



Humanitarianism, Communications and Change



Simon Cottle &
Glenda Cooper, EDITORS



Humanitarianism, Communications and Change is the first book to explore humanitarianism in today's rapidly changing media and communications environment. Based on the latest academic thinking alongside a range of professional, expert and insider views, the book brings together some of the most authoritative voices in the field today.

It examines how the fast-changing nature of communications throws up new challenges but also new possibilities for humanitarian relief and intervention. It includes case studies deployed in recent humanitarian crises, and significant new communication developments including social media, crisis mapping, SMS alerts, big data and new hybrid communications. And against the backdrop of an increasingly globalized and threat-filled world, the book explores how media and communications, both old and new, are challenging traditional relations of communication power.



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Humanitarianism, Communications and Change



Simon Cottle
General Editor

Vol. 19

The Global Crises and the Media series is part
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Humanitarianism, communications and change /

edited by Simon Cottle, Glenda Cooper.

pages cm. — (Global crises and the media; v. 19)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Humanitarianism. 2. Communication. 3. Non-governmental organizations.

I. Cottle, Simon. II. Cooper, Glenda.

BJ1475.3.H865 361.2'6—dc23 2015003306

ISBN 978-1-4331-2527-0 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4331-2526-3 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-4539-1531-8 (e-book)

ISSN 1947-2587

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

© 2015 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

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Global Crises and the Media

We live in a global age. We inhabit a world that has become radically interconnected, interdependent, and communicated in the formations and flows of the media. This same world also spawns proliferating, often interpenetrating, 'global crises'.

From climate change to the War on Terror, financial meltdowns to forced migrations, pandemics to world poverty, and humanitarian disasters to the denial of human rights, such crises represent the dark side of the globalisation of our planet. Their origins and outcomes are not confined behind national borders, and they are not best conceived through national prisms of understanding. The impacts of global crises often register across 'sovereign' national territories, surrounding regions and beyond, and they can also become subject to systems of governance and forms of civil society response that are no less encompassing or transnational in scope. In today's interdependent world, global crises cannot be regarded as exceptional or aberrant events only, erupting without rhyme or reason or dislocated from the contemporary world (dis)order. They are endemic to the contemporary global world, deeply enmeshed within it. And so, too, are they highly dependent on the world's media and communication networks.

The series *Global Crises and the Media* sets out to examine not only the media's role in the *communication* of global threats and crises but also how they can variously enter into their *constitution*, enacting them on the public stage, and helping to shape their future trajectory around the world. More specifically, the volumes in this series seek to: (1) contextualise the study of global crisis reporting in relation to wider debates about the changing flows and formations of world

media communication; (2) address how global crises become variously communicated and contested in both so-called 'old' and 'new' media around the world; (3) consider the possible impacts of global crisis reporting on public awareness, political action, and policy responses; (4) showcase the very latest research findings and discussion from leading authorities in their respective fields of inquiry; and (5) contribute to the development of positions of theory and debate that deliberately move beyond national parochialisms and/or geographically disaggregated research agendas. In these ways the specially commissioned books in the Global Crises and the Media series will provide a sophisticated and empirically engaged understanding of the media's changing roles in global crises and thereby contribute to academic and public debate about some of the most significant global threats, conflicts, and contentions in the world today.

In *Humanitarianism, Communications and Change* edited by Simon Cottle and Glenda Cooper, as the editors elaborate in their Introduction, the collection sets out to examine today's rapidly changing media and communications environment against the backdrop of an increasingly globalised and threat-filled world. The collection explicitly examines 'how media and communications, both old and new, and often in complex interaction, enter into humanitarian disasters from the outside in, and inside out, changing humanitarian capabilities and challenging as they do traditional relations of communication power.' The recent explosion of social media, growth in mobile telephony, deployment of remote satellite surveillance, development of crisis mapping and crowd sourcing, SMS (short message service) texting, and new digitalised appeals and donation transfers are all, amongst others, now making their mark on the contemporary field of humanitarianism. The opportunities that these and other technologies afford, as well as their associated risks and the sometimes less than progressive uses to which they can be put, warrant careful scrutiny. But new communications are only one dimension of today's changing global field of humanitarianism.

