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A scientific analysis of  
non-governmental organisations“**

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*“To be sure, all the sciences have their many tiny facts, but these are gathered, not for their own sake, but to serve some larger purpose. And this purpose is to formulate a series of overarching propositions that seek to explain ever larger segments of nature.”*

*(Carneiro 1995:10)*

## 1. Introduction: The need for a scientific perspective

How can science contribute to our understanding of so called non-profit non-governmental organisations (NPNGOs), commonly known as NGOs? Social change, humanitarian aid, and the role of non-governmental organisations in international development are widespread topics within the social sciences. As recurrent themes they have influenced the theoretical and investigative development of various disciplines. Within the range of issues NGOs engage in, the probably most researched one is humanitarian aid: An entire study programme called International Development was designed to shed light on the implications, strategies and consequences of humanitarian action. Within academia, much has already been written and said about non-governmental organisations, so one might wonder: Why do we need another perspective at all? And why a scientific one?

### WHAT IS SCIENCE?

Science is an epistemological principle belonging to a paradigm<sup>1</sup> that seeks to explain phenomena through cause-effect relationships rather than describing them as, for example, descriptive postmodern anthropology does. In order to provide evidence, scientific studies must meet certain criteria (testability, falsifiability/verifiability, etc.). Therefore, scientists reject any moral valuation whatsoever about the phenomenon being studied and do not follow a specific ideological mission (e.g. the improvement or “empowerment” of a specific group of humans) when carrying out research. Neither do they pursue any goal other than understanding the world as it *is*, not as it *should* be. Of course, any scientific research is and necessarily must be led by certain principles. I will specify the principles of science – which differ sharply from the ones of humanism – at the outset by the following table which illustrates their fundamental differences:

<sup>1</sup> A paradigm is a consistent logically interconnected system of principles on the basis of which research is carried out and knowledge gathered. It governs not only the patterns of our perception but also determines the kind of questions we ask (see Kuhn 2012).

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| PARADIGM                  |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE | <p><b>Humanism</b></p> <p>no uniform criteria<br/>confusion of emic and etic knowledge</p> <p>idiographic</p> | <p><b>Science</b></p> <p>scientific criteria<br/>distinction of emic and etic knowledge</p> <p>nomothetic</p> |
| THEORETICAL PRINCIPLE     | <p>idealism</p> <p>subjectivism/value judgements<br/>free will/free choice</p>                                | <p>cultural materialism</p> <p>objectivism<br/>determinism</p>  |
| METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE  | <p>individualism</p>  | <p>holism</p>   |
| ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE     | <p>particularism</p>  | <p>universalism</p>   |

Humanism and science are highly conflicting epistemological principles which along with other theoretical, methodological and ontological principles form two different paradigms. These principles are hardly questioned or discussed in scientific debates and they are hardly ever made explicit in research papers. However, they implicitly guide research and strongly influence the kind of results that are obtained. Postmodernism, being the most radical form of humanism, proclaims that objective science is not possible and that only subjective findings can be collected. According to this principle, freedom, chaos, spontaneity, creativity and deliberation determine human behaviour, which necessarily leads to the conviction that “science” must be an illusion. In contrast, the scientific principle holds that objective research is possible and generalisations can be made only if etic knowledge is separated from emic knowledge. Following the assumption that general laws determine human behaviour, this principle supposes that cause-effect relationships, some degree of order and regularities exist that can be assessed by means of scientific methods.

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The assumption that the “free will” of individual human beings has a notable impact on culture is thoroughly questioned by researchers following the epistemological principle of science. Culture is perceived to be more than the sum of its individual parts, which is why scientists adopt a macro-perspective to take into consideration the cultural whole rather than individual subjects. Humanism, on the other hand, builds on the premise that it is individual human beings that make up culture, which is why a focus is put on their perspectives, practices, beliefs, feelings, etc. This premise makes humanism highly inclined towards subjective interpretations of culture. The value that is given to individuals is highly consistent with the principle of particularism, which builds on the premise that humans are self-determined, powerful and particular (which again is compatible with the principle of free will and the rejection of determinism). Within the epistemological framework of humanism, individual subjects are conceived as being able to change culture, while science’s ontological principle of universalism suggests that humans are not self-determined but dependent on external factors, which they cannot change. As cultural variation cannot be explained by people’s “free will”, we need a scientific approach that helps us to separate dependent variables from independent ones in order to detect cause- effect relationships. This kind of scientific endeavor dealing with human culture is called “anthropology” by some (e.g. Margolis 2000) and “culturology” by others (e.g. White 1949).

### CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES

In contrast, humanist endeavours to study NGOs lead to myriad different descriptions and interpretations of NGOs and their particular projects, as we will see in Chapter 2.4. Such a perspective focuses on differences rather than similarities and is not intended to provide general explanations. A scientific perspective, however, strives to explain why this specific kind of organisations has become so widespread. It enables an understanding of the embeddedness of NGOs in a specific environment of material conditions. People’s pursuit of improving the world and saving the lives of distant strangers is not a universal feature of humanity, but rather part of a very particular culture. Due to its remarkable explanatory power and its well-founded research criteria, I believe that the scientific approach is best suitable for explaining NGOs and the humanist ideology that makes people engage in NGO-related activities.

This master thesis is in no way meant to criticise or depreciate the work of humanitarian, environmental or animal rights activists whose dedication and commitment I personally respect and admire. Neither do I mean to make any political or moral statement whatsoever. Rather, this is



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an attempt to deal with NGOs objectively, as scientific standards require. Such research approach, however, challenges the common perspective taken in previous academic and current everyday debates which focus on strategies to counter existing power inequalities and saving lives.<sup>2</sup>

NGOs proclaim that the world needs to be changed and that people have the power to effectuate such change. The presupposition that people can transform the world is not only highly consistent with the humanist epistemology already discussed, but also with Marxism. Marxism includes elements of humanism and science; more specifically, it combines cultural materialism with methodological individualism: On the one hand, material factors underlying society, i.e. the forces and relations of production, are understood to determine society's "superstructure" (its culture, politics, power relations, and consciousness). On the other hand, following the logics of Enlightenment, Marxism assumes that people are rational beings which can understand and eventually change the workings of society. Carneiro finds that the concept of free will and choice is used to make people believe in the possibility of change:

"So long as Marxism remained only a *theory*, an interpretation of how history had unfolded, it could afford to wave the banner of determinism. But as soon as it became a blueprint for the overthrow of the existing institutions of society and their replacement with new ones, its emphasis had to change. It had to assign the individual a creative role in the process and thus seek to mobilize his efforts for the cause." (Carneiro 2000:54)

In proclaiming that individual human beings can change the social system they live in while at the same time maintaining that society's basis determines people's conscience, Marxism turns out to be highly inconsistent and contradictory. Social revolutionism is based on the concept of human freedom and the power to change social structures. Here lies the difference between social or political activism and science:

"As 'scientific socialists,' they [Marx and Engels] appreciated the force of determinism in human history. But as revolutionaries, urging their followers to action, they had to leave

<sup>2</sup>"Together we can save lives. Every contribution counts." These and similar appeals can be found on letters sent by Doctors without Borders, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its humanitarian engagement. Statements like these are commonly found in letters sent by NGOs to possible future donors. They are based on the overall assumption that everybody can save lives by donating money.

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room for spontaneous individual initiative against the constraints that bound them. If workers were to accept the notion of 'historical laws' playing themselves out automatically, laws that would inexorably bring about change without the need for human exertion, this would surely breed an 'enervating quietism.' And as dedicated revolutionists, Marx and Engels felt compelled to dispel such an attitude." (Carneiro 2000:54)

In most academic discourse people's power to "change the world" is taken for granted. The question if human beings are able to change the world is hardly debated or questioned. Debates focus on ways to improve strategies for making the desired change happen more efficiently rather than on the question why aid organisations exist.

I would like to take a different direction, one that seeks to question and explain rather than take for granted or judge. How can we explain the existence and proliferation of NGOs around the world? Why is it that these organisations have come into existence at all and why do they persist? Why does the concept of humanitarian aid exist in our industrial-capitalist world society but not in hunter-gatherer societies organised in tribes or clans? Why do we know of no chiefdom or Big Man society in which people pretend to change the world? Why does the aid business flourish in capitalist societies and not in small farming societies? Is the tendency to help others a natural characteristic of human beings? And why is it that those states which were once colonising and exploiting distant strangers are now helping to "empower" them?

The scientific paradigm does not allow for simple and clear-cut explanations to each of these questions, but it provides the necessary theoretical approach for examining the conditions and mechanisms underlying such kind of organised activism. The materialist environment NGOs are embedded in can tell us a lot about why they exist and how they manage to proliferate. Just as any other cultural phenomenon, NGOs must be studied as part of a larger culture resulting from the organisation of human beings. As aid organisations have not existed in all cultures at all times, their appearance must be caused by external factors rather than by inherent biological ones. Thus, it is the task of anthropologists rather than (socio)biologists to explain why this phenomenon is so widespread in our globalised world.

### A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

Cultural materialism, a science paradigm named after the theoretical principle it is based on, provides a suitable framework for critically examining the existence and workings of NGOs. It aims at establishing probabilities about the appearance of cultural traits, the explanations of

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which are to be found in the material conditions of human life. This scientific approach presupposes that cultural phenomena are not simply there because some people invented them, but because they have been caused by non-human factors such as the environment, material resources as well as modes of production, reproduction and technological means. This theoretical approach enables us not only to describe cultural traits, but to explain them. Thereby, it becomes possible to understand why certain traits very likely come up under certain conditions (while others don't) and why they will hardly appear under different conditions. Rather than accepting things how they are without questioning why they exist or establishing links between different phenomena without looking for cause-effect relationships, cultural materialism offers a scientifically founded approach that makes the existence and proliferation of non-governmental organisations understandable.

From a scientific standpoint, it is very doubtful that NGOs came to be as "successful" as they are today because someone in the past had the idea of founding such an organisation and inspired others to found similar organisations around the world. At first glance, when immersing oneself in some founders' life stories, it might seem to have been this way. When looking at personal histories we can see what people hold to be true, how they themselves rationalise why things are as they are, which is not exactly what scientists take as face value (I will elaborate on the distinction between these two "realities" called emics and etics in Chapter 3.1.). However, if we want to explain why these organisations have become so widespread, we must change our perspective, leaving aside the stories of individual human beings and turning to the material conditions that enable their existence.

The relevant question therefore is not who founded which particular organisation and which individuals played the most outstanding part, but rather why NGOs as a cultural form of organisations have come into existence in different parts around the world at about the same time. In order to find an answer to this question, we will have to search for similar conditions around the world that have made (and still make) their formation likely. Therefore, an analysis must focus on external factors and embrace a holistic view. A macrosociological perspective is needed for the study of NGOs as internationally operating organisations. Cultural materialism is consistent with such macro-perspective and provides us with a framework for establishing dependent and independent variables and possible deterministic relationships between them.

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### CULTURE IS A "SCIENCE THING"

It is not just phenomena typically belonging to the natural world that can be explained scientifically; culture is indeed part of the natural world and therefore subject to laws that can be discovered, described and tested. Cultural phenomena have a reason, and to explain how phenomena are related has always been the objective of science. As scientists, cultural materialists presuppose that the world is ordered and structured in certain ways and that we can – by means of suitable methods and theories – discover these structuring mechanisms. The fact that we don't know yet why a phenomenon exists should in no way make us believe that it is impossible to find an explanation, but rather encourage us to look for something that remains to be discovered. As scientists, we first and foremost must suppose that there is a reason for every possible phenomenon. A different standpoint would hinder any knowledge from being gained. Therefore, what we must question is not that explanations *can* be found but *how* they can be found accurately. Cultural materialism provides methods in accordance with scientific standards that can produce probabilistic knowledge on cultural phenomena. Even though absolute certainty is never achieved in any kind of scientific research, cultural materialism can yield much evidence and shed light on probabilities that can be tested. If things simply are how they are and there is nothing to explain, why would we even look for explanations? If we believe there is no reason for cultural phenomena and that no evidence may ever meet scientific standards, why would we carry out research and call our discipline a branch of "science"?

In my endeavour to investigate why NGOs exist, I will analyse the material factors, organisational features and the ideology that is maintained and encouraged by these organisations. According to cultural materialism, ideology as well as social organisation are the outcomes of infrastructure. Ideological change is always attached to social change, which itself is caused by changing infrastructural conditions. Even though science cannot predict when exactly an ideology will change and how it will change, it nevertheless enables us to establish theories of how one factor is related to another. Piece by piece, sufficient proof can be put together to establish results about a cause-effect relationship that meets scientific criteria. As international aid organisations exist under specific conditions which can be detected, named and categorised, it is

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important to focus on the questions when and where these specific organisations came into existence and which conditions prevailed in the particular environment at that time.<sup>3</sup>

Just as Margolis (2000), Wojcicka Sharff (1995), Murray (1995) and other anthropologists who adopt a cultural materialist perspective manage to find evidence on cultural phenomena by using the theoretical framework of cultural materialism, I will use it to analyse the ideology of “saving others” (whatever these “others” are: the planet, nature, animal species or the poor). Only by comparing what people engaging in NGO-related work say and believe to be the causes of the proliferation of NGOs (the “emic view”) to what can be scientifically determined to be its causes (the “etic view”) can we fully understand in what emic and etic understandings differ and why. By a comparison of these two points of view we can see how ideology and material conditions are related.

### MORAL IMPACT ON RESEARCH

This master thesis is not an attempt to report on current ills of aid organisations or global inequalities and hierarchies, neither does it question whether it is our duty as human beings to engage in the strive for a "better" world or not. Rather, this study is meant to be a neutral and sober account of humanism, which in our Western culture is so widespread that it appears "natural" to us. Even mainstream anthropology illustrates the impact humanism has on the discipline. Today, anthropologists deal with topics rather than science, which is reflected in the division of research specialisations named “Anthropology of Work”, “Anthropology of Food”, “Anthropology of the Middle East”, “Anthropology of Development”, “Anthropology of Migration”, “Anthropology of Art”, “Anthropology of Global Conflicts”, and the like. The discipline lacks clearly defined principles for knowledge gathering and focuses on the description of phenomena rather than its explanation. Just as humanism suggests, anthropology uses vague and blurry terms that can be interpreted in various ways rather than trying to narrow down its interpretative character (see for example the countless different definitions of key terms such as “society” or “culture” used within the discipline).

<sup>3</sup> As we can see with the rise of feminist organisation in the research carried out by Margolis (2000), seemingly unexplainable ideologies become understandable in the light of changing material conditions.

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Anthropologists often resemble political or religious leaders whenever they use mainstream ideology for making their claims. For example, in her assertion that “warfare is only an invention” (see Mead 1940), Margaret Mead is driven by ideology rather than scientific fact. This is best illustrated in her concluding remarks, in which she reflects on the possibilities that open up if we only thought of war as an “invention”: “If we know that it is not inevitable, that it is due to historical accident that warfare is one of the ways in which we think of behaving, are we given any hope by that?” (Mead 1940:405) From her kind of reasoning it becomes clear that Mead follows an idealist, humanist approach based on the principles of free will and individualism. She argues for the possibility of changing culture by calling on their consciousness and morals of individual human beings and entire “nations”. Her article is meant to provide thought-provoking impulses for abandoning war rather than collecting objective facts. As she declares in the final sentence of her article, we must first of all believe in the possibility of change in order to change culture: “A form of behaviour becomes out of date only when something else takes its place, and, in order to invent forms of behaviour which will make war obsolete, it is a first requirement to believe that an invention is possible.” (ibid.) From this example, it becomes clear that mainstream anthropological research is not guided by the scientific criteria of objectivity but rather moral questions.<sup>4</sup>

Scientists, despite of dealing with a topic usually treated in mainstream anthropology, take on a rather different perspective: They do not consider the moral implications but the very nature of social phenomena. Just as natural scientists take interest in studying the inner workings of animals or plants, this thesis results from my interest in studying the very nature of social organisms and suborganisms. This paper seeks to contribute to the explanation of why NGOs around the world succeed in making people believe that they can change the world. As a scientist, rather than taking ideology for granted, I question the assumption that fighting for distant others is something deeply inherent to humankind.

<sup>4</sup> Today, anthropology is itself an instrument of spreading the dominant ideology of humanism. A social science free from moral implications, which is based on very different principles that are incommensurable with humanist ones, can hardly assert itself, because it does not adapt to the humanist ideology operating in our current social system. For detailed explanations on the implications of the forces of natural selection within social systems, see Carneiro (1992).

## 2. A scientific approach to studying NGOs

### 2.1. Conceptualising NGOs scientifically

*“Thus, then, with social organisms as with individual organisms, it is through the struggle for existence [...] that there arise those great aggregates which at once make possible high organization, and require high organization.”*

*(Spencer 1967:74)*

According to common understanding, non-profit non-governmental organisations may be defined as specific arrangements of people linked to each other through their engagement for a certain “good”. However, to be able to analyse such organisations scientifically, to compare them cross-culturally and address the questions raised in Chapter 1, we must not rely on emic terms, but instead consider a conceptualisation that meets scientific needs. Such conceptualisation must necessarily be an etic one (for an explanation of the difference between emic and etic terms, see Chapter 3.1.). In order to analyse NGOs, we must first define which kind of entities we are talking about and which concepts already exist that enable a better understanding of these organisations as parts of culture. To be able to determine the general characteristics they share and, eventually, arrive at possible explanations, I will focus on similarities rather than individual differences. This is consistent with the ultimate end of the worldwide project named “science”, which is in the endeavour to determine universal statements that can be applied cross-culturally. In order to arrive at scientifically testable results, it is essential to first define our object of analysis.

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### NGOs ARE IDENTEREST GROUPS

From a scientific standpoint, we may conceptualise NGOs as a form of human organisation made possible by certain material conditions and sharing similar structural and ideological features. One of these features is the pursuit of changing a culture or society, or – in the case of Oxfam – even “the world”<sup>5</sup>.

The urge for change is a general feature that also appears in other human groups that engage in social conflict, as Ferguson (2006) argues. In his article on “Tribal, ‘Ethnic,’ and Global Wars” (2006), Ferguson finds that conflicts termed “tribal”, “ethnic” (a very vague term in itself), “religious” or otherwise are not about tribal, ethnic or religious issues, even they might seem to be at first glance. Ethnicity and other cultural or biological differences do not *cause* conflicts but may be attached to them. This misunderstood cause-effect relationship so widespread in anthropological and popular thought is partly due to a confusion of emic and etic statements:

“Countless ethnographers have told us that the so-and-so go to war to avenge the ghosts of the dead, to gather supernatural power from killing, to capture women, etc. [...] Materialist approaches, in contrast, have tried to understand war as practical struggle over materially important goods or conditions.” (Ferguson 2006:47)

One condition that makes conflicts arise is the scarcity of needed goods which leads to competition over their control (see *ibid.* 2006:46). Ferguson argues for calling such conflicts “identerest conflicts” led by “identerest groups” (groups sharing a certain identity and common interests). Identerest groups can be identified as the main players in international, regional or internal conflicts, be they terrorist, revolutionary or military groups. Interestingly, identerest groups show great similarity with groups engaging in non-violent social conflict such as NGOs and other humanitarian organisations, which actively participate in a “fight for a more humane

<sup>5</sup> Oxfam reports on “How to change the world in Eight Steps” (see <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change-the-world-in-eight-steps>, last accessed on 22.10.2018), describes its “Six Goals to change the world” (see <https://www.oxfam.org.au/get-involved/how-schools-can-get-involved/classroom-resources/oxfams-six-goals-to-change-the-world/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018) and gives advice on “How you can change the world every day” (see <https://www.oxfam.org.au/how-you-can-change-the-world-every-day/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).



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world” and openly take sides in political debates (see for example the fight for abolition, which will be outlined in the following subchapter, or the fight for women’s rights led by the UK-based NGO Womankind Worldwide<sup>6</sup>), as will be outlined below.

### FOUR PHASES OF IDENTEREST CONFLICTS

The following mechanisms describe the formation process of identerest groups: In phase one, a group of entrepreneurs with self-serving interests in promoting a social conflict unite: “They forge and widely disseminate a charged political ideology, thoroughly immersed in local cultural understandings, which identifies ‘our common enemy’” (Ferguson 2006:55). In this phase, it is a vital interest of the core to mobilise others in order to grow and achieve its aims. For these means, a sharp line of in- and outgroup is drawn between “them”, the aggressors who cause misery and injustice, and “us” (or in the case of NGOs “us and the victims”) by means of symbols and a specific interpretation of history.

In phase two, fear is spread through a manipulated perception of threat and danger:

“When a perceived threat is directed at a person’s self, at the very conception of who he or she is, and at all those who are like him or her, the elicited response is felt not as calculated, rational self-interest, but as bubbling hot passion, beyond or even against rational self-interest. [...] And usually the message is, ‘Do not count on the government to protect us – we are on our own.’” (Ferguson 2006:56)

In phase three, mobilisation and manipulation have extended to such degree that the masses are urged to take sides: They are confronted with the decision of whether they want to do what is “right” or “wrong” according to the ideology spread by the identerest group. “Within the hard core, organizational structures, social pressures, and controlled information create a new reality [...]”. (Ferguson 2006:56) In their daily work, NGOs make us take sides, they channel information which appals, moves and affects us, which is meant to convince us to think and act the way they want. This facilitates the recruitment of supporters. What is of vital material interest to the core members (or management of the organisation) turns into an emotionally charged

<sup>6</sup> see <https://www.womankind.org.uk/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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ideology to others and, at the same time, becomes a personal concern of the masses of supporters. At this stage, identerest groups contribute to the polarisation and division of society.

In phase four, a visible attack or a series of attacks is performed, which can happen in various ways, be it a violent outbreak or a non-violent mob meant to communicate the identerest group's messages to its supporters and self-defined enemies:

“To supporters, the message is, ‘Look how we stand up for you; this is what needs to be done!’ To the enemy the message is, ‘Whatever else you may be as a person, your life and death depend solely on the identity label we attach to you.’” (Ferguson 2006:57).

