and unproblematic appropriation of the makeover by NGOs to deliver humanitarian messages begs critical introspection. Critical literature stresses how the makeover functions as contemporary citizenship training; makeover programmes act as laboratories of conduct that articulate and reinforce the values and ideals of neoliberal citizenship. What then are the implications of communicating the cause of redressing global structures of inequality and injustice, through a genre so intimately linked to neoliberal logic? More specifically, (how) can neoliberalism and its detrimental role in the creation, sustenance and reproduction of global injustice and suffering, be disrupted by and through the makeover - a narrative which is predicated on, publicizes and normalizes neoliberal democracy's values?

Three central tensions arise from our analysis in response to these questions. The first concerns the problem of *voice*, as elaborated by Couldry in his critique of the neoliberal transformation of media culture.[65] The humanitarian makeover arguably could exemplify a domain which facilitates and amplifies the marginalized other's voice. Humanitarianism is focused on the plight of distant others, an important part of its endeavour – especially in the "alchemical" branch - being the recovery of their suppressed and silenced voice. Evidently, so much of humanitarian organisations' discourse is about "giving the subject a voice". Makeover shows are a central domain of popular voice; subordinate subjects are given expertise and authoritative agency, thus, the programmes allow for expression outside the typical normative bourgeois subject positions.[66] Yet, as Couldry observes, where media (such as the humanitarian makeover) might be expected to increase voice, on closer inspection all too often they fail to do so. *Arman* centres on the host's exciting and adventurous journey, telling the story predominantly from his, not Assanga's or her people's point of view. It is Arman's understanding of the situation, and his evaluation of the flawed lives and need for transformation of Assanga and her people that are presented as guarantors of the truth, validating the Baka people's need, and the significance of the aid provided by Plan. As the programme's host, Arman is the sole mediator and interpreter of events.

Subscribing to the morality of post-humanitarian solidarity, [67]Arman acts as the expert whose proffered views and advice hold the key to the transformation of both the Baka people and the western viewers. Similarly, the IDG event relied exclusively on UK girls' and experts' exercise of makeover techniques to communicate the need and means to transform the lives of girls in the developing world denied access to education. The voices of these girls were entirely missing, and their paper images destined to be erased by their UK "sisters". While the grand narrative underpinning the IDG event was one of challenging the unjust conditions of girls' lives in the developing world – including silencing of their voices by oppressive patriarchal regimes - the event highlighted the experience of UK girls performing "ethical citizenship", and their exclusive voices, performed to the Trafalgar Square crowd (and their peers on social media).

A second tension derives from the makeover's alignment with and legitimation of a *culture of judgement, self-disciplining and surveillance*. Humanitarian communication (led by international NGOs based in the West), has been critiqued extensively for reproducing a patronizing, orientalizing and fundamentally asymmetric gaze of the west over the 'other' in the Global South. The analysis showed that the makeover enables a move away from this much-criticized symbolic asymmetry, through a shift in the tone and address of the humanitarian message, from educational and explicitly normative, to casual, ordinary, unassuming and unpretentious. However, as Weber notes, "television makeover…positions spectacular to-be-looked-at-ness as normal" where "makeover subjects are not made to engage in public sphere discourses but to circulate as public sphere spectacles."[68] Indeed, in *Arman*, the Baka people and Assanga and her family in particular, are subjected to the camera's (and thus viewers') ongoing surveillance, mediated and normalized through Arman's gaze. The absence of their own voice or perspective is never questioned. The "success" of the transformation is based on a series of judgements that the programme invites viewers to make about their Before lives, as "inadequate" as opposed to their After "improved" lives. In the IDG event, the paper muted girls constitute a spectacle to be consumed and "worked upon" by their western "sisters", through the act of erasing and speaking on their behalf. Thus, the humanitarian makeover ultimately normalizes rather than disrupts the asymmetric gaze on "the Other". Furthermore, the makeover is based on putting subjects through various exercises including "objective" critique from strangers.[69] In the humanitarian

makeover it is always western critique, coordinated and voiced through NGOs and celebrities, that mediates the relations between spectators and far away others. This critique is predicated on the values of neoliberal democracy, which proposes "to make lives happier and participants more powerful, and thus freely able to compete in a global marketplace,"[70] deeming anything that does not conform with such values, inappropriate and in need of transformation.

Finally, a third tension in the marriage between the makeover paradigm and humanitarian communication relates to *difference and inequality.* The makeover's neoliberal ideology evinces a deep cultural desire for a coherent, stable, well-regulated and celebrated self which flattens difference to underline very specific normative identity roles.[71] The makeover works to displace questions of inequality and difference into simple and unambiguous categories; binary oppositions that can be easily demonstrated in the transportation of participants from their Before to After bodies and selves. Humanitarianism, by contrast, is predicated on acknowledgement and respect of difference, and on a deep commitment to addressing inequality. However, as our analysis shows, casting this commitment into the makeover paradigm undercuts this very recognition: both Arman and the IDG event offer a simplified, personal, self-centred narrative of seemingly effortless transformation, which foregrounds the pleasures of western spectators and their exercise of "ethical citizenship", but fails to offer a programme that engages with structures of inequality. Both *Arman* and the IDG event offer a "fix" that draws on individualized neoliberal forms of action, geared primarily towards monetary donation. Thus, even were spectators informed about some of the structures underpinning subjects' suffering (in *Arman*, the environmental catastrophe brought about by the multinational logging industry, in the IDG event, patriarchal oppressive and violent regimes) the solutions they are presented with are individualistic and ad-hoc rather than structural and systemic.

Couldry argues that the new range of reality media, for all its counter-hegemonic promise, provides a space for amplifying, normalizing and reinforcing explicit neoliberal values.[72] NGO communications like the ones analysed in this paper, in their employment of the makeover paradigm, corroborate this critique: they seem little different from commercial makeover programmes and their emphasis on neoliberal values, in particular, individualistic work on the self, geared towards a smooth and easy

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transformation to a better self, be it the western benefactor's, the beneficiary's, or both. Therefore, the humanitarian makeover may signal a worrying makeover of the identities of humanitarian NGOs: from agents of emancipatory social transformation concerned with redressing injustice – which includes interrupting the failures of neoliberal democracy - and are firmly distinguished from profitable organizations and corporate culture, to organizations promoting and reinforcing new avenues for the pursuit of self-improvement and projects of the self within neoliberal societies.

Situating the analysis of the humanitarian makeover within broader critiques of contemporary media culture highlights the various ways in which this recent media/NGO communicative outlet may be undermining the critical impetus of humanitarianism. At the same time, as Attwood and Deller[73] usefully observe, narratives of transformation and makeover can also be "starting points for experimentation and originality, for political and spiritual activity". Our study seeks also to acknowledge this possible, though very hard to realize, potential of the humanitarian makeover, in the current context of global inequality where care for the other ought to be part of, but seems all too far from, global, national and individual prime agendas.

Figures

Image 1: Arman introduces his quest to find Assanga

Image 2: The village celebrates following Arman's donation of food. Arman is centre stage holding hands with Assanga, who is dressed in white (distributed by Plan on Twitter).

Image 3: Plan UK billboard at the front of the National Gallery, London, 11 October 2013

Image 4: Participants erasing the Plan UK billboard picture

Image 5: Becky Mantin, Weather Presenter for ITV in Trafalgar Square

Notes

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