The nature and forms of humanitarian disasters in a globalising world are also fast changing—and becoming increasingly more complex. The crises of ecology, economy, energy shortages and ideological enmity, for example, often converge in compound conflicts that extend across space, encompassing diverse peoples and places, and can unfold over extended periods of time or even become institutionalised and routinised into 'permanent crises'. The challenges they pose to humanitarian organisations are often acute, sometimes next to intractable. And, disturbingly, they have recently included the direct threat of violence and deliberate killing of humanitarian workers—sometimes malevolently choreographed in front of cameras. These new challenges warrant no less serious recognition—and concerted world responses. New forms of global crises and today's communications ecology it seems have become deeply, sometimes disturbingly, intertwined. And this in a time when the very principles, philosophy, and practices

of humanitarianism have become subject to increased external criticism as well as internal reflexivity and critique. Discourses of humanitarianism now increasingly rub up against contending and/or politically augmenting discourses of human rights and human security—not always comfortably.

This collection, then, aims to better understand how contemporary media and communications enter into fields of conflict and humanitarian crises and how they can variously contribute to, condition, or challenge the humanly destructive processes that unfold within them. In an overview introduction and nineteen authoritative and complementary chapters, *Humanitarianism, Communications and Change* examines how humanitarian communications both advance and condition humanitarian practices in the twenty-first century at a time when the nature of humanitarian threats and humanitarianism itself are fast changing. The editors have deliberately included a wide range of reflective accounts and short case studies from experienced humanitarian communications practitioners and journalists as well as more theoretically driven and research-based pieces from academics. These different constituencies have much to offer and much to learn from each other. Both are absolutely necessary, suggest Cottle and Cooper, if we are to arrive at a deeper understanding of the problems and possibilities of humanitarian communications in the decades ahead. It is essential, they say, that expert communication practitioners, who engage at the sharp end of media and communication practices and struggle with real-world problems and dilemmas, and academics privileged with the time and opportunity to gather evidence and reflect on how things could be better conceptualised and theorised, listen attentively to each other. This book aims to both contribute to and facilitate such productive engagement. And, in this way, it aims to render explicit and accessible the latest communication practices and thinking in these practitioner and academic fields and thereby help to leverage improved understanding in the face of pressing global threats and humanitarian needs.

—Simon Cottle, Series Editor

Humanitarianism, Communications, and Change

SIMON COTTLE AND GLENDA COOPER

The world of humanitarian communications is changing fast. From geo-stationary satellites charting disasters from space to social media uploading raw emotions and scenes of devastation on the ground. From 24/7 news channels broadcasting crisis reports live from distant locations to crowd-sourcing and crisis-mapping visualizing local hotspots and sources of relief. From new volunteer technical communities mobilized at their desktop computers anywhere in the world to diasporic communities settled in distant countries donating funds ‘back home’ via their mobile phones. And from choreographed, videoed acts of inhumanity targeting humanitarian workers to calls for help from disaster survivors and potential atrocity victims fearing for their lives—all uploaded to the world’s media via a networked inter-linkage of mobile telephony, social media, Internet, satellites, and overlapping national and international news ecology. These and a host of other communication developments are posing new challenges and new opportunities for those who variously work in, are concerned about, are subject to, or who seek to mobilize humanitarian communications.

Humanitarianism, Communications, and Change sets out to explore today’s rapidly changing media and communications environment against the backdrop of an increasingly globalized and threat-filled world. The volume explores how media and communications, both old and new, and often in complex interaction, enter into humanitarian disasters from the outside in, and inside out, changing humanitarian capabilities and challenging as they do traditional relations of

communication power. Today the field of humanitarianism also exhibits complexity and change. Across recent decades humanitarianism has become buffeted by real-world processes, challenged by new political discourses and insider critiques, and conditioned by international frameworks of law and human rights (Reiff, 2002; Barnett & Weiss, 2008; Wilson & Brown, 2009; Hannigan, 2012; Oxfam, 2012).

Humanitarianism, it seems, has become not only a contested terrain but also something of a 'sticky signifier', capable of holding on simultaneously to multiple discourses and meanings. These include the relatively elastic, bland, and politically all-encompassing: 'We're all humanitarians now'—individual charity givers, welfare agencies, even democratic states pursuing liberal interventionism and military forces violently securing the same through so-called military humanism. But humanitarianism today also continues to signal and register the historically fixed, prescriptive, and apolitically sealed. Under this humanitarian guise, 'humanitarians' are those who 'voluntarily seek to protect humanity', and they are committed to do so, for example, in the founding terms of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), through practical actions based strictly on impartiality, neutrality, and independence. This encompassing and elastic quality of humanitarianism has stretched further since its organisational effervescence in the nineteenth century that gave institutional form to Enlightenment sentiments for humanity and compassionate, often religiously inspired, motivations to help others (Wilson & Brown, 2009). Which is not to suggest, of course, that such organised and outwardly directed sentiments did not have their antecedents in the earlier formation of ethical values and just-war principles evolved across millennia (Walzer, 2006; Robertson, 2012; Johnston, 2011).