Even though this fourth stage of social conflict is only common among militant NGOs<sup>7</sup>, examples of non-militant NGOs actively engaging in violent action exist (consider, for example, Greenpeace's decades of fighting against whalers which culminated in various conflicts with the Japanese whaling vessel *Nisshin Maru* such as in 2006<sup>8</sup>, or Sea Shepherd's fight against whaling and sealing operations<sup>9</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> In 2004, the FBI classified the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), among others, as terrorist groups due to their extremist activities (see <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/animal-rights-extremism-and-ecoterrorism>, last accessed on 22.10.2018). Both are non-hierarchic non-profit NGOs.

<sup>8</sup> Both, *Nisshin Maru* and Greenpeace members hold each other accountable for the ramming and massive damage of their own ship. Remarkably, the Institute of Catacean Research (ICR) as well as Greenpeace, which are self-declared non-profit organisation, publish very antagonistic reports on their websites. While the first calls Greenpeace's practices an “illegal harassment and terrorism against ICR research” as they had included “unforgivable acts akin to terrorism that threaten human life at sea” (<http://www.icrwhale.org/gpandsea.html>, last accessed on 22.10.2018), the latter condemns the “deliberate ramming which placed the safety of our ship and the lives of our crew in severe danger”, which nevertheless would not stop them from continuing their peaceful protest (see <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/whalers-ram-greenpeace-ship/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

<sup>9</sup> The self-declared non-profit marine conservation organisation Sea Shepherd openly declares to have caused the ruining and sinking of numerous “illegally operating” vessels. Whereas Sea Shepherd maintains to act “in accordance with the UN World Charter for Nature” and accuses the whalers of being “pirates” (see <https://www.seashepherd.org.uk/news-and-commentary/news/victory-for-the-whales-in-berlin.html>, last accessed on 22.10.2018), the

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### TERRORIST VS. HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

What becomes clear from Ferguson's account is that in their modus operandi NGOs are similar to terrorist or military groups, apart from the fact that most NGOs carry out conflicts peacefully, and that as long as uneven distribution of and access to vital resources are maintained, competition, conflict and identerest groups will persist. The examples of Greenpeace's and Sea Shepherd's fights against whaling operations illustrate quite clearly that Ferguson's concept of identerest groups is as applicable to militant groups engaging in the War in Iraq as to non-governmental organisations engaging in the abolishment of animal killing. Both kinds of organisations justify their actions by a moral belief in fighting for "a higher goal", which is defined by the ideology they support.

The comparison of terrorist and humanist advocacy organisations might seem provoking from an emic point of view, because both terms are politically and symbolically charged in opposite ways. But, however different their moral positions may appear, these groups share similar characteristics. As Ferguson points out, the label "terrorism" is readily used for "others" rather than for oneself: "*Enemies* are terrorists. Few who are called terrorists think of themselves in that way. They see themselves as freedom fighters, or religious warriors – and the defenders of those who have been victimized." (2006:57), which is exactly the attitude humanitarian, environmental or animal welfare NGOs appropriate for themselves. The content of the moral ideals of terrorists and humanitarian groups might oppose each other, however, in its form of organisation and its operating behaviour these organisations are strikingly similar.<sup>10</sup> The concept of identerest groups can help us understand the mechanisms of any organised groups engaging in social

members of Sea Shepherd are called "eco terrorists" by others, including Greenpeace (see <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jan/06/japan-whaling-sea-shepherd-greenpeace>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

<sup>10</sup> In this context, it is important to consider that moral attitudes are highly relative. For example, "[w]hen nonconventional fighters attack military targets, by whatever means, they are guerrillas. When they deliberately target civilians, they are terrorists." (Ferguson 2006:58) When they raid whaler's vessels and sink them, they are probably NGO activists, one might add.

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conflict and fighting for a “better world”. In what follows I will discuss another well-known scientific concept that contributes to our understanding of how NGOs operate.

### NGOs ARE SOCIAL SUBORGANISMS

Assuming that the underlying principles of natural and social phenomena can be studied in equal ways under the name of a single science characterised by the application of scientific methods, Spencer (1967) found that biological organisms (plants, animals and humans) and social organisms (societies) behave in remarkably similar ways. I propose that such similarity also exists with NGOs, which are suborganisms of a larger social organism.

As Spencer claims for societies (he calls them “social bodies” in analogy to “living bodies”), rather than being only temporal arrangements of individuals they are durable and persisting entities and therefore deserve to be named “organisms”. As such they behave as living bodies, inasmuch as even though individual parts might cease to exist and new parts start to form, the organism itself lives on.

“By a catastrophe the life of the aggregate may be destroyed without immediately destroying the lives of all its units, while, on the other hand, if no catastrophe abridges it, the life of the aggregate is far longer than the lives of its units” (Spencer 1967:6).

He finds this to be true not only for biological organisms but also for social organisms:

“Governing bodies, general and local, ecclesiastical corporations, armies, institutions of all orders down to guilds, clubs, philanthropic associations, etc., show us a continuity of life exceeding that of the persons constituting them” (Spencer 1967:7).

The same goes for NGOs: People working and engaging in such organisations may quit, they may change their minds, stop donating money or engaging in political activities, resign or die whereas the organisation as organism stays alive by replacing its workers, looking for other projects and recruiting new donors. Despite the change or loss of individual parts, the integrity of the organism is maintained, because it is more than simply the sum of its parts, albeit its composing parts exist if, and only if, the organism exists as a whole. When individual parts unite new dynamics emerge and different principles apply, which is scientifically known as the

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result of emergence<sup>11</sup>. The world cannot be known as sum of its parts but must be understood in its integrity. We therefore need a holistic approach if we want to understand social phenomena.

### THE LAWS OF EVOLUTION

The characteristics Spencer finds to be true for any “living organism” can be applied to NGOs as one specific kind of social organism: During evolution, these organisms tend to grow, whereby their structure becomes more complex and differentiated so that its subgroups or subunits become more divided and more numerous (see Spencer 1967:3). Just as it is with societies, in NGOs a differentiation of structures brings about an increasing division of labour which implies a differentiation of functions being exercised by different parts, each fulfilling certain needs. Another characteristic trait is that evolution causes mutual dependencies between divisions and subdivisions, each relying on the work of others (see Spencer 1967:4). Another law Spencer describes holds that social organisms grow as a result of competition with other similar organisms. Whether or not an NGO is able to succeed in this competition not only depends on its inner workings. Only if it constantly adapts to the infrastructure that conditions its existence, it manages to maintain itself alive.

We may conclude that growth is enabled by the adaptation to external factors, which is a common law of evolution. Whenever organisms are exposed to similar external conditions they tend to unite, which raises the chances to survive.

“Small aggregates only can hold together while cohesion is feeble, and successively larger aggregates become possible only as the greater strains implied are met by that greater cohesion which results from an adapted human nature and a resulting development of social organization.” (Spencer 1967:78f)

<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon relates to the fact that the properties of the whole cannot be deduced from the properties of its parts. Whenever an organism grows it becomes more complex and its parts more integrated, and new characteristics evolve that are not necessarily similar to the characteristics of the whole. Emergence occurs not only in phenomena usually studied in the natural sciences, but also in social phenomena.

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As a side effect, when the size of a social organism increases, it becomes more integrated and organised, which is a prerequisite for cooperation. At the same time, its units become more and more dependent upon each other.

### THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL CONDITIONS

The way NGOs operate and function depends on their size, which again is determined by external conditions. Global capitalism<sup>12</sup> makes it possible for organisations to gain potentially unlimited growth and enables them to exploit resources (patrons, donors, partners, funds, projects, sites, partners) worldwide. As more and more people are exposed to similar external conditions and at the same time connected through modern means of communication, we see that they become more alike in terms of consumption, knowledge, interests and worldviews. Therefore, the similarity of external material conditions plays a vital role for the spread of NGOs. Spencer's description of how social organisms function is crucial for understanding how NGOs work as organisms within and across larger social organisms ("societies") that he compares to living systems. Conceptualising NGOs this way can help us analyse why they behave in certain ways and not in others. But before arriving at their analysis, let us see under which conditions these organisms emerged and spread around the world, and how they have conventionally been studied within the social sciences. In the following section, I will demonstrate under which ideological and material conditions these organisms initially evolved.

<sup>12</sup> Even though "global capitalism", just as "democracy" or "neoliberalism", is an emic term marked by political movements and linked to ideas of social (in)justice, I will use this term here in a neutral way to refer to an expanding economic system based on financial markets and the principles of scarcity, private ownership, capital accumulation and competition.

## 2.2. The spread of global humanitarianism

*“Our culture is infused today by the idea that when confronted with the suffering of distant strangers, one has to intervene and do something.”*

*(Stamatov 2013:176)*

As a part of his research on comparative and historical sociology and international networks, Stamatov provides a detailed macrosociological account on how humanitarianism has originated and expanded around Europe during the last five hundred years. Even though he does not follow the paradigm of science, from his detailed descriptions of historical events we can detect various cause-effect relationships that explain why humanitarianism came into being and why it turned into what it is today: a dominant Western ideology, and at the same time the ideological foundation of the practices of NGOs. “Global humanitarianism” is an institutionalised form of (see Stamatov 2013:1).

This solidarity with distant strangers is in no way a “naturally given” phenomenon, but rather a very specific feature of Western culture that has developed since colonial times. Stamatov’s findings are therefore highly compatible with the evidence put forward by Heinrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) who highlight the strong bias of research on Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies. According to their findings, much of the knowledge about human behaviour that we think of as “universal” is derived from data stemming nearly exclusively from WEIRD societies. Their main observations are as follows:

“(1) The database in the behavioural sciences is drawn from an extremely narrow slice of human diversity; and (2) behavioural scientists routinely assume, at least implicitly, that their findings from this narrow slice generalize to the species.” (Heinrich et al. 2010:63)

Thus, what is true for WEIRD societies is often erroneously presented as a human universal rather than a culture-specific feature of a particularly small part of humanity.

Similarly, Stamatov identifies humanitarianism to be a very specific rather than a universal feature of human culture: He locates the early beginnings of this ideology and political practice in times of European colonialism, more precisely in the counteraction and protest of radical

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Dominican Catholics against the inhumane treatment of non-Europeans in the Americas and the Caribbean in the sixteenth century. Even though global humanitarianism might have become more dominant within recent processes of globalisation and the development of mass media and new communication technologies, which provide highly effective and affordable means and tools for spreading their message and recruiting resources, it is in no way a present phenomenon, but goes back to social conflicts in the colonies. Whether looking at past or present forms of long-distance advocacy, Stamatov finds that its mechanisms are highly similar: “The general pattern is remarkably uniform: an initial nucleus of ‘issue entrepreneurs’ discover the problem and then turn to pre-existing organizations to elicit wider support.” (2013:10) Also religious groups proclaiming humanitarian ethics originally contributed to the development of the modern form of NGOs (see Davies 2013:pp.21). Religion has played and continues to play a crucial role in advocating human rights and justice, which is reflected in the high number of church-based NGOs in self-proclaimed “secular” European countries.

### HUMANISTIC VS. SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

In looking back to crucial historical events, Stamatov tries to find answers to the questions why and how long-distance advocacy has become an integral part of modern life. Even though his aim is similar to mine, his approach is a humanistic one: He finds the set of roles and practices of long-distance advocacy to be a reiterating cognitive pattern of social interaction located in the minds of individuals and “an institution of Western modernity” (see Stamatov 2013:11-13). Due to his focus on behavioural and cognitive patterns he however fails to *explain* why these patterns repeatedly come up in specific parts of the world at specific times. He does not take into account the non-human external factors that engender the reiteration of this ideology and the practices linked to it. Rather, he states that past cultural models of practices influenced later religious struggles and argues that the remarkable similarity of advocacy practices throughout history can only be described in the following way: “The institutional model that crystallized out of religious struggles provided a set of ‘ready-made’ tools of action that subsequent adopters could use” (Stamatov 2013:22). Others (see for example Keck/Sikkink 1998) emphasise the network character of long-distance advocacy mobilisation, however, neither do they provide an answer to the question *why* these networks came into existence.



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### THE CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

Despite ignoring cause-effect mechanisms, Stamatov's account on the history of global humanitarianism is nevertheless important for our purpose of analysis because it shows in which context long-distance advocacy came into existence, namely in times of conflict between economic, political and religious imperial networks as well as tensions within the dominant Catholic and Protestant religious organisations which gave rise to reformist movements. Stamatov finds that social conflict is connected to the formation of global humanitarianism in numerous events throughout history:

“It [this conflict pattern] connects as if in a common thread the first denunciation of Spanish abuses by Dominicans in sixteenth-century Hispaniola and the principled stance of Catholic priests, missionaries, and Quakers against violence in Central America as late as the 1980s. In the centuries in-between, the pattern repeated itself many times in both Catholic and Protestant territories as representatives of an intensified religious orientation rose in defense of the rights of subjugated non-Europeans.” (Stamatov 2013:20)

Global humanitarianism evolved at a time when Europe was gaining political and economic importance. While individualism and human liberties and rights were promoted in Europe, in the overseas colonies indigenous people were subject to exploitation and foreign control. This exploitation stood in strong contrast with the ideological principles of that time, which eventually led to outrage within the Catholic church. With the conquest of Hispaniola as the very first Iberian colony in the Americas, expansionist imperialism had taken on a new dimension and marked the beginning not only of Spanish conquest in the Americas, but also of a new kind of ethics as one of its consequences, namely the solidarity of Europeans with distant strangers: “And if this conflict was the product of the differentiation proper, it also generated [...] something distinctively new” (Stamatov 2013:21). What Stamatov deliberately puts into words corresponds with other theories on social conflict: As Simmel (1964) has already pointed out, social conflict creates integration through solidarity and establishes or consolidates identity lines. Social conflict has a unifying character and leads to the assignment of positions thereby adjusting or maintaining systems of stratification: “Conflict [...] revitalizes existent norms and creates a new framework of norms within which the contenders can struggle.” (Coser 1956:125) Similarly, social conflict between religious affiliates engaged in colonisation led to a new ethics: the ethics of humanitarianism.

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### CULTUROLOGICAL VERSUS PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

Even though religious criticism of inhumane treatment had been formulated before (i.e. in the late eighth and thirteenth century), with European expansionism this kind of ideology had taken on a new form: put into practice, the advocacy was directed at the salvation of distant strangers living in until then unknown lands (see Stamatov 2013:pp.27). The ethics of saving oppressed non-Europeans evolved in sharp contrast to the then dominant ethics of imperial capitalist expansion and exploitation of natural resources (especially gold), mainly consisting of political expansion through warfare and the accumulation of wealth:

“Within the limitations of a decidedly Christian worldview, the Dominicans championed a position in which the exploited ‘Indians’ were not considered a nearly subhuman source of labor and wealth, but souls in need of salvation and, ultimately, fellow human beings whose welfare must be taken seriously” (Stamatov 2013:36).

Despite numerous attempts, it had taken centuries until slavery was finally abolished and indigenous and Africans were granted equal rights to European settlers in the colonies, which underpins the fact that cultural change is slow. White has already pointed to the different ways of explaining slavery as a culturological or psychological phenomenon:

“The institution of slavery has often been interpreted as the outcome of man’s inherent tendencies to commit aggressions upon others – of ‘man’s inhumanity to man.’ [...] We know, however, that the institution of slavery has not been universal by any means.” (White 1949:127)

As evidence shows that slavery has not existed before the Neolithic and does not exist everywhere, White concludes that slavery is clearly a cultural phenomenon (see White 1949:127). Neither a psychological interpretation of slavery nor a psychological explanation of its extinction withstands scientific scrutiny. White argues that the only way slavery can be scientifically explained and understood is through its cultural embeddedness:

“Slavery as an institution will exist and endure only when the master can derive profit and advantage by exploiting the slave. [...] Slavery did not exist during the hundreds of thousands of years before Neolithic times because culture had not developed sufficiently to make it possible for a producer to be more than self-supporting. There certainly would be no point – even if it were possible – in one tribe of savages enslaving another if the latter required all that they were able to produce in order to subsist. Consequently, we find no

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slavery in early periods of human history, nor in the modern world, among peoples on low levels of technological development. But when in the course of cultural evolution the productivity of human labor was sufficiently increased by technological progress so as to make exploitation profitable and advantageous, the institution of slavery came into being.” (White 1949:128)

There is strong evidence that slavery is mainly caused by material imperatives and makes sense only as long as it is compatible with the cultural organism it is embedded in. It exists as long as the work of human slaves is more profitable than the one of machines (see White 1949:129). With a change of material conditions comes a change in ideology.

It is plausible that long-distance advocacy (for saving humans, animals or our climate) is a direct outcome of a change in infrastructure, namely the spread of capitalism around the colonies, which becomes clear from Stamatov's historical account. The claim for universal human rights correlated with an economic system based on the exploitation of indigenous and African slaves by the Spanish governors and settlers. Today, the idealist proclamation of “changing the world” correlates with intense exploitation, global inequalities and climate change on an infrastructural level. How do these seemingly opposing levels of culture – its superstructure and its infrastructure – fit together? And why did the ideological component of the dominant European culture spread before industrial capitalism did?

### THE LAW OF CULTURAL DOMINANCE

Both, the spread of a humanist worldview as well as the spread of capitalism are result of European expansionism. The intention of both secular and religious groups of settlers in the overseas territories was to spread their own beliefs and practices. Sahlins and Service suggest that this expansionist attitude is typical of more advanced<sup>13</sup> cultures:

<sup>13</sup> In terms of general evolution theory, the expression “more advanced” refers to the stages of cultural progress, not to a moral judgment. A higher cultural of cultural evolution results from technological improvements and the harnessing of new sources of energy (see Sahlins/Service 1973:pp.33). Advanced cultures have a high capacity to adapt to a range of different (natural and superorganic) environments. Therefore, these cultures tend to be more dominant and expansionist (see Sahlins/Service 1973:pp.70). The spread of Western Culture in former colonies is but one example of this dominance. Cultural evolution eventually leads to a “greater convergence and consequent

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“Higher cultural forms tend to dominate and replace lower, and the range of dominance is proportionate to the degree of progress. So modern national culture tends to spread around the globe, before our eyes replacing, transforming, and extinguishing representatives of millenia-old stages of evolution, while archaic civilization, now also falling before this advance, even in its day was confined to certain sectors of the continents.” (Sahlins/Service 1973:37)

This kind of ideological dominance – the spread of one’s own values, beliefs and moral principles – is made possible by a culture’s power of harnessing ever more quantities of energy, as Sahlins and Service explain: “[T]he more energy and habitats a culture masters, the more man becomes convinced of his own control of destiny and the more he seems to proclaim his anthropocentric view [...]” (1973:pp.37). This is true for European culture, which was, according to the definition, more technologically advanced than the culture of the colonies. In this case, the humanist ideology spread before capitalism became the dominant mode of production. In formulating his Law of Cultural Dominance, Kaplan tries to explain why the spread of ideology usually proceeds the one of technology:

“The more advanced the cultural type the more complex is the technology. In the most advanced cultures of the present day the technological base has become an enormously complex affair, requiring sizable amounts of capital, specialized skills, organization, and great quantities of raw materials to develop it and keep it going – all of which means that it can be transmitted across cultural boundaries only with the greatest difficulty. Ideological elements, on the other hand, even those of the most advanced cultures can be carried across cultural boundaries with relative ease.” (Sahlins/Service 1973:89)

A second reason lies in the active hindering of the spread of technological advance in order to maintain one’s own dominance:

“All of the European colonial powers [...] used their political, financial and economic power to prevent, or at least slow down as far as possible, the spread of industrialism to the

homogeneity of culture type; accompanied by a decrease in the variety of cultures” (Sahlins/Service 1973:73). A great number of NGOs such as Native Planet, Survival International, IWGIA or *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* (GfbV), all of which are based in Europe or the USA, have explicitly made the preservation of indigenous cultures their main objective.

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less advanced countries under their political control because they were primarily interested in markets and sources of raw materials and not in creating manufacturing competitors.” (Sahlins/Service 1973:89)

While the free development of industrial capitalism was politically prevented as far as possible in the colonies, the ideological groundwork was set by colonial settlers. However, secular and religious settler groups differed in the approach towards how this “ideological conquest” would be best accomplished. The non-violent form of conquest proclaimed by religious settlers was just a different form of Iberian expansionism meant to increase the number of group members through a conversion to their faith. But it also enabled the political administration and economic exploitation of the colonies and its people. This could be accomplished most effectively by spreading the ideology and political system attached to industrial capitalism while preventing the technological spread itself (see Sahlins/Service 1973:90). The advocacy work of NGOs and their claim to “change the world” are elements of an ideology which is characteristic of dominant cultures.

### FIGHTING FOR PEACE

As we can see from various examples, this ideological expansionist character is still present in the patterns of long-distance advocacy today: Just as religious groups in the colonies argued for universal human rights, today's NGOs similarly spread their faith in democracy, peace, equal rights, liberties, emancipation, biodiversity, protection of the environment, etc. Their fight for a “better world” is based on the assumption that the world should be as they want it to be – just as Catholic groups initiated the conversion of people to what they believed was right.

However, from a scientific point of view no moral universals exist. Ideology is always ethnocentric as it varies according to cultural contexts. Therefore, we have to analyse under which conditions a certain ideology evolves and spreads. The ethnocentric character of moral beliefs and practices is the reason why ideology is highly conflicting with science. As the history of global humanitarianism shows, the spread of Catholic faith within the colonies could best be achieved through the expansion of an ideology that is based on the belief that all humans are equal (in this particular case rather: equally susceptible to be saved by the word of God): “The emphasis on preaching in Dominican evangelism was coupled with the assumption that the ‘heathen’ were rational thinkers who could be persuaded through logical argument” (Stamatov 2013:70). In a similar way, NGOs embrace humanism as their dominant ideology to spread

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their “word” and conduct their missions. The mindset characteristic for today’s humanitarianism result most clearly when considering NGO’s approaches to converting others to their own faith, for example the Association of Women’s Rights in Development (WRID)<sup>14</sup>, which strives to promote the emancipation of women worldwide (for an elaboration of today’s definitions on what doing good means in the context of NGOs, see Chapter 4). Their mindset is highly compatible with the one of Catholic religion, as both follow similar (humanist) principles.