Most recently humanitarianism, alongside organised churches and other sacral institutions, has lost something of its inviolate institutional standing, becoming subject to public scrutiny, accountability, and media scandals and criticism (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). And yet, at the same time, we also witness the increased propensity of individuals and societies to commit to humanitarianism, to become actively involved in compassionate causes, to give generously, to protest and demonstrate, and to demand action from governments in the face of human suffering around the globe (Cottle & Lester, 2011). Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (2008), in their scholarly disquisition on humanitarianism, observe two fundamental trends defining its contemporary standing. The first is an observable tendency of increased awareness of and preparedness to respond to those in need around the world.

Radical improvements in information technology and logistical capacity, growing international support for a duty to aid and a responsibility to protect victims, multiplying numbers of relief organisations, and spikes in available resources offer the promise of an enhanced collective capacity to provide war victims with relief, rescue and reconstruction. Although the slow-motion genocide in Darfur and other tragedies are stark reminders that good

thoughts and solemn proclamations are never enough, there now exists an international network that can act when and if called. Although these pledges serve as a bitter-sweet reminder of unkept promises, they at least represent the possibility of a more just world order. (Barnett & Weiss, 2008, p. 2)

They also observe a counter-trend at work in the increased dangers and risks posed to civilians in contemporary humanitarian crises as well as to humanitarians seeking to intervene.

Although willing to answer the call, humanitarian organisations have been generally ill-equipped for what they have found: war zones where civilian populations are the intended victims, where access is difficult, where aid workers are in danger of being received as a threat or as a resource to be captured, and where their own physical safety is in doubt. (Barnett & Weiss, 2008, p. 2)

These two trends have prompted a degree of professional introspection within the humanitarian community worldwide, as well as fuelling contradicting celebratory claims for the new humanitarianism and its international capacity to alleviate suffering and right wrongs on the one hand, and more sceptical if not cynical claims on the other about the political hijacking of humanitarianism, its selective recognition of needs around the world and subservience to Western governments, geo-political interests, and funding coffers. Barnett and Weiss, rightly in our view, signal the importance of radical improvements in information technology as a prominent spur in the contemporary flourishing of humanitarianism, though here we would also want to explore further and drill down into the rapidly changing communications environment more widely—and, with the help of our contributors, will do so.

This book also confines its analytical sights on the contemporary, though at the outset we may want to consider how communications have historically been implicated in the development of human societies throughout the ages and, specifically, in relation to the growing recognition of distant others as not so different from ourselves—a fundamental prerequisite in the development of a humanitarian sensibility. This ‘expanding human circle’ (Ignatieff, 1998; Rifkin, 2009; Singer, 2011) or ‘circle of concern’ (Nussbaum, 2013) can be traced in respect of a number of historical trajectories; some imposed through the ‘leading edge’ of Western military conquest and unassailable commerce (Ferguson, 2003; Mann, 2012), others more generic to the history of humankind (Harari, 2014). Notable amongst them are the rise of the first axial age (monotheistic, universalizing) religions (Bellah, 2011; Bellah & Joas, 2012) helping to open up a religio-normative space for critique and social challenge; the origins and formalization of justice and law, both on and off the battlefield (Walzer, 2006; Robertson, 2009; Johnston, 2011; Crowe, 2014); the expansion of city-states, trade, and commerce encouraging associational contacts, mobility, and mutual understanding (Gellner, 1990; Mann, 2012); state

formation, war, and the (internal) pacification of violence (Giddens, 1985; Elias, 1994; Pinker, 2012; Goldstein, 2011; Morris, 2014); the Enlightenment—both of science and, importantly, the philosophy of sentiments and sympathy (Pagden, 2013; Mazlish, 2014); and the advances of individualism, democracy, and, of course, humanitarianism, and more recently human rights (Tilly, 2007; Keane, 2009; Hunt, 2007; Ishay, 2008; Robertson, 2012).

To be clear, these developments are not separate from the all-together more historically brutal and violent processes and past struggles that helped spawn them—whether state formation (Elias, 1994; Tilly, 1990), endemic European wars (Morris, 2014), slavery and colonialism (Blackburn, 2011), or the early frontier ‘dark side of democracy’ (Mann, 2005). There is no comforting teleology or cunning hand of reason gently unfolding through history (Bauman, 1989; Malešević, 2010). Still, these same destructive forces have simultaneously also contributed to historically expanding ideas and outlooks of a more inclusive ‘human circle’, both spatially and morally conceived. They are also at work in the historical formation and continuing evolution of ideas of humanitarianism, including the latest debates centering on cosmopolitanism in globalizing media context (Beck, 2006; Robertson, 2010).

Throughout these historical trajectories, the changing forms of media and communications have performed their part, progressively collapsing time and space (Thompson, 1995; Poe, 2011), documenting and representing humanitarian tragedies and atrocities and, more recently, bearing witness to many of them (Zelizer, 2007; Sambrook, 2010; Batchen, Gidley, Miller, & Prosser, 2012; Allan, 2013; Cottle, 2013). It is important to note that media and communications have increasingly given expressive, narrative, and visual form to human suffering as well as humanitarian and human rights responses (Hunt, 2007; Linfield, 2010; Laquer, 2011; Borer, 2012; Balabanova, 2014; Cottle & Hughes, 2015). Increased recognition of distant others, as not so dissimilar to ourselves, and perceived through an increasingly empathetic and compassionate lens (Rifkin, 2009), suggests that contemporary trends in humanitarianism have long historical antecedents and that these are considerably more deeply embedded within the ebb and flow of human societies than any easy idea of technological or communications determinism can accommodate. Nonetheless, media and communications, we suggest, have entered increasingly and sometimes profoundly into the contemporary field of humanitarianism and this warrants sustained, critical attention.

Barnett and Weiss’s observation on the second fundamental trend in contemporary humanitarianism, namely, the increased risks and dangers for targeted civilian populations and humanitarians themselves, also, we think, demands serious consideration in respect of the contemporary media and communications environment (Price & Thompson, 2002; Thompson, 2007; Soderlund, Briggs, Hildebrandt, & Sidahmed, 2008). We need to better understand how contemporary media and

communications enter into fields of conflict and humanitarian crises and how these can variously contribute to, condition, or challenge the humanly destructive processes that unfold within them. Is it possible that media and communications are sometimes deployed in ways that become complicit with, as much as shine a spotlight on, humanitarian crises and denied humanity? (Cottle, 2009, 2011). When we ask such questions, especially within globalising contexts of interdependency and extensive communication surveillance, the historically elastic nature of humanitarianism again begins to stretch, overlapping with but also rubbing up against more politically inflected notions of human rights (and communication entitlements) and contemporary conditions of 'precarious life' (Butler, 2009) and human insecurity more widely conceived (Duffield, 2001, 2007; Kaldor, 2007).

This book takes its departure from these wider debates. *Humanitarianism, Communications, and Change* first contextualises its key concerns in respect of the changing and historically unprecedented global threats and crises currently gathering momentum in the present and that can be extrapolated into the foreseeable future with profound consequences for humanitarians worldwide. Second, the volume and its contributors focus in on the changing forms, current performance, and future potentials of communications when deployed principally within the field of humanitarianism as well as overlapping fields of human rights and human insecurity. More specifically the book and its contributing authors traverse a range of critical themes. These include the changing nature of communications and human insecurity in a globalised world; the often vexed relationships among charities, communications, and donations; the politics of pity and the poverty of media representations of human suffering; the nexus between humanitarian NGOs and mainstream journalism and the impacts of humanitarian communications on policymaking and publics; as well as expert accounts and reflections on the opportunities and challenges posed by diverse media and communication developments in recent years including, inter alia, video advocacy, 'Big Data', crowd-sourcing, social media, mobile telephony, and new news aggregation and verification practices.