As we have seen so far, the origins of the humanitarian ideology are deeply rooted in imperialism: “Dominicans’ protests of the 1510s were the first systematic condemnation of the fundamental structures of an emerging predatory overseas imperialism” (Stamatov 2013:44). The universality of this connection becomes clear when looking at other regions: After this first time of pro-indigenist protest, similar patterns of protest showed up in different colonial sites in Brazil, Peru, Chile and the Philippines, led by members of various religious orders, among them the Augustinians, the Jesuits and the Society of Jesus. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the idea that people all over the world share the same kind of human nature was adopted by more and more religious reformers who increasingly engaged in political activism (see Stamatov 2013:51). Despite their efforts and repetitive memorials to the Pope and leading political figures, in which they insisted on the equal treatment of Europeans and non-Europeans, however, religious activist groups were not able to stop the abuses committed against the indigenous population by colonial settlers and other religious friars.

### CONSISTENCY WITH CULTURAL MATERIALISM

The similarity of conflicts that aroused in numerous colonial sites is compatible with the explanatory framework of cultural materialism: similar material conditions make similar ideological mindsets more likely. As long as slavery represented a lucrative business, the critique of slavery remained insignificant until a powerful international antislavery network emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup> (see Stamatov 2013:79). Until then, defenders of a humanitarian position remained in a weak position and non-Europeans in overseas colonies continued to be considered

<sup>14</sup> see <https://www.awid.org/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>15</sup> Among the first institutionalised humanitarian organisations are the “Aborigines Protection Society” founded by the Quaker Thomas Hodgkin in 1837 and the “British and Foreign Antislavery Society” founded in 1839 and

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“less than fully human beings” (Stamatov 2013:89). However, this changed when the mode of production, i.e. the infrastructural conditions changed. The history of global humanitarianism exemplifies that a change in material conditions leads to a change in ideology (see White 1959). Davies specifies this change in infrastructural conditions, which gave way to the development of transnational civil society:

“The period coincides broadly with the duration of the first Industrial Revolution, and the political revolutions of the 1770s-1790s, 1830 and 1848, each of which [...] was to have a significant impact on the development of transnational civil society. This phase was shaped by the political effects of Enlightenment thought [...]. It was also characterized by significant social transformation, including urbanization and the emergence in industrializing countries of a refashioned class system centred around the bourgeois-proletarian divide.”  
(Davies 2013:24)

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the transition from religious orders and secret societies to the current form of NGOs, meaning specialised, secularised and diversified internationally working organisations, developed in multiple countries (see Davies 2013:23,40). Despite of its humanitarian origins, NGOs have diversified across the globe, and are today engaging in a wide range of different topics.

The history of NGOs is a history of changing material conditions and ideological change. This is why ethics, values, beliefs and practices promoted by (civil or religious) activist groups transformed over time. For example, NGOs engaging in advocating women's rights evolved in the 1920s<sup>16</sup> (during the first wave of feminism) and multiplied extensively from the 1960s onwards (during the second wave of feminism), especially those consisting of women's business and

operating under the name “Anti-Slavery International” today. Stamatov identifies the “World Antislavery Convention” taking place in 1840 in London as the first international humanitarian conference of civil long-distance advocacy (see 2013:178-180).

<sup>16</sup> Among the women's NGOs founded before and during the 1920s are the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace in 1915 (then called Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), the International Co-operative Women's Guild in 1921 and the Associated Country Women of the World in 1929 (see David 2013:83-92).

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professional associations. “The following decade, however, saw international women’s mobilization transformed. [...] New women’s INGOs were also dedicated to an increasingly broad range of issues, such as development, domestic violence and the environment” (see Davies 2013:146). In his analysis of second wave feminism in the US, Harris has already shown the spread of feminist activism to be a consequence of women’s increasing integration into the capitalist mode of production (see Harris 1987:76-97).

### THE AFTERMATHS OF COLONIALISM

From a general standpoint, since the beginnings of industrialisation, the dominant mode of production has been changing towards a service-oriented global capitalism. The aim to “give voice to the otherwise voiceless imperial subjects” (Stamatov 2013:65) and to question the legitimacy of Western expansionism is based on the enormous economic inequality between the West and its former colonies. Cheap labour and the exploitation of natural resources are still required in a global capitalist mode of production. The economies of countries assigned to the Global South depend heavily on Western companies, consumers and institutions (such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund) who provide them with loans and humble sources of income. The aftermaths of the balance of power established during colonialism continue to affect peoples’ lives: The exploitation of raw materials as well as labourers in sweatshops, on farms and other production sites in the former colonies are still common phenomena and emblematic of today’s global capitalism.

Stamatov points to the fact that humanitarianism evolved out of the moral duality of imperialism in which different mindsets were applied to European and non-Europeans. The large gap between the proclamation of human rights and liberties in Europe and exploitative practices and harsh treatment of labourers in the Americas reflects a sharp contrast between the idea of a common humanity on the one hand and the assumed existence of “unbridgeable differences” (Stamatov 2013:88) between peoples on the other hand. Today, stark differences between the so-called “First” and the geographically distant “Third World” as well as the fundamental principle of humanism – namely the idea that all humans are equal – predominate the discourse of NGOs whose lobbying activities, critique and political protests are based on the persisting (economic, legal, social) inequalities between these “worlds”.



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### HUMANITARIAN ETHICS

The existence of the unity of mankind is one basic principle of humanitarian ethics which makes slavery and all other forms of human subordination and exploitation unacceptable. This strong moral claim was originally formulated by small religious groups who initiated negotiation and condemned European's crimes committed first against Indigenous people and then against African slaves (see Stamatov 2013:114) Similar claims are made by today's NGOs. Activities aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of distant strangers (humans and other living beings) constitute an integral part of the work of faith-based and secular NGOs who – in contrast to earlier institutionalised humanitarian organisations – can now spread their message more efficiently by means of mass communication technologies. As a principle of every ideology, the moral concept of right and wrong, good and evil is permeated by a superior faith; namely the idea that all humans deserve to be respected in their rights and dignity (for a more detailed description of the ideology spread by NGOs, see Chapter 4).

The morals and practices of humanitarian action institutionalised in eighteenth century abolitionism are widely applied by diverse organisations and their supporters today. However, with changing structural and material conditions, the humanist ideology of “saving others”, be it humans living in other parts of the planet, animals or the environment, has developed throughout the centuries: Today, it is spread through different channels – religious and civil society associations, the media, intergovernmental organisations like the UN, political parties, even international corporations proclaiming human dignity and human rights – and thus has become an integral part of today's global capitalist world. Its morals and values are widely proclaimed by NGOs getting involved in an ever greater variety of different issues. It has become a cultural trait; something so normal that even in Austria, a nation state which was never a colonial power, it is now taken for granted.

### 2.3. A quantitative approach to NGOs

In the previous section we have seen that NGOs have a long history and are deeply embedded in the cultural environment of humanism, which makes them in many cases much older than the nation states they are located in (see Martens 2002:27). According to the Union of International Associations, approximately 400 international non-governmental organisations existed in 1914 (see Davies 2013:19). Today, there is a general consensus that their number has increased enormously within the last hundred years, but little agreement on how many NGOs exist in the world (see Lewis 2014). Martens points to the fact that their number increased most significantly after the two World Wars, whereas it slightly decreased before periods of military conflict (see Martens 2002:28).

The number of existing has risen continuously, especially since the 1980s (see Martens 2002:29). Today, 4,990 NGOs with consultative status are registered at the UN<sup>17</sup>, which enables them to actively participate in decision-making processes. However, only registered NGOs can participate in the UN, and far not all non-governmental organisations (especially small associations and action groups) apply for registration at the UN, which means that their total number is indeed much higher. As Gosselin and LeBlanc (2016:183) point out, with special regards to case studies in West Africa, the number of faith-based NGOs has also increased significantly.

#### QUANTITATIVE VS. QUALITATIVE MEASURES

Can we measure the significance of NGOs by exclusively looking at numbers and figures? Truly, statistics can reveal general macro-tendencies, however, they do not provide us with insight on the impact of these NGOs. By considering the mere number of NGOs, it could be argued, we cannot measure whether membership affiliation or the success of humanitarian projects run by them have increased or not.

However, when comparing these figures to other nation-based studies about the non-profit sector, we see that the findings are strikingly similar, which points to a general pattern of development: In their statistical study, Simsa and Schober (2012:3) highlight the fact that the number

<sup>17</sup> see <http://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do?method=search&sessionCheck=false> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

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of associations in Austria has increased steadily and has nearly triplicated within the last 50 years, reaching 116,556 in 2010.

When looking at statistics, we are confronted with another issue: not every non-profit association is a self-declared NGO, even though most of them are. However, as we are interested here in general tendencies and cause-effect relationships that indicate general laws of culture, we will try to identify general patterns. Therefore, let us have a brief look on recent developments in Austria's non-profit sector, the so-called "third sector"<sup>18</sup>, in which NGOs typically operate. As it will become apparent below, research on Austria's non-profit sector point to a general tendency: the rise of non-governmental non-profit organisations.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF AUSTRIA'S NON-PROFIT SECTOR

In their statistical study, Pennerstorfer et al. (2015) find the following patterns to be characteristic of Austria's non-profit sector: First, most members working for non-profit organisations are non-self-employed. Second, each of these organisations has on average 56 employees. Third, around 78.6% of employees are women. This third fact largely corresponds with the current cultural imperatives which promote women's engagement in service- and care-related activities. As findings from various studies show, socialisation has a deep impact on the career choice of men and women. For example, gender differences within animal rights activism are connected to the socialisation of girls which tends to focus more on caring and nurturing (see Galvin/Herzog 1992, Herzog et al. 1991). Fourth, less than a third of employees are full-time workers while

<sup>18</sup> According to the European System of Accounts, this term refers to private organisations which qualify as non-market producers (which means that their revenues cover 50% or less of current expenses) and non-governmental (which means they are neither controlled nor to a large degree financed by the state). On the other hand, the UN Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts defines NPOs as private organisations with a self-determined field of activity based on voluntary membership that invest profits into attaining their objectives (see Haider et al. 2008). Simsa and Schober (2012:3) define NPOs as non-governmental associations (which means they are not administered by the state) marked by a certain degree of formal organisation, which do not distribute profits among members or proprietors and which are characterised by at least a minimum of self-administration and voluntary work. Most of them exist as associations, some as foundations and others as corporations or cooperatives. Pennerstorfer et al. (2015) divide Austria's non-profit sector into different categories such as research and development, education, social and cultural sector, health care and arts, among others.

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most of them (around 70%) work part time. Fifth, between 60% and 75% of all non-profit-organisations are partly run by volunteers. Simsa and Schober have already come to very similar conclusions in their study in 2012, showing that within Austria's non-profit sector only around 5.2% of all workers are employed on a contract basis (see Simsa/Schober 2012:4). Nevertheless, the number of people working in non-profit organisations is striking: In 2006, around 27.9% of Austria's total population have been actively involved in the work of NPOs, mostly in the field of disaster relief, culture, sports and religion (see Simsa/Schober 2012:pp.5). Statistics show that the number of people working for NPOs as volunteers and employees has risen steadily since 2008 (see Pennerstorfer et al 2013:pp.39).

All these figures point to the fact that the non-profit sector has become a highly successful economic field. Total revenues of Austria's non-profit organisations amounted to 3.46 billion euro in 2005<sup>19</sup>, most of which, interestingly, originated from public authorities (53%) (see Pennerstorfer et al. 2013 and Simsa/Schober 2012). This makes them neither non-governmental nor non-profit-oriented organisations from an etic point of view. 5.9 billion euro gross value have been generated by these organisations in 2010, which points to a significant increase within the previous decade (see Simsa/Schober 2012:8). Due to financial hardships following the 2008 financial crisis and the outsourcing of public services to NPOs, Simsa and Schober expect that competition will become fiercer and boundaries between profit and non-profit entities will blur (Simsa/Schober 2012:pp.12). Others (for example see Badelt et al.2007) suggest that NPOs will have to adapt to market structures and measure up to profit-based organisations in terms of performance and expenses to survive in the future.

### GENERAL TENDENCIES WITHIN AUSTRIA AND EUROPE

From the figures we have considered so far, the significant rise of NGOs and their adaptation to market structures (especially when considering flexible workforce and part-time employment) have become evident. These tendencies are supported by Austria's 2016 annual fundraising report, according to which donations have nearly doubled within the last decade as the result of a continuous increase (see Fundraising Verband Austria 2016). In 2016, a total sum of 625

<sup>19</sup> According to estimations, these total revenues have risen to more than 4 billion euro in 2013 (see Pennerstorfer et al. 2013:30).

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million euro has been collected, mostly for children's welfare, animal welfare and disaster relief (Fundraising Verband Austria 2016). 64% of all Austrian citizens donated on average 122 euro in 2016. If we consider how much money is donated at which times of the year and for which aims we can see that fundraising behaviour is culturally embedded: According to the donation index provided by Fundraising Verband Austria (2016), donations increase shortly after media reports on humanitarian catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters and during Christmas time, in which nearly one third of annual donations are collected, whereas fundraising goals vary from region to region.

The fact that humanitarian practices are culturally embedded becomes also clear when considering behavioural patterns throughout Europe: around 40 billion euro have been donated in 2016, however, fundraising activity varies enormously from country to country. Within Europe, people in the UK, Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands donate the most on average (between €130 and €260), roughly ten times the amount that is collected in the Czech Republic (around €19). Statistics point to another general characteristic of fundraising behaviour within the European Union: the fact that less and less individuals donate more and more (see Fundraising Verband Austria 2016), which indicates an economic divide in society and corresponds with the growth of social inequalities taking place around the world.

### PHILANTHROPY WORLDWIDE

Considering the amount of donations made every year, Austria's largest NGOs are Caritas, Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz, SOS Kinderdorf, Ärzte ohne Grenzen and Dreikönigsaktion. Two of the three NGOs selected for analysis (see Chapter 4) are included in the list of Austria's hundred largest NGOs in terms of revenues: In 2015, Greenpeace, ranking on place 8, collected a total sum of about €12.21 million, while VGT, ranking on place 77, collected about €1,02 million euro (see Fundraising Verband Austria 2016). Oxfam, which has no regional office in Austria and therefore it is not included in the list, ranks among the largest NGOs worldwide engaging in development cooperation (see Morton 2013:346).

From an international standpoint, the USA are topping the list: In 2015 around 340 billion euro have been donated, which corresponds to more than €1000 per citizen and results from a constant rise within the previous six years (see Fundraising Verband Austria 2016). Along with the rise of donations, more and more intermediary organisation have emerged, most of which also call themselves NGOs. The international network Transnational Giving Europe (TGE), which

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functions as an intermediary between potential donors and NPOs, offers access to around 350 certified non-profit organisations within Europe, thereby promoting their mission of “enabling philanthropy across Europe”<sup>20</sup>. In 2015, it has promoted around 4500 donations of 2,9 million euro in total. Other international charity associations which engage in the promotion of so-called philanthropy advice and services, such as the Charities Aid Foundation based in the United Kingdom and Stiftung Philanthropie Österreich, similarly function as intermediaries between charities and individuals or companies. CAF has established a World Giving Index to measure giving behaviour around the world, with which it “seeks to create an inclusive culture of generosity and envisions a world where everyone gives” (CAF 2017:7). Its self-declared mission is “to motivate society to give ever more effectively and help transform lives and communities around the world” (CAF 2017:5). Thus, donating money to charities has become a publicly advertised activity, in which not only individuals but also more and more profit-oriented companies engage: About 73 percent of all Austrian companies have presented themselves charitable by donating money, goods or personnel (see Fundraising Verband Austria 2016). It has become common practice among companies to overtly support one or more charities.

As we have seen so far, NGOs today are highly specialised, complex nationally or internationally operating organisms embedded in a specific cultural framework. They have grown enormously in number and in size, and with them their intermediaries, some of which work on a global level. To survive, they have to recruit funds and working staff effectively, engage in fierce competition with other NGOs, thereby adapting constantly to the material conditions of global capitalism, which demands cheap and flexible labour. In the next section, I will critically examine approaches that have generally been adopted in the social sciences when studying NGOs.

<sup>20</sup><http://www.transnationalgiving.eu/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

## 2.4. Academic debates on NGOs

After the historical outline of the origins of humanitarianism and current developments of NGOs, I will provide an overview of the rather short history of academic debates on the issue to address the question how NGOs have been discussed so far. Due to the restricted scope of the present thesis, this overview is by no means complete. Neither is it limited to the anthropological discipline. Rather, it shall outline some ways in which NGOs have been studied and highlight a few theoretical and practical problems that arise from the research here presented.

Since the 1990s, the social sciences have increasingly addressed NGOs as social phenomena (see Frantz 2002:51). Lewis even writes of an “explosion of academic and practical literature over the past few decades” (2014:4). They have been discussed in a myriad of different ways, so that some researchers have arrived at the conclusion that a general debate is hardly possible: “NGOs operate in so many contexts and roles that it is difficult to generalize about them” (Choudry 2013:3). Most academic literature focuses on the roles NGOs take as actors within world politics and international development and on the questions who they represent and whether or not they are democratic (see for example Willetts 2011). However, recent debates on NGOs discuss the questions how they operate (see Lewis 2014) and whether or not they actually have the potential to contribute meaningfully to policy- und development-related topics (see for example Bebbington et al. 2008).

Despite of the abundant literature on NGOs, researchers have not come to terms with a uniform definition of what a non-governmental-organisation actually is<sup>21</sup>. Some refer to it as a “promotional group, which seeks to influence political decision-making on certain issues at global level” (Arts 1998:50), others consider NGOs to be “professional, non-profit, non-membership inter-

<sup>21</sup> The Union of International Associations (UIA), an NGO founded in 1907 with the aim of documenting international organisations around the world, has established a set of criteria for defining NGOs. According to these criteria, such organisation must have international members, funds and activities (in at least three states), a freely elected executive committee, permanent workers and an established headquarter, it must work independently of the influence of others (especially states or members of only one state) and be founded by private initiative (see Martens 2002:33).

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mediary organisations which are independent of the state and which undertake a range of activities in order to further development objectives” (Bebbington/Mitlin 1996:83), thereby making “NGO” a very heterogeneous and imprecise term despite of its wide use within the academic field. Davies (2013:20) even considers religious orders (such as the Order St. John, founded in the 11th century) and missionary societies (such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded in 1698) to be early forms of NGOs.

The UN has officially coined the term “non-governmental organisation” in 1945 in the United Nations Charter for a future cooperation of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and NGOs<sup>22</sup> (see Willetts 2011:pp.6 and Martens 2002:31). Since then, it has been integrated in political, academic and public discourse, which is why the UN are generally taken as a reference when trying to find an overall definition:

“If we are considering NGOs in global politics, then the only reasonable basis to proceed is to ask what organizations the UN accepts or refuses to accept as NGOs. This is not just because the UN itself is the primary focus of a great deal of NGO political activity but also because UN policy and practice have been a major influence on all other international organizations.” (Willetts 2011:3)

In fact, no single widely recognised definition exists. The rather inconsistent use of the designation highlights its emic character and impedes a systematic study of such organisations.

As the lack of definitional uniformity already indicates, NGOs have been discussed in very different ways within the social sciences, depending on the traditional fields of research of each discipline. Within international relations and international development, the question of legitimacy was raised, e.g. whether or not NGOs functioned as legitimate advocates and represented

<sup>22</sup> Though, the term was vaguely defined and had a rather different meaning than today. Originally, it included all kinds of private (international) organisations in contrast to intergovernmental and governmental organisations (see Willetts 2011:7). For being granted either “general consultative status” or “special consultative status”, or for being listed on the “roster” these organisations have to deal with issues concerning at least one of the UN organisations (see Martens 2002:32). The lack of definition makes its scientific operationalisation a difficult endeavour and reflects a widespread problem in the social sciences: “The continuing failure to agree on the meaning of [...] concepts is a reflection of their unoperational status and constitutes a great barrier to the development of scientific theories of social and cultural life.” (Harris 1980:15)



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the interests of civil society. Furthermore, questions of the role and participation as well as the effects and relevance of these organisations (especially in political decision-making and problem-solving) were addressed (see Frantz 2002:pp.53), mostly in case studies of particular NGO-run activities.

Most research attaches to NGOs the role of agenda setters, advocates, lobbyists or pressure groups, opinion leaders, intermediaries or gatekeepers (see for example Frantz 2002 and Choudry 2013). As these roles require a large degree of expertise and qualification, in other contexts NGO members are generally depicted as “experts” assuming a special role in political processes and public debates (see Frantz 2002:pp.56, 61).

As we have seen in the previous section, NGOs have not played a major role before the end of the Second World War, and their number has grown exponentially with the expansion of globalisation. At the same time, they increasingly gained prominence in academic discussion for making governmental failures and shortcomings in their roles as supervisors of the state transparent (see Frantz 2002:60), whereas the so-called “NGOisation” of social action has been critically examined by others (see for example Choudry 2013). Within the social sciences, NGOs are criticised of being “little more than businesses [...] with a hierarchical, corporate management structure” (Choudry 2013:3), because of their cooperation with government bodies, their complicity with capitalist and colonial powers, their financial dependence on the state and their lack of legitimacy. On the other hand, they are celebrated as important actors within transnational politics and defenders of the interests of civil society. Publications that focus on an evaluation of NGOs are often partial, either arguing for the importance of their work or criticising them, which reflects the moral consideration and political concerns of the editors:

“For many people, to define a non-governmental organization is to take a political position, either explicitly or implicitly. NGOs are to be admired: therefore, the term can only cover admirable organizations. Alternatively, NGOs are to be condemned, therefore the term only covers organizations with which they are familiar and other very different types of NGOs are not acknowledged.” (Willetts 2011:6)

These moral standpoints also become clear in what is written about these organisations. Some researchers celebrating the success stories of NGOs have been criticised for their partiality, a common problem Martens traces back to the fact that much academic literature has been produced by NGO members themselves (see Martens 2002:44).