This volume comprises authoritative, cutting-edge reflections and analyses of contemporary humanitarian communications and how these both advance and condition humanitarian practices in the twenty-first century. To this end the editors have deliberately included a wide range of reflective accounts and short case studies from both humanitarian communications practitioners and journalists as well as more theoretically driven and research-based pieces from academics. These different constituencies, we suggest, have much to learn from each other and only together can we arrive at an informed and deeper understanding of the problems and possibilities of humanitarian communications in the years ahead. It is essential, we think, that expert communication practitioners who daily engage with the sharp-end of media and communication practices and encounter real-world problems and dilemmas on the ground, as well as academics privileged

with the time and opportunity to gather evidence and reflect on how things could be better conceptualised and theorised, listen attentively to each other. This book aims to both contribute to and facilitate such engagement. To this end it aims to render explicit and accessible the latest practices and thinking in these fields and is directed at understanding today's changing communications environment and leveraging, possibly, its advantages in the face of pressing global threats and humanitarian needs. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the book structuration, introducing its five substantive sections and 19 individual chapters.

BOOK STRUCTURE

One of the fundamental premises of the *Global Crises and Media Series*, of which this volume is part, is that the world today is confronted by a range of unprecedented challenges and threats and that many of these are endemic to, entrenched within, and potentially encompassing of today's globalizing world. Whether climate change, food and water shortages, energy depletion, population movements, and rampant pandemics or new wars and terrorism, these and other issues become played out in and through today's complex media and overlapping communications ecology—an ecology that is itself increasingly globalised and encompassing (Cottle, 2009, 2011). These same global challenges frequently result in humanitarian crises, exacerbate the abuse of human rights, and contribute to the general condition of human insecurity around the globe (Duffield, 2001; 2007; Kaldor, 2007; Beck, 2009; Oxfam, 2012). Part 1, *Humanitarianism and Communications in a Changing World*, comprises four chapters each of which reflects on these wider changes and the roles and responsibilities of media and communications within them. These themes are then taken up and pursued in more empirically detailed and/or communicatively focused ways across the chapters that follow.

In chapter 1, 'Humanitarianism, Human Insecurity, and Communications: What's Changing in a Globalised World?' Simon Cottle provides an opening overview of how processes of globalisation are contributing to endemic world threats and producing new forms of complex, often overlapping, humanitarian disasters. The chapter also seeks to clearly set out what is distinctive and new about today's reconfiguring communications ecology in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Both the extensity and intensity of media and communications under conditions of globalization enter into humanitarian crises, he suggests, and do so in six analytically distinct ways: scale, speed, saturation, social relations enfranchisement, surveillance, and the sensory privileging of seeing. Cottle then considers some of the profound ways in which media and communications have become deeply etched into situations of human (in)security broadly conceived, including new forms of war and conflict that threaten civilian populations with extreme violence

and generate new forms of humanitarian crises. Finally the chapter turns to the disturbing and malevolent aims that new communications have been put to when deliberately targeting humanitarian workers in callous acts of videoed inhumanity disseminated around the globe. These too are part of the changing humanitarian and communications environment and serve to remind us of the diverse ways in which new communications can become enacted and deployed, from the potentially democratising and enfranchising to the tyrannical and egregiously inhumane.

Chapter 2, 'Media Futures and Humanitarian Perspectives in an Age of Uncertainty and Complexity', by Randolph Kent of the Humanitarian Futures Project, also addresses processes of unprecedented global change and how these, based on current world trajectories, are anticipated to pose new challenges and opportunities for humanitarianism in the future. Developing on a critique of the contemporary media that discerns how there is 'no consistent media attention given to engaging with the public about longer-term threats and opportunities' or the ways in which 'the media, governments, international and non-governmental organisations should be prepared', Kent makes the case for 'media futures' and in ways that can progressively and beneficially engage publics in the global challenges and expected humanitarian crises ahead.

The two chapters that follow, written by two experienced and accomplished communication practitioners, succinctly reflect on the changing nature of humanitarian communications over recent decades. Chapter 3, 'From Buerk to Ushahidi: Changes in TV Reporting of Humanitarian Crises', by Richard Sambrook, charts the changing nature of humanitarian reporting from one of the most iconic moments of humanitarian broadcasting to one of the most exciting online developments in recent times. Written by a former director of BBC Global News, the piece describes the professional impacts of the changing news ecology and new communication technologies from Michael Buerk's seminal news reporting of the 'biblical' Ethiopian famine (filmed by Mohammed Amin) in 1984 to the latest developments of open-access, crowd-sourcing, and mapping such as Ushahidi (Swahili for *testimony* or *witness*) since 2007.