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The scope of action, financing strategies and the transformation of roles of NGOs in times of globalisation are among the most widely discussed topics within the scope of third sector<sup>23</sup> research, international relations, development cooperation and globalisation. However, there is one topic that recurrently comes up when looking through academic literature: the question of social change, which is conventionally understood as induced by human actors. This question evolves around the significance of the work of such organisations: To which degree can NGOs effectively change social structures and how? Davies (2013) not only stresses the importance of the role of civil society organisations throughout history, starting around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but also argues that these organisations substantially transformed national and international history within the last two-and-a-half centuries. He supports his argument by highlighting that the major achievements of the past, such as the abolition of the slave trade or the enfranchisement of women, were accomplished by transnationally organised civil society groups, which he considers to be early non-governmental organisations (see Davies 2013:7).

The theoretical framework these and similarly dominant assumptions within the social sciences are based on, is clearly a humanistic one, which combines the principles of subjectivism, free will, individualism and particularism.<sup>24</sup> By assuming that human beings have the potential to induce change, these academic debates merely concentrate on a discussion of strategies and conditions under which the enormous potential of human beings to change the status quo may unleash. As it is apparently humans who act and decide, it is widely assumed that it is also them who may achieve significant social change. If we consider human beings to be freely acting individuals, they must be the cause of all social change.<sup>25</sup> However, this approach leaves many

<sup>23</sup> Civil society organisations such as NPOs, NCOs, NGOs and INGOs are part of the third sector, which is generally defined in the following way: “Fundamentally, the third sector can be conceptualized as a set of entities that is composed of *organizations that are self-governing, do not distribute profit, are primarily private and nongovernmental* in basic structure, and are *meaningfully voluntary*, thus likely to engage constituents on the basis of shared interest.” (Kallmann/Clark 2016:3)

<sup>24</sup> The humanistic paradigm will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup> In her thesis on ethnic conflicts in South Sudan, Schilling (2012) has found that the confusion between correlation and causation is very common in academic literature. Ethnic conflicts are commonly interpreted as the result of ethnic diversity in academic debates, while these are in fact correlations. Schilling concludes that ethnic conflicts are the outcome of a scarcity of resources rather than of ethnic heterogeneity. Additionally, in many academic

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questions unanswered: Why have global social inequalities increased enormously despite of the growing number of humanitarian NGOs (see Davies 2013) engaging in international development and helping the poor? According to a humanistic standpoint, this enormous failure is due to the wrong strategy, the lack of expertise or other opposing forces exerted by people considered politically or economically powerful.

Rather than questioning whether or not it is actually humans who can deliberately make change happen, researchers usually discuss how to make aid more effective (see for example Riddell 2007 and Banks et al. 2015). In case no improvement could be achieved, this failure is widely assumed to be the fault of external policies and restraints or the wrong strategy, which supports once more the conventional argument that NGOs must find alternative approaches and strategies rather than abandon their projects at all (see for example Bebbington et al. 2008:4). Did any NGO ever stop to exist because it had achieved its goals? The steady increase in number, size and popularity of existing NGOs shows that this is hardly the case. There is, as it seems, always a reason to go on, a need for improvement, something old or new to fight for.

What becomes clear from the academic literature just discussed is that ideological, moral and aesthetic values have been an integral part of academic research on NGOs, which results in a lack of explanations of the phenomenon so far. The ideology of humanism, so visible in much academic research, results in a confusion of science with morals, which affects research results.

As we have seen from this outline of academic debates, no universally accepted scientific standards have been systematically applied to the study of such organisations. Another problematic is the lack of a single etic definition of the term "NGO". As will be elaborated in greater detail in Chapter 3.1., we need a clear distinction of emic and etic views in scientific debate in order to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of non-governmental organisations. For this purpose, the theoretical framework of cultural materialism, which enables a macro-social analysis of the emics and etics of NGOs, will be outlined in the following chapter.

debates on the topic she finds fallacies of composition, i.e. the assumption that what is true for a unit (for example, an ethnic group) is true for its parts (members of an ethnic group).

### 3. The methods of Science

*“The goal of scientific approach is to achieve the highest possible degree of certainty about objective synthetic propositions.” (Lett 1997:42)*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, academic debates on NGOs are usually based on a humanist paradigm which has a strong influence on the social sciences. Contrary to the dominant paradigm, in this chapter I will outline the methods of science which belong to an alternative philosophy of science approach: one that seeks to understand and explain social and cultural phenomena.

Science, just as humanism, is a paradigm consisting of a set of principles that govern our perception and our mode of enquiry and enable the gathering of knowledge. It is possible to gather knowledge about the sociocultural world from a humanistic approach, as well as from a science approach. However, different approaches most often produce different results. Because of the nature of the humanistic paradigm, results most often do not fulfil the criteria needed, such as precision, rigor, objectivity and internal consistency. The science paradigm stands in sharp contrast to any subjective and highly relativistic approach suggesting that objective knowledge is impossible anyway: “Science does not deny that the pursuit of objective-propositional knowledge is a highly problematic undertaking. Instead, science merely denies that all claims to propositional knowledge are equally valid [...]” (Lett 1997:42)

The basic assumptions of science are:

1. Objective reality exists independently of our subjective perceptions<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Lett has rephrased this presupposition in his own words: “Our lives are not mere illusions, and we do not live in worlds of our own.” (Lett 1997:42)

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2. Human beings are able to explore objective reality (at least to a certain degree)<sup>27</sup>

These two presuppositions, just as the principles of any other paradigm, are in fact unprovable from a logical point of view, but they are assumed to be true<sup>28</sup>. Without such basic assumptions, no generally valid knowledge can be achieved, which is why they are vital to any paradigm. Also, they are universally accepted by researchers of any scientific field, regardless which aspect of the world it deals with, which is why science is an ancient highly unified project and must not be confined to the natural sciences. It is a universal approach of gathering systematic and reliable knowledge about how the world is and not how it should be. In order to guarantee that the highest possible accuracy is achieved, knowledge must be logical, objective, systematic and testable (see Lett 1997:44). Note that objectivity here does not mean that we must exclude our own interpretations, which are shaped by our culture and personal experiences, but follow the rules of testability and verifiability:

“The fact that there is no absolute perspective is exactly why we need a standard of scientific objectivity: because there are so many competing perspectives, we need to be able to distinguish the reliable from the unreliable ones.” (Lett 1997:46)

A propositional statement is objective if it is publicly verifiable, falsifiable and thus testable<sup>29</sup>. In order for it to be verifiable, it must be replicable, which means that it must be possible to

<sup>27</sup> Here, Lett points to the myriad scientific innovations of the twentieth century which make us understand much of the world as it is (see Lett 1997:42).

<sup>28</sup> Note that the existence of “truth” is itself linked to these propositions and can be understood as follows: “Truth can simply be defined as an agreement or correspondence between a proposition and something in the external world. As such, it becomes quite possible to attain it. In fact, it is, and has always been, the stated goal of science.” (Carneiro 1995:9)

<sup>29</sup> Harris explains this in the following way: “By testing hypotheses and accepting some as better confirmed than others, science advances toward ever more powerful and accurate theories from which predictions about increasingly wider ranges of phenomena can be made.” (Harris 1980:16) Popper formulated the difference between scientific and other ways of knowing in emphasising the criteria of falsifiability, as knowledge cannot be verified in absolute terms: “It must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience.” (Popper 2000:41)

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repeat the observation in question (see Lett 1997:47). Moral statements can neither be falsified nor tested and are therefore irrational. They are culturally specific and amendable.

It follows that all scientific knowledge is provisional, propositional and fallible rather than absolute.<sup>30</sup> Only a certain degree of objectivity can be attained in the research procedure of testing and verifying evidence: “The scientific definition of the term recognizes that complete objectivity is an ideal that can only be approximated and never attained.” (1997:46) Furthermore, scientific arguments must be logical in order to be legitimate (for an elaboration on various kinds of logical fallacies, see Lett 1997). Apart from the epistemological principles of objectivity and logic, science must be systematic. The systematic nature of science is not required in order to produce valid knowledge, but it is highly useful because it facilitates cooperation among researchers. All in all, science is “nothing more and nothing less than the systematic application of reason in the pursuit of propositional knowledge” (Lett 1997:54) Such a rational approach enables us to produce valid and reliable knowledge that can be publicly tested and verified. Even though these procedures might be ideals that cannot be fully put into practice in every single research project, it is nevertheless vital to follow these principles as much as possible to make valid contributions to the project called “science”, regardless of the thematic field of one’s research area.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, Lett (1997) reminds us that any knowledge *must* be potentially fallible; otherwise it would not be possible to test it (and correct it).

## The epistemological principle of Science

*“Everything that we human beings experience or do is real. But everything we experience or do is not equally effective for explaining why we experience what we experience and do what we do”*

*(Harris 1976:331)*

Scientific knowledge is testable, falsifiable, verifiable and therefore reliable. It is the most superior form of all knowledge, as it is as close to objectivity as possible and fulfils certain, accurately defined criteria<sup>31</sup>. Scientific research is nomothetic, intended to find universal laws of cause-effect, which is why it is based on generalisation rather than particularism. Hence, particular features cannot be fully explained by the universal laws (see Harris 1968:649), but this does not affect its validity.

So *how* can we carry out scientific research about culture? One important peculiarity about humans is that they can be both research subject and research objects, which is why the emic/etic distinction is so relevant in researching human culture: “No aspect of a research strategy more decisively characterizes it [empirical science] than the way in which it treats the relationship between what people say and think as subjects and what they say and think and do as objects of inquiry.” (Harris 1980:pp.29). Sociocultural phenomena cannot be studied alone through people’s worldviews and statements. In order for knowledge to fulfil scientific standards, it must consist of empirical evidence about what people say, think and do. This is why knowledge can only be gained if we clearly distinguish emic from etic knowledge.

The terms emic and etic, originally used in the distinction of *phonemics* and *phonetics*, were introduced by the linguist Kenneth Pike (1954:8) for the analysis of nonlinguistic phenomena

<sup>31</sup> This statement is sharply rejected by epistemological relativists who find all knowledge to be equally “true”, which is proven wrong by scientific evidence: “The epistemological anarchist, convinced that all knowledge is equally uncertain, faces the ludicrous task of trying to convince others of the certainty (or probability) that all truths are equally false.” (Harris 1980:22)

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such as intentions, purposes, motives, goals, attitudes, and thoughts of human actors on the one hand and the formal analysis of their behaviour on the other (see Harris 1968:pp.574). Harris, Lett and others (see Headland 1990) have significantly contributed to the debate on the use of the emic/etic distinction in the study of culture.

For the study of cultural phenomena, we may access two fundamentally different sets of data: the descriptions of cultural phenomena through the natives' categories and relations on the one hand and the description of cultural phenomena through the ethnographer's categories and relations on the other hand (see Harris 1968:580). "Thus, actual behaviour can be treated in both an emic and an etic fashion." (ibid. 1968:581) The natives' and the ethnographers' descriptions might resemble, differ or even contradict each other. The difference does not necessarily consist in their respective cultural embeddedness but rather in their epistemological approaches of knowing the world. The two accounts provide us with significant but mostly different accounts of how a phenomenon can be known. Emics and etics can and should be applied to verbal as well as nonverbal behaviour, due to the contrast between what people say and what they do (see Harris 1968:pp.589). Of course there can be various different emic accounts within the same cultural context, as in the case of NGOs, however, the purpose of science is to detect the main regularities and differences within emic accounts. Etic accounts also differ, as academics do not follow common principles – however, within one paradigm, scientists stick to the same principles and rules for evaluating the meaningfulness and significance of knowledge (see Chapter 3). This uniformity of research principles might be greater or weaker, depending on the paradigm. In contrast to postmodern anthropology, within the scientific paradigm researchers have agreed to evaluate findings on the same principles, which will be described in the present section.

Together, the etic and emic view can provide us with insight into the scientific vs. everyday life explanations of sociocultural phenomena. A comparison of etic and emic views can also make us understand why phenomena are explained by natives the way they are. Emic worldviews and knowledge are embedded in culture, they are culture-specific and fulfil certain functions in that specific culture. For example, NGOs spread a humanitarian worldview and are based on certain values and beliefs dominant in the capitalist social systems in which they operate. Kaplan (in Sahlins/Service 1973) suggests that there is one probable explanation for this spread of ideology: advanced cultures tend to dominate others. Humanitarian aid is but one example of this dominance of Western culture. And rather than giving up their mission to change the world, in cases



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of undeniable failure their work is not abandoned even though proven inefficient (see for example the case of Haiti, which has been widely discussed within the literature on NGOs, e.g. by Schuller (2012), Zanotti (2010)); instead, the current working strategy is slightly amended or other factors are claimed to be responsible for the change in results.<sup>32</sup> The continuing acceptance of the work of humanitarian NGOs is highly similar to the durable acceptance of conventional theories within academia, as described by Kuhn (2012).

As we have seen from the nature of social organisms, these constantly strive to maintain themselves alive, to grow, if possible, but never kill themselves. No NGO has ever laid down its work and deliberately ceased to exist because it *did not achieve* what had been promised. At least not openly and overtly. Neither has any NGO ever laid down its work because it *achieved* its aim.

To be able to understand their persistence around the globe, we need to see which claims are made by NGOs and which material conditions maintain them alive. In order to grasp the whole picture of why NGOs work the way they do, I will collect both emic and etic data for analysis. A separate analysis of emic and etic views turns out to be highly effective when studying cultural phenomena. Cultural phenomena are interpreted by humans themselves and thereby achieve their culture-specific meaning. This culturally specific reasoning is what humanists, e.g. most of anthropologists today, try to uncover to fully understand what kinds of meaning is attached to certain kinds of behaviour, artefacts or other phenomena. For scientists, the emic view is important insofar that it conveys a particular worldview that makes sense in that specific culture. However, in order to study a cultural phenomenon scientifically and to be able to compare our findings cross-culturally we need to base our analysis on scientific criteria. Lett points to the fact that the emic-etic distinction is of vital relevance in the social sciences because we, the researchers, are ourselves enculturated beings that study other enculturated beings, which causes certain difficulties for scientific enquiry:

<sup>32</sup> As in the case of Haiti, in the aftermath of the disastrous failure of humanitarian aid in a “republic of NGOs”, representatives of international aid agencies and so-called experts in disaster relief widely discussed what had gone wrong after the earthquake in Haiti. They most often found external (e.g. political) factors and ineffective strategies to be the problem rather than questioning their own reason for existence. (see for example Holmes 2015).

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“Human beings face a significant practical problem when they attempt to study themselves scientifically: They have already been enculturated to study themselves in some non-scientific way, whatever its particulars might be, and there is the omnipresent danger that they will confuse the two and wind up mistaking their enculturated assumption for scientific propositions. All social scientific disciplines need a precise, consistent, and explicit set of guidelines to avoid that pitfall.” (Lett in Headland 1990:142)

From this problem, it becomes clear why the application of scientific criteria is of such importance when studying culture. Only by separating culture-bound kinds of explanations from scientific ones that are subject to continuous evaluation can we possibly avoid our own culturally shaped preconceptions to influence the results, which is especially important if we study a cultural phenomenon of our own culture, as it is the case here. In order to ensure that the outcome of our analysis is as objective as possible, we have to stick to scientific criteria that are cross-culturally accepted and independent of subjective evaluation.

For the purpose of the present study, I will base the analysis of emic and etic statements on the following definition made by Lett (in Headland 1990:pp.130):

*“Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviors are being studied.”*

*“Etic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers.”*

Note that Lett here defines emics and etics as “constructs”, thereby pointing to the fact that neither of the two is more accurate or “real” than the other. Even though emic accounts can be and often are contradictory or illogical, they usually make more sense for the natives than etic accounts, which might appear alien to them: “Frequently, etic operations involve the measurement and juxtaposition of activities and events that native informants may find inappropriate or meaningless.” (Harris 1980:32) This implies that different notions and concepts resulting in different perceptions are used in both accounts. So, one could ask, why don't we simply rely on etic accounts and forget about emic ones? Emic accounts are useful for grasping the range of meanings and worldviews of the people studied, and help us to understand cultural phenomena as they are interpreted in that particular culture. As such, they add to our knowledge about that culture, but is not sufficient to fully understand it. In order to be able to find out why such

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meanings and worldviews exist and work in that particular culture, we need a complementary etic account: “[T]hose research strategies that confine themselves exclusively to emics or exclusively to etics do not meet the general criteria for an aim-oriented social science as effectively as those which embrace both points of view.” (Harris 1980:34) A combination of both leads to a more profound understanding.

From this epistemological distinction we already see that emic knowledge such as the natives’ thoughts, feelings, worldviews and assumptions is what the humanities intend to fully grasp and document by means of accurate *description*, whereas the comparison of emic and etic knowledge used by scientists for testing possible cause-effect-relationships serves the *explanation* of a cultural phenomenon. Only through the latter approach can we establish scientifically meaningful theories based on results that are appropriate for further testing and cross-cultural comparison.

For the purpose of collecting emic knowledge I will analyse visual and textual material publicly available on the organisations’ websites, facebook pages, leaflets, brochures, mailings and other promotional material. The leading questions for the following systematic analysis of emic knowledge will be as outlined:

| <b>EMIC KNOWLEDGE</b> | <b>EMIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>  |
|-----------------------|---|
| self-definition       | How does the NGO define itself?   |
| self-representation   | How does it represent itself to the outside?<br>Which activities is it involved in? |
| values and beliefs    | Which values does it propagate?<br>Which beliefs does it represent?                 |

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|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| aims and purpose | <p>Which are its interests/aims?<br/>         What or who does it work for?<br/>         What is its final goal?</p>   |
| strategy         | <p>How does it pretend to accomplish its aims?<br/>         Which evidence does it provide for its claims?<br/>         Which is its openly declared strategy?</p> |

Emic knowledge reveals the thoughts, values, aims, beliefs, etc. of the people working and sympathising with NGOs. Etic knowledge is gained from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data provided in the organisations’ annual reports, financial statements and other publications, job descriptions on their websites, as well as scientific research papers. The fact that I partly rely on information published by the NGOs themselves points to a common problem concerning the nature of etic data:

“[A]s a matter of practical necessity, observers must frequently rely on native informants to obtain their basic information about who has done what. Recourse to informants for such purposes does not automatically settle the epistemological status of the resultant descriptions.” (Harris 1980:36)

Emic and etic knowledge might overlap, as it is the case with annual reports and statistics published by the respective NGO itself, however, the organisations are themselves controlled by the Austrian Donation Certificate, which ensures that an internally monitored accounting system has been established<sup>33</sup>.

Informants may provide etic or emic information, depending on the categories and concepts this information is based on. Etic material refers to all data that is scientifically evaluated, whether it is provided by the NGOs themselves or by the researcher. The research questions for

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed outline of the assessment criteria of the Austrian Donation Certificate see <https://www.osgs.at/pruefunterlagen#koopvertr> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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collecting etic knowledge are divided into three parts – superstructure, structure and infrastructure – according to the model of cultural materialism:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>ETIC SUPERSTRUCTURE</b><br/>(dependent variable)</p>   | <p><b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b></p>   |
| <p>ideology<br/><br/>(moral values, cause-effect relations, beliefs, worldview, pursuit)</p>   | <p><i>Which ideological principles does the NGO base its work on?</i><br/>Which moral values does it proclaim?<br/>Which cause-effect relations are established?<br/>What do NGO members believe in?<br/>What is their dominant worldview?<br/>What do they strive for?</p>                      |
| <p><b>ETIC STRUCTURE</b><br/>(dependent variable)</p>  | <p><b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b></p>   |
| <p>organisational structure<br/><br/>(organisation and governance, hierarchy, division of labour, complexity, degree of cohesion/distance)</p> | <p><i>How is the NGO organised and structured?</i><br/>How many departments or internal divisions are there?<br/>Which principles is the form of organisation based on?<br/>How often do NGO members working in different departments meet?<br/>What characterises the type of organisation?</p> |
| <p>activities</p>  | <p>Which kinds of projects does the NGO run?<br/>How does it reach out to people?<br/>Where and how is it making itself heard and seen?</p>  |
| <p>recruitment and salary structure</p>  | <p>Which kind of jobs does the NGO offer?<br/>How does it recruit workers?</p>   |

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|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>How many people work there?</p> <p>How much are workers paid?</p>   |
| fundraising  | <p>How does the NGO collect funds?</p> <p>Who does it financially depend on?</p> <p>How many sponsors or supporters does it have?</p>  |
| <b>ETIC INFRASTRUCTURE</b><br>(independent variable) | <b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>  |
| mode of reproduction                                 | <p><i>How does the organisation "survive" and "grow"?</i></p> <p>Where do the earnings come from?</p> <p>How much money is collected?</p> <p>What is the money used for?</p> <p>How is the money invested or redistributed?</p> <p>How much money is spent? What for?</p> <p>Which (regional/national/transnational) partnerships exist?</p> |
| mode of production                                   | <p>What is the NGO's field of specialisation?</p> <p>Which economic principles is it based on?</p> <p>In which kind of macro-economic world system is it embedded in?</p>  |
| technology   | <p>Which kind of technologies does the NGO use?</p> <p>How does the NGO use these technologies and what for?</p>   |

## The theoretical principle of Science

*„It is the simple rule that we are not to abandon the search for universal laws and for a coherent theoretical system, nor ever give up our attempts to explain causally any kind of event we can describe.” (Popper 2000:39)*

What Popper proposes as a rule that corresponds with the “principle of causality”, which he finds to be rather metaphysical, is part of the theoretical principle of science. Science is based on the assumption that cultural phenomena can be explained, which implies a strict rejection of randomness and chance. Without this, we would have to recognise that there are no specifiable reasons for phenomena. The search for describable order is what all sciences have in common: “This one crucial assumption is that the overall aim of science is to discover the maximum amount of order inherent in the universe or in any field of inquiry.” (Harris 1980:25) As the approaches to research vary greatly, we must make explicit our aims, assumptions and the rules governing our research before starting with our analysis. In this chapter, I will outline the paradigmatic approach that guides my research.

As abundant evidence shows, there are cause-effect relationships at work not only in the natural sciences but also in the social sciences.<sup>34</sup> In their quests for explaining sociocultural phenomena, scientists have found different independent variables that lead to cultural variation: Spencer described culture to be biologically determined, White found it primarily to be determined by the availability and use of energy, and Steward argued for an environmental determinacy (see Harris 1968:636). Even though these anthropologists followed the theoretical principle of cause-effect, the factors they found to primarily determine cultural variation differed. The present research is based on White’s formulation of the three components of sociocultural systems: the ideological and structural and the techno-economic, the first and second being caused by

<sup>34</sup> It is the task of those engaging in science to account for such regularities. Just as physics engage in the pursuit of natural laws, social scientists strive to discover the determinants of cultural variation: “Our job, as scientists, is not to celebrate, but to explain, to account for. That’s what makes us scientists.” (Carneiro 1995:2)

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the third. Culture is thus “a mechanism for harnessing energy and of putting it to work in the service of man, and, secondarily, of channelling and regulating his behaviour not directly concerned with subsistence and offense and defense.” (White 1949:390) This principle has been shown to be highly effective in answering questions concerning the ideological and structural variations of culture. Therefore, it will be used as a theoretical framework for the present study of NGOs. The central question of the spread and growth of NGOs around the world will be studied in the framework of cultural materialism. According to this paradigm, “human social life is a response to the practical problems of earthly existence” (Harris 1980:ix). Culture is a result of such existential conditions that lie outside the individual, namely in the economic, technological, ecological – the “material” – environment. Cultural materialism enables us

“to account for the origin, maintenance, and change of the global inventory of sociocultural differences and similarities. Thus cultural materialism shares with other scientific strategies an epistemology which seeks to restrict fields of inquiry to events, entities, and relationships that are knowable by means of explicit, logico-empirical, inductive-deductive, quantifiable public procedures or ‘operations’ subject to replication by independent observers.” (Harris 1980:27)

In order to understand sociocultural – as opposed to inorganic or organic – phenomena, different material factors must be taken into account, because the sociocultural world is not determined by biological, physical or psychological factors.

Cultural materialism does not provide absolute truths of total certainty. However, this does not render this theoretical approach unsound, but rather more scientific, i.e. ready to be tested and evaluated, which makes scientific evidence the best<sup>35</sup> possible way of knowing. Thus, one might not speak of scientific certainty but scientific probability. Any theory proven wrong, in this sense, is an advancement rather than a failure of science (see Harris 1980:11).

<sup>35</sup> The adjective “best“ here refers to the high degree of certainty and accuracy made possible by the application of scientific criteria.



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But why do we need a theoretical basis for carrying out research? I believe, as Harris does, that we need an interplay of facts and theory in order to understand a phenomenon in the best possible way. A simple collection of facts cannot sufficiently explain a phenomenon, because without theory, any facts would do and without facts, any theory would do.

“Facts are always unreliable without theories that guide their collection and that distinguish between superficial and significant appearances. Nonetheless, we should not forget that theories are equally meaningless without facts.” [...] Science has always consisted of an interplay between induction and deduction, between empiricism and rationalism; any attempt to draw the line on one side or the other conflicts with actual scientific practice.”  
(Harris 1980:7)

The present approach is both an inductive and a deductive one, insofar as it applies cultural materialism for the gathering and analysis of data, which will then be used to test and specify the cause-effect relationship suggested by this theoretical approach. I will apply the theoretical model of cultural materialism for my analysis of NGOs and test the model by the use of empirical evidence.

This theoretical approach has some more implications: That we cannot deliberately change the world. If we assume that the cultural as well as the natural world is governed by cause-effect relationships ready to be discovered, we must also acknowledge – much to the contrary of humanists' idealism based on the premise of free will – that humans lack the ability to change the web of laws they are entangled in:

“Humanists have long shared a commitment to the idea that man himself, the human subject – understood as man's consciousness and will – is the originator of human actions and understanding. The notions of individual freedom and individual responsibility, and the philosophies that support them, have long been based upon it.” (Windschuttle 1997:135)

It is argued by humanists that change begins in human minds<sup>36</sup>. However, for an idea to become a culturally accepted invention, there first need to exist favourable material conditions. “The

<sup>36</sup> Harris explains that such a conviction arises out of our limited perception of daily life experiences: “Conscious thoughts in the form of plans and itineraries certainly help individuals and groups to find a path through the daily

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strategic priority of the infrastructure rests upon the fact that human beings can never change these laws.” (Harris 1980:56) Thus, ideas

“cannot assume a material social existence unless appropriate material conditions for their social acceptance and use are also present. Furthermore, the recurrence of such inventions [...] independently in different parts of the world under similar infrastructural conditions suggests that not even the most original ideas happen only once.” (Harris 1980:59)

Cultural materialism, much contrary to humanistic approaches which find the ingenuity of human beings to be the cause of culture, rests on the assumption of infrastructural determinism. By the term “infrastructure” we mean the “principal interface between culture and nature” (Harris 1980:57), which in the case of NGOs includes the technological, productive and reproductive factors that enable their existence.

“The fundamental theoretical principle of cultural materialism is the principle of *infrastructural determinism*, which holds that particular forms of infrastructure give rise to particular forms of structure, which in turn give rise to particular forms of superstructure.” (Lett 1997:109).

This makes it possible for us to formulate and test hypotheses about possible causes of a sociocultural phenomenon (see Harris 1980:56) Even though the relationships between these three analytical levels might seem rigid, they are in fact dynamic and probabilistic<sup>37</sup>.

Even though cultural materialism also has its flaws, e.g. it neither specifies which changes have been caused by the stem from the structural and superstructural levels nor exactly when and under which conditions a time lag in change will happen, it nevertheless provides us with a theoretical basis for the scientific study of sociocultural phenomena in that it shifts our focus on measurable and testable data useful for the formulation of general laws. That people organise

complexities of social life. But these plans and itineraries merely chart the selection of pre-existing behavioural ‘mazeways’.” (Harris 1980:pp.59)

<sup>37</sup> This means that we cannot predict or describe the cause-effect relationships with absolute certainty, because many factors must be taken not account. Instead, there is a probability that a cultural phenomenon is determined in this way.

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themselves is a universal, but that they do so in organisations that claim to save the world is a variable that can be accounted for in certain infrastructural settings.

### **The methodological principle of Science**

Contrary to sociobiologists which use scientific methods for finding explanations to questions about biologically determined social behaviour, cultural materialists do not take interest in the individual but in larger corporative groups and their infrastructural, structural and superstructural characteristics. Therefore, a macrosociological rather than a microsociological approach is required. As we are interested in discovering general laws of culture rather than individual deviations from these laws, it is logical that we take corporate groups rather than individual persons as our unit of selection. For reasons that I have already pointed out in the previous section, I understand culture to be a group phenomenon guiding individual behaviour rather than the other way round. This does not mean that I am not interested in individuals, but that this individual behaviour cannot be explained by itself but only in the sociocultural system it originates from. We cannot understand long-distance advocacy by looking at individuals and their life histories or their biological or psychological characteristics, but rather by focusing on the culture it emerged in, with a focus on its infrastructural conditions.

We have to take into account the entire sociocultural organism rather than parts of it in order to understand cultural phenomena. If we only consider individual parts, research results may turn out to be highly illogical. Harris illustrates this with an example:

“The more hierarchical the society with respect to sex, age, class, caste, and ethnic criteria, the greater the degree of exploitation of one group by another and the less likely it is that the trajectory of sociocultural evolution can be calculated from the average bio-psychological utility of traits. This leads to many puzzling situations in which it appears that large sectors of society are acting in ways that diminish their practical well-being instead of enhancing it.” (Harris 1980:pp.61)

As this example illustrates, we cannot arrive at generally testable evidence unless we take into account larger sociocultural systems and their characteristics. This is why the present analysis takes NGOs of different sizes and the sociocultural systems they are embedded in as the unit of selection rather than individual NGO members or supporters. Therefore, the data stems from official statistics and reports rather than from interviews with activists. This research takes methodological holism rather than methodological individualism as a starting point for analysis.

### **The ontological principle of Science**

Science is universal in that it produces “knowledge that is equally probable for any rational human mind.” (Harris 1980:28) Therefore, it is the aim of scientists to arrive at knowledge that is not ethnocentric or particularistic, found true in a specific cultural setting, what is called *emic* knowledge, but to transcend the boundaries established by cultural relativism. One of the central objectives is to find universal laws with the maximum validity possible. For the purpose of science, it is less relevant to examine one single NGO as a case-study than it is to compare different NGOs to each other to find similarities that might explain the very nature of such organisations, whether they engage in animal protection, humanitarian aid or environmental activism.

Science finds humans to be subject to material conditions. Human culture is not a puzzling product of human minds but something that can be studied and explained. However, it must not be explained in the same way animals or other organic/inorganic entities are explained, because there is a qualitative difference between these kinds of phenomena. The study of human culture requires a differentiation between *emic* and *etic* accounts. If we look at *emic* accounts, we may be able to understand people and their thoughts, values, beliefs, etc. However, to be able to explain why these people think and act the way they do, we must consider other factors which are independent of these thoughts and behaviour. Science regards material entities as independent of ideological ones, meaning that “thoughts about things and events are separable from things and events” (Harris 1980:30). The differentiation between the objective external world on the one hand and the subjective minds and collective ideology on the other hand is vital to the study of culture.

Science also holds that phenomena are the product of evolution and can be explained. This is found to be true within all fields of science, whether it is chemistry, biology or the social realm: evolution is a mechanism that brings about transformation. However, evolution is not a constant, gradual process, but rather a mechanism of sudden transformation that comes about whenever a certain quantitative change has occurred. Carneiro argues that this mechanism, which is widely applied the realm of the Natural Sciences, is equally true for social phenomena: Just like a certain increase in the temperature of water causes it to change its aggregate state, a certain increase in the number of a population cause a transformation in its social structure (see Carneiro 2000). Thus, social transformation is brought about by a change in quantity: “Since the time of Marx and Engels, scientists have come to recognize the validity and utility of the notion

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that, during the course of changes in nature, a quantitative increase in substance, once it reaches a critical threshold, results in a qualitative transformation of state.” For example, qualitative transformation in social organisation is caused by an increase in population and the struggle to survive on ever scarcer natural resources. As the size of a population increases, it either splits at a certain limit or develops more complex social structures (see Carneiro 2000:pp.12928). Population density required new forms of social organisation that would hold people together and that allowed for a proper functioning of society. In this way, social organisation developed from villages to clans, from moieties to chiefdoms and, finally, to states<sup>38</sup>. This mechanism is part of the process of natural selection which underlies social evolution:

“In its essence, natural selection is the outcome of a struggle for existence among variant and competing forms. In this struggle, the better adapted forms survive in larger numbers than the less well adapted. [...] Without competition, evolution as we know it could not have occurred.” (Carneiro 1992:119)

Not just social structure, but also culture is subject to material pressures and the outcome of natural selection, according to which “more efficient traits spread and supersede less efficient ones, just as more efficient societies supersede less efficient ones.” (Carneiro 1992:132) This competition is also at work when new cultural traits are developed in a culture. Instead of being inventions of brilliant minds, these cultural traits are the outcome of competition and natural selection. As an outcome of these processes, individuals choose to adopt a new cultural trait, e.g. because of its practicability and efficiency within a specific cultural and social setting (see Carneiro 1992:pp.124). Science conceives human beings to play a rather passive than active part in the transformation of social order and culture change. It seeks answers to human behaviour and social organisation not through individual actions, but through the conditions that make this behaviour favourable. Even though individuals might deviate from general sociocultural patterns, this does not affect mainstream patterns; even though individuals die, the sociocultural

<sup>38</sup> Evidence shows that war plays a crucial part in the formation of modern states. As Carneiro (1970) illustrates, along the course of history war has repeatedly caused the establishment of ever larger political units (see Carneiro 1970). In a different paper, he argues that social evolution strives towards the political unification of the world population, which will most probably be achieved by military means (see Carneiro 2004).

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system, the organism itself, survives. According to the principle of emergence, the characteristics of the social organism are different from the characteristics of each of its individual parts, which is why the organism cannot be explained through its individual parts. Science therefore studies the evolution and behaviour of social entities rather than individuals and their particular points of view.

Culture is not an individual but a collective phenomenon, which has been made possible by the symbolic<sup>39</sup> faculty of human beings. This faculty is proper to human beings and clearly distinguishes them from animals; it is the foundation of articulate speech which made possible the accumulation and communication of knowledge. It is the ability to symbol that has made possible all forms of cultural life and civilisation (see White 1949:39). Despite of the lack of evidence on the causes of the development of the symbolic faculty, it is widely assumed that this ability resulted from organic evolution and a quantitative difference of the human brain (see White 1949:32). What is more important, however, is that the difference between animals and humans is not one of grade but one of kind, as no animal has the ability for abstract thinking.

According to the science approach just outlined, the course of social as well as cultural evolution can be accounted for and understood. Culture and social organisation are not the hazardous outcome of a long history of human inventions; they are the outcome of a long process of constant competition underlying the mechanism of natural selection, which means that the kinds of social organisation we know of today are the ones best adapted to the current technological and organisational requirements (see Carneiro 1992:131). This ontological perspective makes social and cultural transformation understandable and explainable. Despite of the abundant evidence showing that the mechanism of cultural evolution can help us understand the world we live in, recognition is poor within mainstream anthropology which is not based on the principles of science.

<sup>39</sup> The term “symbolic faculty” refers to the ability to create, use, and understand symbols, which are defined as follows: “A symbol may be defined as a thing the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those who use it. I say ‘thing’ because a symbol may have any kind of physical form; it may have the form of a material object, a color, a sound, an odor, a motion of an object, a taste.” (White 1949:25)

## 4. The emics and etics of NGOs

The hypothesis of this master thesis is that NGOs work in similar ways, regardless of their political mission and the kind of issues they dedicate their effort to. This is precisely why I will select three NGOs operating in different thematic areas to analyse and compare the emics and etics of each of them. This way I hope to be able to identify similarities and differences in their workings in order to contribute to the propositional knowledge about NGOs. For the purpose of analysis, I will select data from three different organisations of different sizes: Oxfam as one of the largest INPNGOs<sup>40</sup> in the world engaging in humanitarian work, mainly poverty reduction, based in the UK, Greenpeace as an NPNGO focusing on environmental protection and the local animal rights organisation VGT (*Verein Gegen Tierfabriken*, in English: Association Against Animal Factories), based in Vienna. An analysis of the emics and etics of these three organisations which vary in size and in the field of action may enable us to identify general operating patterns of NGOs and find certain similarities and differences in their emics and etics.

### 4.1. The emics of Oxfam

*“We know people have the power to change their lives, and the lives of those around them. All they need is a little help.”<sup>41</sup>*

Oxfam is one of the highest ranked globally operating NGOs<sup>42</sup>, besides Doctors Without Borders, Islamic Relief International and Save the Children, Acumen, Partners in Health, World Vision, BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities) and Danish Refugee Council. It currently consists of 20 organisations located in Europe and outside, in Australia, Brazil, Canada,

<sup>40</sup> International Non-Profit Non-Governmental Organisation

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/introduction-to-oxfam> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.theglobaljournal.net/article/view/1171/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]



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China, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and the USA. In the year 2015/16, Oxfam accounted for a total income of €1,071.4 million. It has existed for about 70 years and has since become a globally operating billion-euro-organisation implementing projects in all continents of the planet, more importantly in Africa and the Middle East. Currently, Oxfam operates in more than 90 countries. It claims to have improved the lives of a total of 22.2 million people in the year 2015-2016 alone (see Oxfam 2016a:11).

In emic terms, the organisation derives its origins from an outstanding, and therefore highly praised, individual: the founding Executive Director of Oxfam International and generous leader Ernst Lightering. According to the official historical account, Oxfam owes its existence to its founding father:

„Ernst’s colleagues speak very fondly and with great sincerity about what a deeply dedicated and impressive leader he was – one of those rare people who was equally a “doer” as he was a “thinker”. All of us at Oxfam owe a huge debt of gratitude to amazing people like Ernst who helped to build our global movement from scratch and to turn an idea into a reality that has since helped many millions of people to have a better life. We pause to remember Ernst and his achievements, but I’m sure he’d be wanting us to forge ahead and finish what he began.”<sup>43</sup>

According to the common belief, it is this individual person who once laid the cornerstone of Oxfam. He is the one regarded to have caused its existence.

### SELF-DEFINITION

Oxfam<sup>44</sup> defines itself as “a world-wide development organization that mobilizes the power of people against poverty” (Oxfam 2016a:100). Its main objectives are:

<sup>43</sup> Winnie Byanyima, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/remembering-ernst-lighteringen-founding-executive-director-oxfam-international> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>44</sup> The name Oxfam is derived from the original name of one of its civil society organisations, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, which was founded in Britain in 1942 to help stop the famine in Greece during WW II (see <https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/history-oxfam-international>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

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“to relieve poverty, combat distress and alleviate suffering in any part of the world regardless of race, gender, creed or political convictions; [...] to research the causes and effects of poverty, injustice and suffering; [...] to inform the general public and decision-makers about the causes and possible solutions; [...] to work as an international partnership of goodwill.”<sup>45</sup>

The major cause that holds its members together is their united fight against poverty: “Oxfam is a global movement of people, working together to end the injustice of poverty.” (Oxfam 2016a:6) It’s reason for existence is the economic, social and gender injustice suffered by other people all over the world, which is “the crux of all of Oxfam’s work”: “Our world must yet support the poorest and women on the frontlines suffering most because of the excesses of the richest.” (Oxfam 2016a:4) This specific culturally defined sense of injustice is a cornerstone of Oxfam’s work and reflects one of their central aims: to make poor and marginalised people, especially girls and women, exert their rights (see Oxfam n.d.:pp.16). These rights include a sustainable livelihood, basic social services, life and security, the right to be heard and the “right to have an identity”<sup>46</sup>. Human rights are considered to have an enormously positive impact on facilitating change. They are found to be fundamental to the concept of humaneness. “In all our work we aspire to uphold the humanitarian principles of humanity (responding to need), independence and impartiality.”<sup>47</sup> Independence here refers to the political and financial autonomy: “Our governance, programmes and policies will be non-partisan, independent of specific governments, political parties and the business sector.”<sup>48</sup> Poverty is itself regarded as profoundly inhumane, which is why it must be fought against.

<sup>45</sup> Stichting Oxfam International Constitution: Article 3. Available online: [https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/story/oxfam-constitution-2013\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/story/oxfam-constitution-2013_0_1.pdf) [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>46</sup> What is understood by the right to have a recognised identity is open to interpretation (see Oxfam n.d.:7 and <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/oxfams-values-and-principles> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>48</sup> International Non-Governmental Organisations‘ Accountability Charter 2005:3, [Available online: [https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/story/ingo\\_accountability\\_charter\\_0606\\_0.pdf](https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/story/ingo_accountability_charter_0606_0.pdf), last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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According to Oxfam, poverty must and can be overcome<sup>49</sup>. Thus, the shared vision of the organisation's members is to live in a world in which no one is poor and no one suffers injustice:

“We want a world where people are valued and treated equally, enjoy their rights as full citizens, and can influence decisions affecting their lives. [...] Our purpose is to help create lasting solutions to the injustice of poverty. We are part of a global movement for change, empowering people to create a future that is secure, just, and free from poverty. [...] We are secular, open-minded and pluralistic. We welcome all beliefs that advance human rights.”<sup>50</sup>

This is not just their vision but their firm belief. Oxfam defines itself as a humanitarian movement committed to changing the world and making it a better place. The formulated aims and purpose are not only part of the organisation's work but lie at the very heart of the NGO: “The ultimate goal of Oxfam is to end the injustice of poverty” (Oxfam n.d.:6). Thereby, Oxfam suggests that it will continue to exist as long as there is poverty (poverty itself is vaguely defined as the cause and result of inequality at times and as inequality itself at others). Considering that, according to predictions, “[w]ithin a single generation, the earth will be inhabited by 9 billion people, and 90 percent of the additional 2 billion inhabitants are likely to be born into poverty” (Oxfam n.d.:7), Oxfam's future is as sure as guaranteed.

### SELF-REPRESENTATION

To the outside public, Oxfam declares to be unified by a shared mission, a common ideology and unifying values: “We are united by our common values and brand identity, and share the same passion and commitment.”<sup>51</sup> This unity of values and beliefs points to a common ideology. In 2016, an overall of 10,000 staff members and up to 50,000 volunteers and interns engaged in the mission of ending poverty. The organisation members are involved in a wide range of

<sup>49</sup> see Demanding Justice: Oxfam Strategic Plan 2007-2012: 6. Available online: [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2007\\_0.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi_strategic_plan_2007_0.pdf) [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/annual-report-2016-2017/about-oxfam> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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activities. Most importantly, the organisation engages in projects aiming at tackling inequality, reducing poverty, saving lives, and protecting the poor and vulnerable.

Oxfam's self-definition is not confined to the people working at Oxfam, but also includes its financial supporters, especially sponsors, which it calls its "friends" (see Oxfam 2016a:90). These friends are considered an important part of the Oxfam movement because of their passionate and tireless commitment which is an "inspiration" to Oxfam's work: "By giving your support, you became part of a global movement to end poverty for everyone, for good." (Oxfam 2016a:90) The organisation openly declares itself grateful to its friends, because it assumes that the more people engage in the fight against poverty, the more they can achieve together: „*We all want to contribute to the betterment of the world. But anything we do collectively is far more impactful than [sic!] what we do as individuals*“, Anjali Joshi, a female Oxfam supporter, says (see Oxfam 2016a:91).