Chapter 4, 'Digital Humanitarianism', by Paul Conneally, also provides an authoritative overview and critical insights and here from the vantage point of Conneally's experience as a public communications manager working for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In this reflective piece he eloquently discerns the game-changing nature of new digital communications when inserted into the emergency field of competing humanitarian organisations and pressing humanitarian needs. He argues in a challenging but ultimately upbeat mode, stating: "It has always been the elusive ideal to ensure full participation of people affected by disasters in the humanitarian effort." And he concludes, "We now have the tools. We now have the possibilities. There are no more reasons not to do it."

The three chapters that comprise part 2, Cash, Charity and Communication, provide perhaps a slightly less optimistic appraisal when focusing on the humanitarianism field's dependency on the pursuit of donations and charitable giving. Chapter 5, 'Give Us Your ****ing Money': A Critical Appraisal of TV and the Cash Nexus', by Glenda Cooper, provides an incisive account of the critical dilemmas and seemingly inescapable compromises that have coloured past emergency relief campaigns and that continue to structure many of those in the present. Not that this underpinning political economy of charitable giving and communications should be conceived in ahistorical or relatively staid and static ways. In chapter 6, 'NGOs, Media, and Public Understanding 25 Years On', Glenda Cooper engages in interview Paddy Coulter, former Head of Media Oxfam, inviting him to analytically reflect on the changing, sometimes vexed, relationships and aims characterising mediated NGO campaigns and appeals.

Finally in this section, chapter 7, '3000 Words that Explain How to Build a Powerful Fanbase, Make Your Message Go Viral, and Raise Millions for Your Cause', written by Liz Scarff from Fieldcraft. Cognisant of and experienced in deploying new media, Scarff reflects on the practicalities and multiple media opportunities that now present themselves when humanitarian organisations seek to win increased public recognition, support, and funding and can do so in and through new social media and aligned modes of communication.

Possibly one of the most contentious and developed areas of academic criticism in respect of the world of humanitarianism is found in its critical analyses of the representations of distant suffering, especially when such images are deployed to appeal to Western publics, arouse sympathies, and/or open purse strings (Cohen, 2001; Sontag, 2003; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013; Mody, 2010; Borer, 2012; Dogra, 2012; Orgad, 2012; Kennedy & Patrick, 2014). Material inequalities all too often become symbolically replicated in and through such media representations and the latter, so it is often lamented, provide little by way of resources with which to better understand much less challenge prevailing international and structural conditions of oppression and disadvantage. Perhaps it is historically the time to shift from a prevalent 'politics of pity', formed earlier alongside the rise of religiously inspired and compassion-filled humanitarian organisations to a 'politics of recognition' based more on human rights and entitlements—including communication entitlements?

Part 3, The Politics of Pity and the Poverty of Representation, explores the contemporary nature of humanitarian appeals and representations in three distinct critical analyses. Chapter 8, 'International NGOs, Global Poverty, and the Representations of Children', by Nandita Dogra, offers an analysis of INGOs' messages and how these are based on a double representational logic of 'difference' and 'oneness' and does so by focusing specifically on portrayals of children. Her analysis and critique based on systematic empirical analysis concludes that INGOs

in and through their representations ‘symbolically infantilise the majority world’, that the connotations of ‘overpopulation’ and ‘irrationality’ associated with the majority world assigns ‘blame’ to them for their plight, and that these and other myths negate the aims of those INGOs aimed at ‘root causes of poverty.’

Chapter 9, ‘Underline, Celebrate, Mitigate, Erase: Humanitarian NGOs’ Strategies of Communicating Difference’, by Shani Orgad, explores how NGO practitioners’ frames of thinking and understanding shape their portrayals of difference and otherness—and in varied ways. In particular she identifies four strategies employed by NGOs in their planning and production of communications of international development, humanitarian aid, and human rights abuses. These are ‘underlining’, ‘celebrating’, ‘mitigating’, and ‘erasing difference’ and they often feature in overlapping and contradictory ways. Her analysis, based on in-depth interviews with NGO professionals as well as communication materials, identifies continuing representational deficits and unresolved tensions in the organisational aims and practices of many humanitarian NGOs.