The strength of Oxfam's work is proclaimed to consist of the solidarity within the growing "Oxfam family". By becoming part of the "movement", every single person is promised to change lives. Individuals are encouraged to believe they have the power to change the world by financial and nonfinancial contributions. Extraordinary potential is attached to this unified collaboration, which is found to be the key to worldwide change:

"Oxfam is a global movement of people, working together to end the injustices of poverty. That means we tackle the inequality that keeps people poor. Together, we save, protect and rebuild lives when disaster strikes. We help people build better lives for themselves, and for others. We take on issues like land rights, climate change and discrimination against women. And we won't stop until every person on the planet can enjoy life free from poverty." (Oxfam 2016a:6)

According to its self-representation, Oxfam is a globally connected group of ambitious, courageous, responsible, highly conscientious and kind-hearted people contributing to a better world.

### VALUES AND BELIEFS

Oxfam's supporters, employees and volunteers are unified by the will to make the world a better place. Values are the very "heart" of the organisation; they are considered as something that keeps the organisation alive. Only if members share the same moral aims and beliefs, it is assumed, they can effectively work together and attract others to support Oxfam projects. The

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importance of shared values and beliefs is affirmed by a supporter who decided to leave a legacy to the NGO in her will: “Oxfam is one of the main charities I support because its values and beliefs fit well with my own. [...] I am confident that my support, both now and in the future, will really change the lives of people living in poverty.” (Oxfam 2016a:92)

Shared values and beliefs are supposed to unify the organisation members. In its universal approach, the NGO claims to work for no government, corporation or any other political or partial institutions. It presents itself to be independent of any self-interest. All of its commitment is dedicated to one global mission: stopping the world's injustice of poverty. Thus, Oxfam's beliefs are connected to a specific concept of universal human rights and justice. Its shared beliefs are outlined as follows:

“Everyone has a right to realize their potential, and to live free of poverty in a secure and more equitable world. We believe that with the necessary action and political will, this world is possible. People have a right to life and security; to a sustainable livelihood; to be heard; to have an identity; and to have access to basic social services. We subscribe to all international covenants on rights, and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>52</sup>

Besides the notion of universal human rights, the core values that Oxfam claims for itself are empowerment, accountability and inclusiveness:

“Our approach means that everyone involved with Oxfam, from our staff and supporters to people living in poverty, should feel they can make change happen. [...] Our purpose-driven, results-focused approach means we take responsibility for our actions and hold ourselves accountable. We believe that others should also be held accountable for their actions. [...] We are open to everyone and embrace diversity. We believe everyone has a contribution to make, regardless of visible and invisible differences.”<sup>53</sup>

Poverty is considered a major injustice that stands in sharp contrast to these rights:

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/how-we-work/our-goals-and-values> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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“In poverty, people have little power and are denied an effective voice. Poverty means little income, too few assets, lack of access to basic services and opportunities, deep inequalities, ongoing insecurity and little opportunity for development. Poverty is rooted in inequality, and in human action or inaction.”<sup>54</sup>

Poverty is believed to exist as long as socioeconomic inequalities exist. Another central belief is that people have the power as well as the moral obligation to eradicate inequalities around the world caused by human beings: “We need to show that there is an overwhelming demand for change: that poverty is not inevitable, and that justice is possible. For this we need your help [...]”<sup>55</sup> As social and economic inequalities are perceived to be driven by human action, Oxfam identifies human action to be the major cause of and at the same time the solution to poverty.

### AIMS AND PURPOSE

Oxfam’s vision is that one day “nine billion people will live equitably and free from the injustice of poverty, on a planet that has the natural resources to sustain them.” (Oxfam n.d.:5) This proclamation suggests that it depends on us to realise the worldwide project of generating equality. According to the charity, this will only be possible if people make our present capitalist world system change. The only moral response to the injustice of poverty is unified action. At other times the NGO assumes that the enormous problem of inequality can only be solved if institutions around the world work together:

“We face unprecedented changes and challenges this century, including climate change, famines and food price crises, increasing humanitarian crises, energy limitations, proliferation of weapons, urbanization, and natural resources shortages. To meet these challenges, we need global co-operation and cohesion. Governments should be accountable to their people, and all society’s institutions – corporations, organizations and groups including us – should be accountable for the impact of their actions.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>55</sup> Demanding Justice: Oxfam Strategic Plan 2007-2012. Available online: [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2007\\_0.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi_strategic_plan_2007_0.pdf) [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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The second half of this statement suggests that it is not the responsibility of supporters but of governments and corporations to change the world, which stands in contrast to the earlier specified belief that change must and can happen only if people join the organisation. Oxfam's aims and purpose are highly utopic but never questioned by the organisation itself. Whether or not its mission is indeed feasible does not matter; what matters is that people at least try to change the world for the better. Winnie Byanyima, the executive director of Oxfam International, characterises the members of the organisation as “incurable optimists” (see Oxfam 2016a:3) who don't let anybody take away their belief in the good. Whether or not their aims are realistic is secondary.

Oxfam does not specify how to ensure the achievement of its aims. As the mission of eradicating poverty requires the highest possible number of people to act accordingly, Oxfam addresses its potential supporters personally. Its messages are intended to reach as many individuals as possible. In one of its end-of-the-year video reviews titled “Where did your help go in 2016?” it states the following:

“You were there when there was no water [...] You were there when there was no food [...] You were there for the harvest [...] You were there when rights were under attack [...] You were there when there was nowhere to go [...] You were there when all was lost [...] You were there when hope returned [...] You've made a huge difference. YOU WERE THERE.”<sup>57</sup>

From this message it becomes clear that in emic terms “you” and “Oxfam” are meant to be the same. With Oxfam, people can change the world. Oxfam stresses the importance of every single individual and its inherent capacity to have a positive impact on the world they live in. It does so by addressing donors and other supporters personally. In pointing out that everybody can save lives if they contribute to the organisation, importance is given to the immediate effectiveness of every single contribution. Everybody is considered responsible for the whole world as it is, including the suffering of “distant strangers” (see Chapter 2.2.). Everybody is needed to make a change and save lives. In a video call for donations, the organisation states: “right now,

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQcIip1RpXE> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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so many people need our help and we can't reach them without you. It all starts with you.”<sup>58</sup>  
The importance of individuals is communicated in these and many similar messages found in Oxfam reports, strategic plans, written statements and the like.

### METHODS

Winnie Byanyima, the executive director of Oxfam International, declares the organisation's strategy to consist in giving power to marginalised people so that they become capable of influencing “the political and corporate dynamics that keep people poor” (Oxfam 2016a:9), an approach that rests on the belief that such strategy allows for greater change than any provision of goods and services ever could.

In its Strategic Plan for the years 2013-2019, Oxfam emphasises that it will work hard to achieve a series of self-declared goals through its global work. By 2019 Oxfam predicts to have achieved the aim of changing the world by having accomplished the following „six external change goals“ to solve global poverty through the power of people<sup>59</sup>:

1. Enabling more poor and marginalised people to exercise their civil rights
2. Increasing gender justice
3. Saving people affected by humanitarian crises
4. Ensuring food security, prosperity and resilience of people in rural areas
5. Safeguarding that more poor people have access to natural resources
6. Advocating for increasing financial aid for development

These goals are clearly emic goals which part from the culturally defined concept of poverty (mostly perceived as misery, injustice and powerlessness of people in the Global South) and its moral consequence: the need (and the ability) to change things and to make people more prosperous and powerful. “Power”, “prosperity” and “security”, as well as “justice”, are all culture-specific rather than universal concepts. The perception of justice rests on a deeply humanitarian

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyyNCKsMSc4> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>59</sup> see Oxfam 2016a:7 and <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/how-we-work/our-goals-and-values> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].



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emic concept: the idea that every human being on this planet can and must be treated equally. These goals are meant to be accomplished by means of improving the way Oxfam currently works by achieving the following „six enabling change goals“:

1. Creating a powerful global network held together by „a common vision for change“ (Oxfam 2016a:8)
2. Improving the monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy (MEL)<sup>60</sup>
3. Increasing Oxfam's transparency and accountability
4. Investing in qualified and motivated staff
5. Achieving maximum cost effectiveness
6. Increasing financial resources

From an *etic* point of view, however, both the “six external change goals” as well as the “six enabling change goals” lack one characteristic: precision. A systematic approach is needed to measure the actual impact of Oxfam and to evaluate whether the objectives have been met, which requires the formulation of precise and well-defined goals in the first place.

Instead, these six external and six enabling change goals reflect the following *emic* knowledge: By increasing its own financial means, Oxfam pretends to end poverty. By saving themselves, Oxfam members pretend to save others. Oxfam needs you because people need you, so the logic goes. People who invest in Oxfam invest in the poor and marginalised. With the help of supporters, Oxfam claims to empower others to make a change. Oxfam exists as long as poor people exist, even though the definition of the term “poverty” is open to subjective interpretation. Oxfam's work is intrinsically coupled with the existence of poverty. Thus, ending poverty would take away its emic basis for existence, its reason of existence. Once the mission is accomplished, what reason for existence will remain?

The fact that Oxfam's legitimacy depends on the poverty of others is not the only discrepancy found in its emics. Another one is the proclaimed “independence” of the organisation: “Oxfam

<sup>60</sup>MEL is a strategy used by numerous INGOs in order to “monitor comprehensively, evaluate selectively, and learn continuously to support their programs or initiatives” (<https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/toolkits/mel>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

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is an independent charity, and as such does not align itself to any governments.”<sup>61</sup> Contrary to this independence, elsewhere the NGO states that apart from the people living in poverty it is accountable to its many stakeholders:

“partner organizations and allies; supporters, including both private and institutional donors; staff and volunteers; the targets of our advocacy at local, national, regional and international levels: including politicians, governments and private sector; publics in each affiliate host country; and the environment.”<sup>62</sup>

The emic description of Oxfam’s vision<sup>63</sup> is highly abstract and vague, which is also true for the presentation of strategies and results. Even though the organisation claims to be transparent, failures of the past are neither publicly mentioned in its annual reports nor on its official websites, nor does it present a critical examination of the concrete results of former strategic plans. The Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019 does not only lack a clear definition of the kind of change the members want to bring about (e.g. of what poverty is and how it is measured)<sup>64</sup>, but also fails to specify by which strategy and under which concrete circumstances the desired change will be effectuated. The unspecific measures outlined by the organisation include “rights-based sustainable development programs, campaigns, advocacy, public education, and humanitarian

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/plans-reports-and-policies/statement-of-legitimacy-and-accountability> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

<sup>62</sup> Oxfam Accountability Report 2015-2016:27. Available online: <https://accountablenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Oxfam-Accountability-Report-2015-2016.pdf> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

<sup>63</sup> “Oxfam’s vision is a just world without poverty: a world in which people can influence decisions that affect their lives, enjoy their rights, and assume their responsibilities as full citizens of a world in which all human beings are valued and treated equally.” (Oxfam n.d.:6)

<sup>64</sup> As poverty is perceived to be caused by multiple factors, numerous different projects may have the potential to tackle it, such as campaigning on climate change, investing in small-scale farming, supporting women to run businesses, improving water storage systems, providing emergency food and water after hurricanes, lobbying against gender-based violence, exerting pressure on governments, launching reports on the harmful effects of natural disasters and even running a film festival that gives centre stage to development-related issues, to name but a few (see Oxfam 2016a and Oxfam n.d.).

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assistance in disasters and conflicts” and a collaborating with “local and global” partners and allies.<sup>65</sup>

The same vagueness is found in Oxfam’s Strategic Plan for the years 2013 to 2019: The expectation that more people will gain their rights and less will suffer from poverty as more money will be invested in development aid reflects a high degree of idealism. Oxfam mentions the use of an “integrated approach”, one that operates “locally, nationally and globally” (see Oxfam n.d.:7). If and how the expected results of this approach will be measured is not mentioned. To the question how the eradication of poverty will be achieved, Oxfam responds: “The answer is, simply, justice; fair use of the world’s natural resources; a global economy that reduces inequality; a world that does not discriminate against women or minorities” (ibid.), which once again leaves us with the initial question. All of this points to poor systematisation and a lack of scientific criteria. Nevertheless, the organisation’s emic accounts and proclamations appeal to its supporters, which ensures funding.

For the purposes of Oxfam, the ideology behind emic accounts is more relevant than a scientific evaluation of facts. From this point of view, it makes sense that the organisation focuses on an envisioned, hoped-for-future rather than on its past. In emic terms, hope is considered to have huge potential in bringing about change. This belief is transmitted through the series “untold stories of unexpected hope” in which hope is defined as “real” and “precious”<sup>66</sup>. Being hopeful is considered to be a pre-requisite for change, which is why the objective evaluation of results is not as important to Oxfam members as the spread of hope.

<sup>65</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-purpose-and-beliefs> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>66</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/inside-oxfam/untold-stories-unexpected-hope> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

## 4.2. The etics of Oxfam

As we have seen so far, Oxfam's emics are sometimes illogical, controversial and, most of the times, inaccurate. This is why they leave many questions unanswered (e.g. How will a world without poverty be achieved? As every Oxfam supporter is considered to be able to make a change to end poverty, one may ask why the charity has not been able to achieve this goal within its 70 years of existence.). While questions about its own flaws are blackboxed, importance is given to the good intentions and contributions of its members.

Emic statements are insufficient for explaining the NGO's factual workings. However, the many intentions, beliefs, values and visions – in short: the ideology spread and shared by Oxfam enables us to understand emic statements and their cultural embeddedness. In order to understand how Oxfam works, we must take into account etic knowledge and have a closer look on its superstructural, structural and infrastructural level.

### 4.2.1. Superstructure

From an etic point of view, Oxfam bases its work on the ideological principles of humanism. These principles are regarded as meaningful in the culture Oxfam operates in. The emic beliefs, worldview, assumptions, presuppositions, hopes, claims, self-representation and motives belong to the ideological framework of humanism, as we will see here in greater detail.

#### EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

From Oxfam's own accounts we can observe that no differentiation of emic and etic knowledge is made. For the most part (except for selected scientific studies used to spread Oxfam's messages and attract attention), no scientific criteria are applied to test the organisation's hypotheses and strategies. And if they are applied, they lack objectivity, as the following example proves: In 2016 a study commissioned by Oxfam revealed that the top 1% of the world population owed more than the rest. Its clear message was that the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, who remain poor. However, the emic claims that arouse from this report vary from

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country to country, as they adapt to the specific cultural framework they work in (see Lorenz/Feller 2016:14). According to the definition of the World Bank<sup>67</sup>, despite of the continuous population growth the number of people living in poverty has decreased by two-thirds within the last 35 years. Statistical data on the income of the world population shows that middle-incomes have increased more than high-incomes, a fact Oxfam omits in its report. As the Gini coefficient proves, both wealth and income are currently distributed more equally among the world population than they were three decades ago (see Lorenz/Feller 2016:21). These etc data falsify Oxfam's claim that more and more people are living in poverty while the wealthy are getting richer and richer. The study Oxfam refers to measures levels of poverty by considering private property only, which is why the results are misleading. Nevertheless, with these results Oxfam managed to cause far-reaching public outrage and gain further support.

This example shows at least two things: Firstly, seemingly scientific data may fall into the emic category whenever it is led by emic beliefs and aims and does not comply with scientific standards. Secondly, the emic message Oxfam spreads is more relevant than the scientific value of its proclamations. By basing the inequality report on a humanitarian ideology that arouses attention and fits to the widely accepted value judgements and beliefs, it will be accepted as true and, consequently, appeal to potential donors to attract funds and other support. However, value judgements are incommensurable with science: "To be sure, as private citizens, as participants in our own culture, we all have our values and pass judgements on the basis of them all the time. But as soon as we don our science suits, we forego that privilege." (Carneiro 1995:2) However, Oxfam's emic works so well *because* it is not science and because it fits into the generally accepted humanist worldview.

As we have seen so far, emic knowledge works in a specific cultural setting and, for this matter, it does not necessarily have to withstand scientific scrutiny. The fact that Oxfam's annual report lacks scientific concreteness is by no means harmful to the organisation. The ideology spread by Oxfam, i.e. the vision that we will live in a world without poverty in which everyone has equal rights, is successful even though, or maybe precisely because, it is highly subjective and

<sup>67</sup> According to the World Bank's definition of poverty, a person is considered poor if he/she lives on less than \$1.90 per day (see <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/06/08/ending-extreme-poverty>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

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inaccurate. In emic statements, what *should* be is often mistaken as something that *will* be, as becomes clear in the proclamation “We won’t live with poverty”<sup>68</sup>.

From Oxfam’s emic accounts we can see that in order for an ideology to work, i.e. to be accepted by others as true, value judgements can be (and often are) more important and more widely accepted than objective facts. Oxfam’s ideology, its humanitarianism makes supporters feel special, unique as well as generous and kind-hearted, adjectives which are regarded as good in within the ideological framework of humanism. It is a promising ideology, one that despite of climate change, natural disasters, wars, humanitarian catastrophes predicts a bright future to Oxfam supporters.

Oxfam maintains that the more the organisation grows the more impact it can have. Growth is of vital importance to the organisation: More money must be raised, and more funding provided to achieve the desired aim. But the principle of growth is not the only similarity it shares with the dominant economic mode of production. For example, the ideology of individualism conveys the belief in one’s potential to realise one’s goals, however unattainable they may appear. The same is proclaimed by Oxfam, for example in its emic approach to poverty: There is enough food for everybody in the world, so it must be possible to distribute these resources equally to ensure that everybody can meet his or her basic needs. According to Oxfam’s emic logic, we must take away from the rich to give to the poor, so that everybody has equal rights and equal access to goods.<sup>69</sup> However, when looking at scientific studies of inequality (see for example Price/Feinman 2010), we realise that hierarchy is a necessary feature of complex social organisation, and that our current world system is incompatible with the idea of social equality.

### THEORETICAL PRINCIPLE

The underlying theoretical principle of the charity’s humanitarianism is the unquestioned assumption that people have the power to change the world. In the case of Oxfam, this assumption is coupled with another unquestioned theoretical principle: the conviction that human beings

<sup>68</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/cymru/blog/2015/09/we-wont-live-with-poverty> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>69</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2018-01-22/richest-1-percent-bagged-82-percent-wealth-created-last-year> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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are free, i.e. that they rationally choose how to act. People are believed to be responsible for the current state of the world (including social inequality) and do not only have the ability but the obligation to make it a better place. What “better” means is defined again by vaguely defined humanitarian values. It is assumed that by making other people aware of “reality”, it is possible to change their actions and behaviour. The more they know, the more “responsible” they will become, for they are rational beings.

This leads us to another of Oxfam’s theoretical principles, which consists of a specific interpretation of cause and effect: the belief that the human mind determines human action. If we are able to change how people think, we can change how they act, the organisation assumes. As it is with inventions, the NGO claims that any advance in poverty reduction around the world is a result of its own work. Infrastructural changes, e.g. the introduction of new technologies or the systematic conversion to capitalist mode of production, are not considered to have a sustainable effect on social inequality.

These theoretical principles are in line and do not contradict capitalist ideology, which is itself based on the assumption of free will and rational choice. The longing for recognition through achievement is another characteristic of the capitalist ideology embedded in our achievement-oriented society. In order for us to be “effective”, we constantly have to act wisely, seize every opportunity, invest our money effectively, and strive to make a difference. The longing for achievement is not only reflected in Oxfam’s theoretical principles, it is characteristic of the complex, hierarchical social organisation in which our factual power to deliberately change our social system is extremely restricted.

### METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The humanist ideology of Oxfam works primarily on an individual level: Individuals are addressed directly and called to make a contribution to change the world. As it is with other “great” inventions, the eradication of poverty is believed to be possible only through individuals who are determined to make this change happen. The greater the number of individuals, the better can this aim be achieved. Oxfam’s message is that if it grows as an organisation its impact increases: the more people start thinking and acting as the NGO suggests, the greater their impact will be. According to the humanist ideology spread by Oxfam, every single person counts and is vital to the organisation, as becomes clear from the following statement: “We aspire to make a sustained and significant positive impact on global poverty and injustice and we believe

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that it is only through the collective efforts of many actors that this goal can be achieved.”<sup>70</sup> Change is assessed on the individual level insofar as it is perceived as a result of individuals working together.

### ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

As is characteristic of all kinds of ideology, the worldview spread by Oxfam contains a particular conceptualisation of what humanness is. According to Oxfam's ideology, human beings are unique and have the right to live in freedom and prosperity. They are essentially different from other living beings because they can think and act freely. An ontological divide between “nature” and “culture” is made because they are understood to be essentially different domains. While the natural domain includes any kind of living being on earth determined by laws of nature, human beings belong to the cultural domain. Human beings are considerably independent from natural forces and rather determined by the culture. As ideas, values, morals, etc. are created by humans, humanity must be self-determined and responsible for its own fate.

This ontological principle of the particularity of human beings fits perfectly to the other principles discussed so far and is entirely different to the ontological principle of science, which makes no such division between human and non-human living beings. Phenomena of the inorganic (physical), organic (biological) and superorganic (cultural) domain are all subject to cause-effect mechanisms. Instead of excluding human beings from the natural sphere in which laws of nature are at work, science assumes that similar mechanisms and forces are at work in the cultural domain, thereby “culture” is conceptualised as a part of “nature”. In this way, culture becomes explainable.

According to the humanist ideology, however, human beings have the power to alter their own culture at will. By assuming that human beings *can* induce cultural change, such change becomes an obligation. Therefore, other human beings are held accountable for existent inequalities in the world. In the case of Oxfam, particularly rich men and global multinational corporations are prompted to pay “their fair share” to the disadvantaged. The ontological divide of “the good” and “the bad” is essential to the working of this particular ideology, even though it

<sup>70</sup><https://www.oxfam.org/en/oxfams-values-and-principles> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]



may seem illogical at times. Although Oxfam is itself a multinational organisation based on the principles of growth and competition, it considers itself to be essentially different from profit-oriented organisations and therefore part of “the good”.

#### **4.2.2. Structure**

Oxfam currently consists of 20 affiliates with headquarters located in different countries, predominantly in the Global North, especially Europe, and cooperates with local communities in more than 90 countries, mostly in the Global South (Oxfam 2016b:16). Its Secretariat is situated in Den Hague, where the INGO is registered as a foundation. Oxfam is also registered as a foreign company limited by guarantee in Great Britain. The organisation originally formed in 1942 under the name Oxford Committee for Famine Relief and has been growing ever since. In 2017 alone, Oxfam opened new offices in two additional countries: Brazil and South Africa. In order to become an affiliate, local organisations must be awarded Observer Status first, which gives them the right to attend meetings, but not to influence decisions made by the Executive Board and Board of Supervisors (see Oxfam 2016b:16).

### **ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE**

The organisation is managed by a Secretariat, which is registered in the United Kingdom<sup>71</sup> and headed by the International Executive Director Winnie Byanyima. The Secretariat runs four advocacy and campaigns offices located in New York, Washington DC, Brussels and Geneva. It is mainly financed by the affiliates' regular financial contributions and specifies the common objectives of Oxfam's work, to which its affiliates subscribe (see *ibid.*).

There is a clear division of labour as well as rights and responsibilities. For example, the Secretariat is in charge of the risk and accountability management of the entire organisation. It is run by the Executive Board, which organises the common activities of the affiliate offices which aim at meeting the objective of the Oxfam Strategic Plan (see Oxfam 2016b:17).

<sup>71</sup> By the end of 2018, Oxfam will have moved its Secretariat from Oxford to Nairobi. This is, in emic terms, considered “part of our strategy to introduce better global balance” (see Oxfam 2016b:5).

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The Executive Board consists of the chief officers of the Oxfam affiliates and members holding observer status and meets at least twice a year. The tasks of the Executive Board are supervised by the Board of Supervisors which has the responsibility of “approving Oxfam’s purposes and beliefs” as well as its Strategic Plan, among others (see *ibid.*). The Finance, Risk and Audit Committee is in charge of scrutinising the Secretariat’s fiscal activities and the financial security of the Oxfam Confederation, which includes the task of risk management and accountability. It is headed by the Treasurer of the Board of Supervisors (see Oxfam 2016b:pp.17). Apart from these leading institutions – the Governance Committee, which is in charge of advising the Board of Supervisors on governance effectiveness and the Board-ED Committee, whose task consists of assisting the Board of Supervisors – the Oxfam International Management Team is responsible for assisting the Secretariat in issues related to Oxfam’s strategy, finances, advocacy and campaigns, among other tasks (see Oxfam 2016b:18).

### SALARY STRUCTURE

Being a multinational organisation, Oxfam consists of around 10,000 paid staff (see Oxfam 2016a:3) and “many thousands”<sup>72</sup> of unpaid staff. As we have seen so far, numerous different departments are entitled with different rights and obligations and thus operate on different hierarchical levels. When considering that social inequality manifests itself “in unequal access to goods, information, decision making, and power” (Price/Feinman 2010:2), it becomes clear that Oxfam’s organisational structure is highly hierarchical. The organisational structure illustrates a clear division and a considerable distance between the different departments, which is another feature of the internal hierarchical order of the organisation. Hierarchy is a feature of complexity, which itself is not a random but a necessary characteristic of large organisations, as Spencer has already described more than a hundred years ago: "Socially as well as individually, organization is indispensable to growth: beyond a certain point there cannot be further growth without further organization" (Spencer 1873:59, see also Chapter 2.1.) It is evident that an organisation of this size cannot work on egalitarian principles which ensure that everybody has equal rights and equal status. The clear division of tasks is a necessary feature of the organisation and a result of its size.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/volunteer-us> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

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This hierarchy is reflected not only in the variety of different statuses (and its corresponding rights and duties) of Oxfam workers, but also in the salary structure. Around €7.5 million were spent on staff in the year 2015-2016 (which indicates a significant rise in comparison to the previous year). The distribution of staff costs is, however, highly unequal and ranges from the top-paid management (headed by one single person, the International Executive Director) to unpaid voluntary staff (of which 22,000 volunteers alone work at Oxfam shops): That same year, the top-paid Management Team consisting of 14 members earned a total amount of £861,000 (which equals approximately €976,000), of which the International Executive Director's income alone amounted to £133,000 (which equals approximately €150,000). The fact that the managements' salary level corresponds to local market salaries of similar positions, is supposed to ensure that highly skilled experts are recruited and retained (see Oxfam 2016b:40). It is money, not ideals, that are meant to attract the management.

In between, there exists a complex differentiation of numerous different job levels within Oxfam, depending to which affiliate and to which thematic area the job belongs. Among the types of jobs offered within the organisation are: Finance Officer, IT Officer, HR Administrator, Marketing Executive, Rule of Law Technical Specialist, Payroll and Staff Expenses Assistant Accountant, Consultancy: Business Development Services, and many more<sup>73</sup>. Interestingly, in several vacancies the organisation openly states that the job purpose is “to make as much money as possible to overcome poverty and suffering”<sup>74</sup>.

The payment level varies according to the job position within the organisations internal hierarchy and the responsibilities and duties attached to it. For example, a Oxfam shop manager with the responsibility of managing a voluntary team earns £7,940 (around €9000) per annum gross for 18 hours per week, while the volunteers are unpaid.<sup>75</sup> The internal job grades specified in the job descriptions refer to the rank of the job and its salary within the internal hierarchy. For example, a full time Senior Human Resource Manager in Iraq is in the salary group C1 of

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/jobs/affiliates> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>74</sup> [https://www.oxfam.org/en/aggregator/jobs\\_1213.aspx](https://www.oxfam.org/en/aggregator/jobs_1213.aspx) [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>75</sup> see <https://jobs.oxfam.org.uk/vacancy/deputy-bookhop-manager-beeston-trd1672/8475/description/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

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£27,963 and £37,095 (which roughly equals €31,500 and €42,000) per year, while a Senior Programme Finance Officer's annual salary, whose position is classified as type D, exceeds €100,000<sup>76</sup>.

### ACTIVITIES

The humanitarian projects run by Oxfam cover a wide range of activities. One of the central strategy and objective at the same time is awareness raising. This is done in numerous ways: By supporting local communities to run radio programs, mass media campaigns, activities to raise attention on Facebook and other social media, producing video clips broadcasted on TV (so-called edutainment programmes) and organising film festivals, the organisation declares to engage in the fight against social injustices and to ensure that the voices of marginalised social groups, such as indigenous communities, unemployed youth, and women are being heard. Its presence at large music festivals such as the Glastonbury festival in England, is used to raise awareness and raise money, for example by installing Oxfam shops there.<sup>77</sup>

Awareness raising is found to be the key to success, not only with respect to collecting funds but also in terms of helping the poor: According to Oxfam, in order for the poor to defend their aims and beliefs in public they first of all must become aware of the unfair treatment they are exposed to, which is why one Oxfam project in 2015-2016 was dedicated to teaching Nepalese women their rights. Another project, Oxfam's Saving for Change (SfC) programme, consisted of training the business and entrepreneurship skills of Malian rural women so they could "create a better society" (see Oxfam 2016a:pp.29). Training programmes and modern communication technologies are the most widely used means by which Oxfam aims at defending the interests of the poor and marginalised. Modern tools of communication are used to challenge conventional cultural attitudes and beliefs which threaten the liberties of marginalised people.

Lobbying is another major tool for combating injustice. For example, it is used for fighting against climate change and its devastating effects on human beings. Through partnerships and

<sup>76</sup> see <https://jobs.oxfam.org.uk/vacancy/senior-programme-finance-officer-int4317/8493/description/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>77</sup> see <http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/worthy-causes/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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public campaigns, Oxfam strives to exert pressure on governments and companies, for example when “demanding the respect and legal recognition of indigenous land rights that are under attack around the world” in their international “Land Rights Now” campaign (see Oxfam 2016a:77).

Apart from awareness raising and lobbying activities, Oxfam supplies people in need with material resources in the events of humanitarian disasters. It provides learning materials in Afghan schools and essential goods such as food, clean water, hygiene kits and sanitation facilities to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflict. However, only a minor part of the organisation's expenses is dedicated to humanitarian aid and conventional development programmes.

Oxfam's projects for the people it strives to help cover a wide range of areas, such as poverty reduction, gender equality, human rights and disaster relief. The vast number of different projects of which donors can pick enables them to support the one(s) they like best. In the same way, Oxfam offers potential supporters a wide range of possibilities to engage in their work, such as campaigning, signing petitions, donating money, participating in “Oxfam Trailwalker”<sup>78</sup>, volunteering, shopping in Oxfam's shops and working with them.<sup>79</sup> Even though the NGO publicly fights against multinational corporations, it is eager to cooperate with those ready to provide donations, which is regarded as a win-win-situation<sup>80</sup>, as companies receive free publicity in return which might help them increase their own profits.

<sup>78</sup> The Oxfam Trailwalker event consists of voluntary teams who walk 100km within a limited time period (usually 48 hours) to collect money for Oxfam's mission to eradicate poverty around the world: “Since it began in 1981, thousands of walkers around the world have successfully taken on the challenge. In 2012 over 22,000 people collectively walked over 2.2 million kilometres and raised over \$18 million.” (<https://www.oxfam.org/en/oxfam-trailwalker>, last accessed on 22.10.2018)

<sup>79</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org/en/work-oxfam> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>80</sup> On its official website, Oxfam publicly endorses the cooperation with companies and corporations. “If you share our vision of building a world without poverty and are looking for ways to meet your business objectives whilst making a real impact, get in touch using the form below and one of our team will get back to you asap.”

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All in all, Oxfam's organisational structure is highly complex and hierarchical. The principles it rests on include a rigid division of tasks, specialisation and professionalisation of its staff, competition with other NGOs, outsourcing of face-to-face fundraising activities to subcontracting firms and cost-benefit maximisation. Thus, the organisational structure shows great similarity to the one of capitalist multinational companies.

### 4.2.3. Infrastructure

According to cultural materialism, the infrastructural conditions have a strong impact on the internal structure, from which the superstructure emerges. This section contains an analysis of the underlying material conditions the organisation is based on, such as the mode of reproduction and the mode of production, including technological means.

#### MODE OF PRODUCTION

Oxfam operates within a globalised capitalist economy, to which it constantly adapts. This becomes most evident when considering the myriads different tactics of the NGO for raising money and recruiting staff, which allows for the organisation's growth. For example, in order to attract attention and promote its work, Oxfam publishes on its website the names and shared histories of their best-known contributors worldwide that spread Oxfam's message. Among the many outstanding supporters, which are called "global ambassadors", are the actors Bill Nighy and Gael García Bernal, the pop group Coldplay and the actress Helen Mirren.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from this, numerous strategies for recruiting unpaid voluntary staff exist. For example, the organisation promises young people unique experiences while volunteering as unpaid "Oxfam stewards" or "Oxfam campaigners" at numerous music and art festivals.<sup>82</sup> Under the label "Oxjam", it encourages potential supporters to start their own charity festival with and for

([https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/become-an-oxfam-corporate-partner/contact-us?intcmp=cpt\\_header\\_btn](https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/become-an-oxfam-corporate-partner/contact-us?intcmp=cpt_header_btn), last accessed on 22.10.2018)

<sup>81</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org/en/ambassadors> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>82</sup> see <https://oxfamapps.org/festivals/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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Oxfam.<sup>83</sup> These are just a few of the many different strategies based on the capitalist principle of maximising profits which the multinational organisation uses to make itself heard and seen and to reach out to potential supporters.

### MODE OF REPRODUCTION

Of the total income of €1.071 billion euro per year, the largest amount of money, around €443,3 million, stems from “institutional fundraising”, which includes funds from UN and UN institutions, EU and EU institutions, other supranational institutions, national governments and other NGOs (see Oxfam 2016a:94). This fact clearly illustrates why a differentiation between emic and etic knowledge is important in social science research: Whereas in emic terms Oxfam is called a non-governmental organisation, it derives funds from governments and intergovernmental institutions. From an etic point of view, Oxfam is, to a large extent, a governmental organisation.

The second largest part of the total income, around €424.1 million, stems from public fundraising, which includes fundraising events, humanitarian appeals, regular donations, online shopping, bequests, lotteries, and other fundraising activities (see *ibid.*). The organisation employs a similarly large number of strategies to recruit donations: Beyond conventional fundraising measures such as street campaigning and advertising through mass media and social channels, Oxfam runs a series of shops: among them Oxfam Home shops selling furnishing items, Oxfam Bridal boutiques selling wedding dresses and Oxfam Mixshops, in which clients can consume “for a good cause” and buy whatever they like best – from second-hand-items such as clothes, books, toys, textiles, curiosities, CDs and DVDs, to modern fashion items, accessories, and more. Apart from these, supporters can consume goods for others – as is suggested by the project “Oxfam unwrapped” which allows clients to buy charity gifts of all kinds for the people in need. One may “buy” safe water, honey bees, pigs, piles of poo, education for a child and the empowerment of girls.<sup>84</sup> Most interestingly, Oxfam does not only promote the consumption of charity goods, but also gambling “for a good cause”: “The Oxfam Lottery: Winning against

<sup>83</sup> see <https://oxfamblogs.org/oxjam/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>84</sup> see <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/shop/oxfam-unwrapped> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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poverty week by week”<sup>85</sup> enables supporters not only to support the poor and marginalised by making a minimal regular donation, but also the chance of making up to £1,000 each week for themselves.

In the year 2015/2016, about one third (€331 million) of total expenditures has not been invested in humanitarian, development and other charity projects, but spent on management, administration, fundraising, marketing, and trading alone (see Oxfam 2016a:96). The programme management covered an additional 10% (€116 million) of total expenditures and for the programme implementation around 65% (€630 million) of total expenditures were spent (see *ibid.*). To a large part, the organisation collects money for itself and its 10,000 employees. Even money that is invested in the programme implementation is spent partly on the salaries and management of working units. In its financial report section, the Oxfam Annual Report 2015-2016 does not state how much money was actually provided in the form of goods and services to the beneficiaries of the projects. There is an enormous difference in what Oxfam advertises on its website (namely its outstanding work of making poverty reduction reality worldwide) and what it actually does (e.g. that donations in fact help, to a large extent, the organisation and its workers), which again points out the discrepancy between its emics and etics.

### TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a vital means for attracting attention and, ultimately, funds to guarantee Oxfam's further existence. Communication technologies play a vital role for Oxfam in achieving massive media attention, as is illustrated in the following example: Before the start of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos in 2016, Oxfam had published the controversial report “An Economy for the 1%”, which caused enormous public outrage. For Oxfam, social media is one of the most effective and therefore extensively used communication channels:

“Oxfam's digital World Wide influencing network achieved massive social media reach within 20,000 people sharing, liking and re-tweeting content, including celebrities Bette Midler, Jamie Oliver, and Simon Pegg. On 20 January, #WEF16 trended in the top 5 globally on Twitter all day. Oxfam's media coverage more than doubled from last year (from

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/oxfam-lottery> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]



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2,500 media hits to over 5,000), with lots of pickup in new markets, with our most conservative figures indicating a media reach of 359 million between 17 and 21 January 2016.” (Oxfam 2016a:83)

Through celebrities, film festivals, internet videos, online gambling and other ingenious fundraising tactics, the NGO strives to reach as many people as possible, and to make its brand name known. In emic terms, having spread Oxfam's message comes close to having achieved the goal of tackling poverty, which is why this is already celebrated as an achievement. From an etic point of view, it becomes obvious that the NGO's major effort consists of attracting more and more donors, on whose financial support it vitally depends<sup>86</sup>.

As we have already seen in the previous subchapter, Oxfam's mode of production relies on a service-and-information economy that involves the principles of free market, individualism and maximisation of growth: The online job offers published on various Oxfam websites are open to competition. Everybody can apply. The higher one's education and professional experience is, the greater are the chances to be hired for a top position. Remarkably, Oxfam jobs are situated in the service-and-information industry, which proves Oxfam's adjustment to the dominant economic system it operates in. The job descriptions for fundraising advisors, consultants, project managers, administrative managers, donor relations assistants, finance officers, technical team leaders, project team coordinators, and alike illustrate this high level of adjustment to external conditions.

Since its foundation, Oxfam has been expanding into an enormous international network of affiliates and partner organisations operating all over the globe. Its mode of production and

<sup>86</sup> The vital importance of (social) media and the enormous accountability towards financial supporters became especially obvious when in 2018 Oxfam Great Britain staff was found to have sexually abused minors during its humanitarian projects in Haiti in 2011 and in Chad in 2006. The scandal became known all over the world and was followed by immediate public outrage: More than 7,000 donors cancelled their regular donations within ten days. Oxfam reacted quickly and repeatedly apologised to its supporters (especially Members of the British Parliament and the British public) for the misconduct. The deputy CEO of Oxfam Great Britain resigned, and several new measures were introduced to regain credibility. However, in their various responses to the scandal the NGO did not directly apologise to the victims that suffered the abuse (see for example <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/20/oxfam-boss-mark-goldring-apologises-over-abuse-of-haiti-quake-victims>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

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reproduction is based on the principles of capitalism and globalisation, which make its proliferation possible. Modern communication and information technologies are a necessary feature of the expansion of the NGO as they enable the fluent contact and management between the various affiliates, partner organisations, donors, governments, intergovernmental institutions, and projects located in different parts of the world. Without modern communication technologies, Oxfam would not have been able to collect as many funds, recruit as many employees and voluntaries supporting their projects and operate in as many locations.

Oxfam's infrastructure is clearly based on globalisation, capitalism and communication- and information technologies. As we have seen from the etic analysis, the infrastructural features become visible in the NGO's organisational structure and, partly, in its superstructure, which is due to the adjustment of social systems to infrastructural conditions.

### 4.3. The emics of Greenpeace

*“The demons we must wrestle are the stories that are holding back a better world: that change is ‘impossible’, ‘too expensive’, ‘naïve’, ‘impractical’. [...] We believe the story of the human journey is better than that.”<sup>87</sup>*

#### SELF-DEFINITION

From an emic point of view, Greenpeace acts independently of political or commercial interests and does not accept funding from any such institutions. Its independence is meant to guarantee the effectivity of its work, which aims at eliminating environmental problems. Greenpeace defines itself through its behaviour: “What matters isn’t words, but actions, and, as far as we’re concerned, there’s only one standard in this: The environment has to benefit.”<sup>88</sup> Greenpeace members regard themselves as one global activist group consisting of defenders of the climate, the forests, the oceans, the air, rivers, lakes and lands, sustainable agriculture, green energy, and “ultimately ourselves as our future”.<sup>89</sup>

Greenpeace officially defines itself as

“an independent campaigning organisation, which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force the solutions which are essential to a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace’s goal is to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> <https://workfor.greenpeace.org/about-greenpeace/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/about/our-core-values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/campaigns/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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In a promotional video titled “We.Are.Greenpeace” and published on the website of Greenpeace USA, members describe themselves to be stewards, caretakers, trailblazers, scientists, climate champions, activists and protectors, thereby emphasising the diversity of Greenpeace.<sup>91</sup>

### SELF-REPRESENTATION

Greenpeace relates its origins to a Vancouver activist group protesting against nuclear tests carried out by the U.S. military in the northern pacific area of the Bering Sea, which in 1972 resulted in the Greenpeace Foundation (see Riese 2017:pp.15). According to emic descriptions, Greenpeace’s history goes back to Irving Stowe, who is celebrated as the official co-founding father of the organisation, because he had the idea of this first intervention.<sup>92</sup> The following story tells how Greenpeace came into being:

“In 1971, a small group of activists set sail to the Amchitka island off Alaska to try and stop a US nuclear weapons test. The money for the mission was raised with a concert, their old fishing boat was called ‘The Greenpeace’. This is where our story begins. [...] The nuclear test program at Amchitka was cancelled five months after our mission, and some scholars argue that this was the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Whatever history decides about the big picture, the legacy of the voyage itself is not just a bunch of guys in a fishing boat, but the Greenpeace the entire world has come to love and hate.”<sup>93</sup>

According to emic knowledge, this event marked the beginning of the NGO’s remarkable success story. Since then, the number of supporters has been growing and its activism has become ever more powerful. Among the numerous achievements, which are summed up in a timeline

<sup>91</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>92</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/history/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]. For a more detailed description of Greenpeace’s origins, see Hunter (2004).

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/history/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

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of 197 historic events, are: the prevention of seals slaughter, a ban on incineration of organo-chlorine waste at sea, the cancelling of several nuclear tests, the establishment of an Antarctic whale sanctuary and the Kyoto protocol agreement of greenhouse gases.<sup>94</sup>

On the official website, Greenpeace members represent themselves to be warriors in a global fight to protect life from the harm caused by political and economic interests: “Around the globe, we are standing up for our communities, and we are holding governments and corporations accountable.”<sup>95</sup> However, the NGO does not specify which communities it means to protect, and which actions exactly it holds governments and corporations accountable for. Emic messages as these are vague and abstract, so that every potential supporter may freely associate the people and events that come to their minds.

Greenpeace’s emic statements often consist of value judgements to which emotions are attached: “Burning fossil fuels — coal, oil and gas — is causing climate change, making us sick, and destroying the lands and oceans we love.”<sup>96</sup> Emotions and feelings are described as the trigger to action and serve as a motivator for their engagement in saving the planet. This becomes clear in the following statement of a Greenpeace activist, in which he describes his deeply emotional attachment to the whales as the reason for his engagement:

“In a way whales are a symbol for how we treat the planet. If we can’t even save the whales, how the fuck are we gonna save the small bugs. [...] If the capitalist economics takes over even that, then it’s hopeless. [...] The other side of it is, if you’ve ever been in an inflatable next to a whale, it is an incredible feeling. It is like the presence of life. You know, it’s just amazing. And so it’s also a personalization of this thing that we’re all trying to save. And they’re also beautiful, supreme and peaceful, ... they are a Greenpeace thing.” (Riese 2017:19)

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/history/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/campaigns/climate-change/Solutions/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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The emotional attachment to nature and the life it creates is the essence of Greenpeace's work. Comprehending life as "good", as something that must be protected and valued, is the basis for its claims: "Some people look at a forest, and all they see is lumber. But there are millions more who see a home, a heritage, a future."<sup>97</sup> "Home", "heritage", "future" are all concepts linked to something peaceful and intimate, something that is vital to our lives and essential for our well-being. Greenpeace members regard themselves as being connected to the nature they are surrounded by. They comprehend the planet as something precious and extremely vulnerable, which is why it must be protected by all people whose existence depends on it. According to this emic logic, Greenpeace members are enlightened citizens of the world engaging actively in defence of the planet's well-being that is under attack of economic and political interest groups which are guided by a reckless and profit-oriented attitude.