Finally in this part, chapter 10, ‘Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism’, by Lilie Chouliaraki, provides a sophisticated disquisition on the changing politics of solidarity encapsulated in the notion of ‘post-humanitarianism’. She argues that solidarity today replaces “common humanity” with “the self” as the privileged morality of solidarity, a wider cultural disposition or orientation that tends toward the narcissistic and which thereby displaces or diminishes the central subject of distant suffering. Her argument is grounded in the interrogation of contemporary humanitarian appeals, celebrity advocacy, and disaster news and in the recognition of the shortfalls of solidarity when conceived in terms of private choice and self-fulfilment.

While the study of media communications and representations has secured sustained, often incisive commentary and critique, the relatively invisible world of NGOs and their impact upon processes of government policymaking, audience reception, and involvement within today’s fast-changing media ecology has, with few exceptions, received relatively little in-depth empirical study (Höijer, 2004; Cooper, 2007; Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2009; Waisbord, 2011; Powers, 2014). This is not to say, however, that sometimes-inflated claims based on little if any serious evidence do not also circulate widely, and often go unquestioned. Oft-heard assertions about the “CNN effect”, for example, abound both within (self-aggrandising) media and beyond. This easy claim both proposes and presumes strong media causality propelled into the realm of government policy intervention via images of human suffering circulated by 24/7 news media and subsequent public calls that ‘something must be done’ (Gilboa, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Cottle, 2009, pp. 127–145). It is also heard in the conceptual inverse of the CNN effect, namely the idea of ‘compassion fatigue’ (Moeller, 1999). In the latter it is precisely the surfeit of media images of human suffering that denudes them of

their moral claims upon us, it is said, with such scenes becoming so much wallpaper with little if any resonance for, much less moral compulsion on, ratings-driven news producers (Moeller, 1999) and easily distracted audiences (Tester, 1994). The chapters that follow, each in its own way, secure increased empirical and conceptual traction on these generalising debates and speculative claims.

In part 4, *NGO Communications: Impacts, Audiences, and Media Ecology*, three chapters examine from their own distinct perspectives some of the complex ways in which humanitarian communications enter into the wider fields of government policymaking, processes of audience reception, and changing media ecology. Chapter 11, 'From Pictures to Policy: How Does Humanitarian Reporting Have an Influence?', by Suzanne Franks, tackles head-on the arguments of the CNN effect clearly outlaying the arguments for and against advanced by advocates and critics before proceeding to provide unique and critical insights into the case of the 1984 Ethiopian famine. Here the alleged role of news broadcasting at this time in influencing government humanitarian relief policies is critically scrutinized on the basis of insider accounts from the time and marshalled in Franks's insightful analysis.

In chapter 12, 'Learning from the Public: UK Audiences' Responses to Humanitarian Communications', Irene Bruna Seu provides fascinating insights into how audiences actually understand and respond—cognitively, emotionally, and through actions—to communications from humanitarian and international development NGOs. Based on a significant sample of participants taking part in 20 nationwide focus-group discussions who commented on communications from a range of major NGOs, Seu discerns which communications manage to break through the seeming obstacle of 'denial' (Cohen, 2001) and how and why exactly they manage to do so. She explicitly asks and addresses by what mechanisms NGO communications manage to persuade, or not, members of the public to engage with, donate to, or become actively involved in humanitarian causes. This, surely, is a timely and critical concern of interest to us all.

Chapter 13, 'NGO Communications in the New Media Ecology: How NGOs Became the "New(s) Reporters"', by Kimberly Abbott, formerly of the International Crisis Group and now vice president of Communications for World Learning, provides an insider's NGO perspective on the changing nature of NGO communications and practices in respect of the transforming new media ecology. Today, she argues, 'NGO communications experts are posted around the world, tweeting, photographing, producing video documentaries, creating mapping tools, blogging, and supplementing news coverage in parts of the globe from which foreign reporters have retreated.' The chapter describes how 'NGOs have adapted to and become part of the new media ecology' and how they have invented and reinvented their communications strategies, increasingly positioning them as central to their mission. Her chapter reflects in this context on the changing relationships

between NGOs and journalists and how, specifically, these formerly distinct worlds have become blurred.

In part 5, *Changing Communications and Communication Power*, five chapters explore in focused discussions some of the ways in which different communication mediums and practices are transforming communications and relations of communication power. Humanitarian NGOs have themselves become intensely interested in new communications and how, with each subsequent major disaster, these seem to play a more innovative and game-changing role (Nelson, Sigal, & Zambrano, 2011; United Nations Foundation, 2011; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2013). The chapters that follow provide close-up observations and reflections on these diverse, frequently interconnecting, communication developments.

Chapter 14, ‘Visualizing Human Rights: The Video Advocacy of WITNESS’, by Stuart Allan, explores the emergence, associated practices, and hopes and dilemmas of video advocacy in the field of human rights abuses. Specifically he focuses on WITNESS, an NGO launched in 1992 that ‘empowers human rights defenders to use video to fight injustice, and to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools that can pressure those in power or with power to act’. Through this case-study approach Allan authoritatively reflects on how one of the most vital of human rights, the right to bear witness, has become a site of struggle amongst diverse communities of interest mobilising across globalising communicative networks.

In chapter 15, ‘Big Data and Humanitarian Response’, by Patrick Meier, former leading member of Ushahidi, considers how the massive outpouring of communicated information during disasters can be as paralyzing to humanitarian response as the absence of information. This “Big Data” (or Big Crisis Data) is being generated, he observes, by the massive volume of user-generated content shared on such social media platforms as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Social media, he suggests, ‘can accelerate the assessment of disaster damage and needs during disasters’, but he also cautions that today the challenge is to make better use of this outpouring of user-generated content, unlocking its relevance for enhanced disaster situational awareness. Meier proposes that microtasking—an example of human computing—can be better deployed to make sense of Big Data during disasters in tandem with machine computing (artificial intelligence) both supporting and accelerating such processes.

Chapter 16, “Power in my Pocket”: How Mobile Citizen Reporting Challenges Digital Elitism’, by Alice Klein, underlines how some of the most transformative and democratizing forms of communication are not high-spec, expensive tech but are in fact, and understandably so given the under-resourced contexts in which they become deployed, relatively low-spec, low-cost technologies. Based on her practice and experiences of Radar, an organization committed to

working in under-resourced countries and facilitating citizen journalism training, Klein considers the benefits of mobile telephony, including short message servicing (SMS), in contrast to more conventional modes of journalist writing. Careful not to position mobile technology as a simple panacea for all problems relating to decades of inequality in developing countries, her reflections nonetheless support the claim that ‘it *can* facilitate participation and in so doing, flip the power dynamic so that citizens become active creators and curators of news, not merely consumers or passive subjects in a correspondence that is carried out around them.’

The focus of news continues in chapter 17, ‘New Approaches to Aggregation and Verification in Humanitarian Newsgathering and Coverage’, by Claire Wardle. She considers the rapidly transforming and increasingly complex communications environment of news production and how NGOs may now seek to leverage this. Notwithstanding the proliferation of exciting new social media and complex communication environments, she argues that the mass media continue to exercise an important and traditional agenda-setting role, shaping the conversations and priorities of the political and cultural elite. Press officers at humanitarian organisations, as anywhere else, she argues, still crave column inches, airtime, and opportunities for spokespeople to be interviewed. However, for Wardle it is unhelpful to see this as a situation of social media versus mainstream media. Rather she identifies the increasingly important role performed by social media in terms of connecting organisations with mainstream media and allowing content created by NGOs to be used by the media.

Chapter 18, ‘Mobile Emergencies, Mobile Phones: The Hidden Revolution’, by Imogen Wall and Kyla Reid, provides an expert view on the importance of phones and connectivity for survivors in disasters. It does so against the backdrop of the exponential growth of mobile telephony subscriptions in the developing world. This rarely commented on but remarkable fact is reconfiguring communications in Africa, Asia, and many other parts of the less-developed world. As the authors observe, more people in developing countries now have access to a mobile phone than to basic sanitation or reliable electricity. And 130 million people in the developing world are becoming mobile service users every year, a trend that is expected to continue until at least 2017. We have yet to fully understand the implications of this exponential growth in mobile telephony say Wall and Reid. Specifically, ‘Learning how to apply humanitarian principles in this emerging sector, especially the importance of meeting the needs of the most marginalised (in this instance those with no or limited access to services)’, they argue, ‘is critical for mobile phone companies and humanitarians alike’.

To conclude, chapter 19, ‘Humanitarianism, Communications, and Change: Final Reflections’, by Glenda Cooper and Simon Cottle, draws together some of the principal themes and debates that have surfaced across the preceding chapters. Here some concluding thoughts on the field of humanitarianism are offered as

well as its inevitable and increasing dependency on changing communication networks and technologies in the foreseeable future.

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