### VALUES AND BELIEFS

Since its early beginnings, Greenpeace members have been sharing certain beliefs and defended certain morals: They have been questioning the "values of mainstream Western society, its 'notions of progress, [economic] growth, and security'" (Riese 2017:17). According to Greenpeace's emic view, people rationally decide whether they want to act in a good or a bad way; they are accountable for their actions. Human action is considered to be caused by human minds, which is why Greenpeace's strategy focuses on raising awareness. There is a strong belief that symbolic nonviolent action such as the one of Rosa Parks in 1955 can have a decisive impact on other people and cause a range of positive transformations (see Simons 2011). Therefore, changing the minds of other people is found to be key to effectuating the desired change in the world.

"There's no such thing as impossible", Greenpeace declares on its official website, and goes on to explain why it is necessary to think that: "The first step to a better world is to open our minds to the unthinkable, the impossible. The problems we face are massive. Our dreams are bigger. They have to be."<sup>98</sup> According to this emic view, there is an urgent need for more people who

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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dare to think that it is possible to change the world: “Greenpeace exists because this fragile earth deserves a voice. It needs solutions. It needs change. It needs action.”<sup>99</sup> According to these emic statements, the earth’s wellbeing depends on us, and it is our task to save it. “We are the ones we have been waiting for”<sup>100</sup>, Greenpeace proudly announces on its official website, thereby attributing outstanding importance to our generation to save the planet. “All it takes is just one person to start a movement. [...] It’s never too late to believe to change the world”<sup>101</sup>, the organisation proclaims on its official Facebook page, thereby suggesting that it depends on us alone if we choose to do so. Every single person matters.

Greenpeace members share a common vision: that courage is the key to a green and peaceful future. Courage, a certain human characteristic, and courageous action, the practice entangled to it, are meant to save the world. Their self-declared optimistic attitude rests on the belief that they have the power to transform the world. According to the NGO’s emic view, whether or not this positive transformation will happen depends solely on the will and choice of human beings to act in favour or against the environment.<sup>102</sup> Greenpeace derives its inspiration from the past, on the one hand from role models such as the Quakers, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. (see Greenpeace 2016a:30) and on the other hand from its past missions, which were led by the principles of nonviolent, independent and courageous action. Its history is a pool of heroic events in which Greenpeace members risked their lives to defend a higher cause: saving the planet. Its victories as well as attacks against them are considered to be the source of power and motivation that guides present action directed towards saving the environment from pollution, devastation, killing, destruction and exploitation.<sup>103</sup> Witnessing how harm is caused on our precious earth is described as the principal reason for Greenpeace’s existence.

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/explore/energy/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>101</sup> Greenpeace International, 30.03.2018, <https://www.facebook.com/greenpeace.international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>102</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>103</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/about/our-core-values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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The idea of bringing about positive change guides Greenpeace's actions in many regards. The NGO declares that it is accountable to its members and supporters, as well as the people it works for. Therefore, it promises to be transparent, respectful of human rights and ethical in its work. Its membership in Accountable Now<sup>104</sup>, a charity serving as a platform of internationally operating civil society organisations, is said to guarantee the NGO's transparency, high quality and responsibility in its management and use of donations.

### AIMS AND PURPOSE

From an emic view, Greenpeace's commitment is a necessary response to serious environmental problems that threaten the existence of human beings, animal species, plants, landscapes, to put it briefly: the world's entire ecosystem. The NGO claims to promote open debates about these problems and works towards finding solutions. Two of its major purposes are protecting the environment (e.g. through the establishment of natural reserves) and bringing about a "clean" and "green" economy. Its officially pronounced objectives are:

1. The protection of biodiversity
2. The prevention of pollution and exploitation of the earth
3. The ending of all nuclear threats
4. The promotion of peace, worldwide disarmament and non-violence<sup>105</sup>

The common vision of Greenpeace members is highly abstract and vaguely defined. As we have seen so far, the NGO works towards "building a brighter tomorrow", "changing the world" and "saving the planet". All of these aims are abstract and directed towards the future, which, according to its emics, ought to be better than the present. What exactly is meant by these terms is open to subjective interpretation. By using vague concepts, the NGO encourages its members and potential supporters to believe they can realise their dreams and create whatever future they imagine. This future shall not be determined by anything else but themselves and their present actions. Human beings are believed to have the power to build the world they want every day

<sup>104</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/about/our-core-values/transparency-and-accountability/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>105</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]



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through their participation in the NGO. By changing the present social, economic and political system, which is Greenpeace's final aim (see Greenpeace 2016a:30), the desired future can become reality. When this future will come about, however, is not clearly defined: "Sometimes change comes quickly, sometimes it takes a decade or even a generation", the NGO announces in its Annual Report (2016a:8).

As Greenpeace's aims and purpose are not clearly defined, they can never be fully achieved. There will always be some place in which biodiversity is not fully protected, in which the earth is exploited for industrial purposes, in which there is a threat of nuclear weapons, and in which arms are used for killing people. As long as there are human beings on earth, these phenomena will continue to exist. Rationally speaking, the envisioned future described above is highly unrealistic, but this does not make it less "real" for Greenpeace members and supporters. The fact that the objectives can never be fully achieved through human action does not make these less effective. Unrealistic promises like these rather help to secure the NGO's existence in the long future. The charity's repeated call for more and more people to become "active" illustrates this.

## METHODS

As we have already seen, Greenpeace proclaims that together human beings have the power to change the world: "Everyday people can band together and challenge even the world's most powerful forces."<sup>106</sup> It is therefore logical, from an emic point of view, that the organisation intends to grow by convincing as many people as possible to join the fight against the destruction of nature. The more people take action, the more will they be able to reach their common aims: "Together we are stronger. [...] Together we are making change."<sup>107</sup> Every single person counts. That is why Greenpeace is eager to attract the support of as many people as possible. This movement to save the Arctic is growing stronger because of people like you. Together we've come so far – and we can go even further."<sup>108</sup> Even though the vision of a green, just

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/campaigns/climate-change/arctic-impacts/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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planet might seem to be hard to realise, on its website the NGO maintains that it is possible, thereby creating the idea of a perfect world that lies within our reach:

“Imagine a world where forests flourish and oceans are full of life. Where energy is as clean as a mountain stream. Where everyone has security, dignity and joy. We can't build this future alone, but we can build it together.”<sup>109</sup>

On the one hand, Greenpeace directs its message to individuals and individual action, for example by calling on each possible supporter to save the Arctic from oil drilling and climate change. Individual action is believed to be decisive when it comes to saving the planet, which is why on its official website Greenpeace urges visitors to “be the change”.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, the NGO claims that it needs masses of human beings to bring about change: “We believe that a billion acts of courage can spark a brighter tomorrow.”<sup>111</sup> From an emic point of view, whether or not this “brighter tomorrow” will become reality depends on the number of people acting towards it.

Human actions are considered to be caused by human minds. Changing the minds of human beings is found to be key to effectuating the necessary change for saving the planet. Greenpeace's strategy therefore focuses on raising awareness. It concentrates on intensive campaigning and the organisation of public protests. However, changing minds alone is not sufficient. Concrete action is necessary in order to attain common aims: “It's not enough for us to point the finger; we develop, research and promote concrete steps towards a green and peaceful future for all of us.”<sup>112</sup> As Greenpeace has already shown in the past, here is a strong need for courageous action, such as driving ships to “crime scenes” to occupy them (e.g. the offshore oil platform Brent Spar or a crane at the construction site of a nuclear reactor in Finland), intervening in “crimes” (e.g. hindering the killing of whales at sea or freeing endangered blue fin tuna

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>110</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/about/our-core-values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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from nets) or evacuating the people affected (e.g. the residents of the contaminated Pacific island of Rongelap).

However, not all forms of action promoted by Greenpeace are as courageous: In other instances, Greenpeace claims that everybody can change the world even by simple acts such as signing a petition: “If you are not already an Arctic Defender, what are you waiting for – one click, and you are there!” (Greenpeace 2016a:16). Despite of such simple acts as clicking on a petition sign on a website, NGO members depict themselves as courageous warriors engaging in a fight against criminals. Their militant language<sup>113</sup> divides the human population into two groups: “the good” (meaning Greenpeace supporters and the victims) and “the bad” (meaning neoliberal governments and corporations which in general do not care about the environment). According to the NGO’s emic logic, “the good” are being attacked and therefore have to defend themselves by fighting back “peacefully but courageously”. This fight is primarily led against the profit-oriented fishing and fossil fuel industry and related multinational corporations such as Nestlé S.A., Novartis International AG, Energy Transfer Partners, Volkswagen, The Dow Chemical Company, Exxon Mobil Corporation, among others, as well as governments, who are found responsible for climate change and the destruction of “our” planet and “our” future. In its fight against these enemies, especially in its strategies and emic concepts, Greenpeace shows strikingly similar characteristics to other identerest groups (see Chapter 2.1).

<sup>113</sup> For example, on its official website Greenpeace publishes the following statement: “We’ve stopped environmental crimes in the past and held companies to account. And our power is growing. More and more people are saying ‘no’ to trashing the oceans, forests and climate – and standing up to protect our air, land and water from pollution.” (<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/explore/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018) On the official website of Greenpeace Africa, the following title is presented in large letters: “THE BATTLE FOR CLEAN WATER: MEGA COAL VS. PEOPLE” (<http://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018). In its fight against oil drilling, the NGO proclaims that “[w]ith this historic court case a new generation is now taking action to stop oil companies from kidnapping our future.” (Skjoldvær/Gulowsen 2016) On another website, Greenpeace announces to “work directly with communities on the frontlines as they protect the environments they call home”. (<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/worldwide/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018). In their fight for justice, Greenpeace members strive to act against the unethical acts of corporations and governments: “We want to tear apart the way corporations and governments collude to make a profit at the expense of both people and planet. They must be held accountable and liable, for their impact on the climate and biodiversity loss.” (<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/explore/people/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

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As we have seen from Greenpeace's emic statements, its existence is believed to be caused by the injustices committed by powerful selfish actors seeking their own profit at the sake of the planet's well-being. Thus, the NGO exists because nature is being threatened, and it will exist as long as there are people threatening it. This logic could be taken ad absurdum, considering that our planet will probably never be totally free from harm. Moreover, "harm" is not clearly defined and could mean anything. However, such considerations are not taken into account. What matters to Greenpeace is that people believe the following statements to be true: first, the planet is being attacked; second, it can be saved; and third, people have the moral responsibility to save it. By the use of vague concepts that are open to subjective imagination, the NGO is able to make a broad range of people believe in their importance to act now for a meaningful cause. As this cause is not clearly defined, it is compatible with different worldviews and personal ideas of a beautiful future.

Sometimes, Greenpeace's emics appear contradictory at first sight. For example, the NGO proclaims that the planet is being destroyed more and more, but at the same time maintains that the situation is getting better because of the support of donors and that there is hope for a brighter future. In its Annual Report 2016, Greenpeace International Executive Directors Jennifer Morgan and Bunny McDiarmid comment that

"[t]he industrialisation and technology boom that has given us so many benefits in some ways, has also brought devastating consequences for the security of our people (exposed to pollution, injustices and land grabs); and especially for our climate. 2016 was the hottest year on record and the most deadly for environmental and human rights defenders. [...] We are significantly reducing our planet's resilience, and our own. But we will not be deterred."  
(Greenpeace 2016a:2)

According to the logic of Greenpeace, highlighting the aggravation of the present situation and at the same time praising Greenpeace's ongoing engagement are not contradictory but highly effective when it comes to convincing supporters to join the NGO. From an etic perspective, however, the following questions arise: Why does the situation worsen despite of Greenpeace's growing worldwide support? Why is there hope for a brighter future if climate change reached extreme threats? As Greenpeace aims at changing the "systems that produce these problems" (Greenpeace 2016a:6), does that mean Greenpeace pretends to reverse industrialisation and ban the use of technology? These examples illustrate that emic arguments leave several questions

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open for debate, because they are usually not based on scientific criteria such as logic and consistency. Elsewhere Greenpeace argues that “[w]e are living in a time of climate change, but we are also the generation who is bringing about an energy revolution” (Greenpeace 2016a:12) This “energy revolution” is brought forward by 30,000 people who have signed a petition to break free from fossil fuels and the gathering of hundreds of people demanding the Kinder Morgan Plant near Vancouver, Canada, to be shut down (see *ibid.*). Other kinds of revolutions are being carried out, too, such as the so-called “eco-food revolution”, which has begun to spread around the world with the help of Greenpeace’s Food for Life movement (see Greenpeace 2016a:14). Changes in policies are praised for being the result of these revolutions. For example, China’s suspension of 104 planned coal power plants in 2016 is proudly announced to be the outcome of Greenpeace’s effective actions (see Greenpeace 2016a:12).

Even though emic concepts as the ones discussed do not withstand scientific criteria, they nevertheless work effectively in the donors’ culture, because they are adjusted to the dominant humanist ideology. Greenpeace, which has been continuously growing since its foundation in 1972, is an excellent example.

#### **4.4. The etics of Greenpeace**

Greenpeace's emics make us understand the workings of its claims, promises, hopes and fears. They give us an insight into the activists' personal motives, thoughts and feelings and enables us to understand their beliefs and worldviews. Even though some emic statements might be inconsistent or illogical from an etic point of view, they make sense to a lot of people who join the NGO and support it in one way or the other. But how can we scientifically make sense of Greenpeace's "success story"? What are the etic characteristics of this NGO and which measurable principles is it based on?

In this section, I will complement the emic knowledge already presented with etic knowledge about Greenpeace. For this purpose, I will analyse the NGO's superstructure, structure and infrastructure.

##### **4.4.1. Superstructure**

The messages spread by Greenpeace are in line with the humanist ideology. However, in contrast to Oxfam, its worldview does not put people, but life on earth at centre stage. Human beings are perceived to be indirectly affected by the threats to nature. They are be highly ambivalent beings, as they may be victims, destroyers or saviours. It depends on each individual whether to choose to exploit or protect the earth and its living species.

The environmentalism proclaimed by Greenpeace is therefore a special kind of humanism: It is directed at saving "distant strangers" (e.g. life on the Arctic) by defending them against particular interests of individual human beings. This ideology is based on a holistic worldview, in which the planet and all the life it produces are conceived as one. To protect ourselves, the human species, we must preserve all life on our planet. Humanity is regarded to be deeply intertwined with and dependent on nature.

##### **EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE**

Greenpeace's environmentalism does not distinguish between culturally specific statements and scientific findings. However, sometimes scientific research is used to emphasise a certain emic claim. The NGO has established its own research laboratory at the University of Exeter, Great Britain, in which it carries out research related to air pollution, water contamination, and other environmental issues. As a source of information, Greenpeace has created an extensive database

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of scientific findings which it uses to create awareness.<sup>114</sup> Emic arguments are supported by adequate research findings to highlight the urgency for people to act in the way Greenpeace suggests.

The concepts Greenpeace's environmentalism is based on are abstract, imprecisely defined and not falsifiable. However, what matters is not that these concepts are scientifically valid, but that they are meaningful to potential supporters, i.e. that people identify themselves with the proclaimed values and beliefs. Not surprisingly, the environmentalism spread by Greenpeace is highly compatible with the dominant ideology of the culture it operates in: global capitalism. Just as Greenpeace proclaims that everybody can make a difference in whatever distant part of the world and that it is their responsibility to do so, global capitalism spreads the belief that everybody is responsible for their own fate, which depends on their personal effort and improvement. By improving yourself, for example by turning your own lifestyle into a more sustainable and "green" one, you can change the world, Greenpeace proclaims. In a similar manner, global capitalism suggests that individuals can become ever more effective and productive, provided they constantly strive to improve themselves.

From an etic point of view, most of the objectives outlined in Chapter 4.3 are unattainable. Nevertheless, Greenpeace successfully encourages people to strive towards the accomplishment of these goals. Constant effort is required for bringing about the desired change. Even though this "change" is not clearly defined, it is nevertheless regarded the highest aim, which – be it achievable or not – it is worth fighting for. Therefore, all effort is in itself "good".

Just as the ideologies of other interest groups, for example religious organisations, Greenpeace's ideology is full of normative statements to which certain morals and a specific notion of "the good" and "the bad" is attached. It is based on ideals that are supposed to guide people's actions and encourage them to pursue a common vision. Scientific criteria such as objectivity, replicability and falsification are widely disregarded, as they would raise undesired doubts. Moreover, these criteria are irrelevant for Greenpeace's workings.

<sup>114</sup> see <http://www.greenpeace.to/greenpeace/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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### THEORETICAL PRINCIPLE

Greenpeace's superstructure is based on the same theoretical principle proclaimed in Enlightenment which claim that human beings are responsible for the world's problems. It is human beings who cause the world to be as it is. Consequently, if we change people's minds we can change the world. Therefore, the NGO's strategy focuses on spreading its message through various communication channels in order to reach as many people as possible. Raising awareness is found to be the key to changing people's minds and, finally, the world.

A second theoretical principle intrinsically connected to the first is the assumption that human beings are governed by free will and free choice. They can rationally choose whether to act "in a good way" or "in a bad way" (as defined by the humanist values proclaimed by Greenpeace). Only if we conceive people to be governed by their awareness, can we hold them accountable for their actions, and only if we assume people are acting rationally with their minds governing their actions, we must believe that their actions vary according to their personal knowledge, beliefs or moral values. Positive thinking leads to positive change, one could logically deduce from this principle. What is more, if people deliberately choose to think positively they will be able to change the world. According to Greenpeace's superstructure, the human mind is conferred the power to imagine change and to induce it (this is illustrated by the emic belief that everything is possible, see Chapter 4.3.). Positive change starts in people's mind. Therefore, Greenpeace engages in arousing emotions in order to make people react to the perceived injustices of the world, especially those related to environmental issues. In order to save the earth and all living being from harm, people need to think and act in a certain way, namely the one proposed by Greenpeace.

The NGO's self-declared cause of existence is based on the very same theoretical principle, as we can see from the following two theses and the resulting moral imperative:

Thesis 1: The planet we live on is being harmed by people (threat)

Thesis 2: The planet we live on is precious and defenceless (victimisation)

Conclusion: We have to protect it against people harming it (moral imperative)

The last statement is a normative one and, according to the emic logic of humanism, follows from the first two statements: Greenpeace's existence is the necessary consequence of the threat that is posed on the earth and its inability to defend itself. Human action is required to save the



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world from harm. According to Greenpeace's worldview, all scientific research must follow a moral cause rather than restrict itself to the collection and analysis of facts.

The theoretical principles Greenpeace's worldview is based on is a humanist one, as human beings are regarded to have the ability to either save or destroy the earth. They are found to be accountable for environmental problems such as climate change and, at the same time, are regarded to be able to stop them. Rather than taking non-human factors into account or accepting the present situation, people are held accountable for environmental problems. NGOs are identerest groups (see Chapter 2.1.) acting against certain enemies by raising consciousness or causing emotional reactions such as fear or compassion, which are considered to trigger action. The media have been used as a communication channel for attracting attention and spreading their messages in order to achieve a "consciousness revolution" (see Riese 2017:18).

The principles just described are similar to the ones of Enlightenment and Marxism, which all part from the idea that if people become aware of the injustices committed, they will be able to create a better world. This cause-effect mechanism is consistent with any kind of humanist ideology, which regards humans to be responsible for social, economic and even environmental problems. As the example of Greenpeace shows, it is not just social and cultural phenomena that can be explained in this way, but also environmental phenomena. The humanist ideology does not only offer explanations about human phenomena but the whole world.

### METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Greenpeace's worldview is based on the idea that every individual human being can make a difference. As individual human beings are regarded to be able to either destroy nature or to protect it, it is not "culture" or "society" that is responsible for environmental problems, but individuals, usually neoliberal multinational corporations guided by selfish capitalists. This radical methodological individualism holds individual human beings accountable for the world as it is, without questioning the material infrastructure and structure which contributes to the exploitative practices within a culture. As we have already seen when analysing the epistemological and the methodological principles, Greenpeace's worldview is based on the assumption that every single person can consciously decide whether to do "bad" or "good", whether to harm or to save the planet, regardless of material constraints. Instead of regarding individual persons to be the product of the culture they are living in, they are considered to be its cause. Thus, Greenpeace's messages are directed to individuals, addressing them directly by the pronoun

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“you”, as in “YOU turn the earth” (see Greenpeace 2016b:8). Groups of people are merely regarded as the sum of numerous individuals. According to this methodological principle, the greater the number of people joining Greenpeace, the greater their impact will be and the more likely will they be to achieve their aims.

### ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

As has already been discussed, human beings are both enemies and saviours of the planet. They are regarded to be accountable for the well-being of the climate, the forests, the oceans, the whales, the Arctic, etc. Human beings are also regarded to be able to willingly decide how to act, which makes them stand in stark opposition to “nature”, that is defenceless and good from the start because it does not destroy, but brings forward all life, which is why it must be protected. Greenpeace’s ideology rests on an ontological difference between “nature” and “culture”. As cultural beings, humans are found to have the ambivalent power to either act against nature or for it.

Even though Greenpeace conceives environmental problems to have slightly similar causes, it parts from the idea that environmental problems are not comparable with each other – all of them arise and unfold in particular ways and have to be addressed in their very specific way. This historical particularism is characteristic of a humanist ideology which understands each phenomenon to be unique. This idea makes it necessary to analyse each environmental issue in its own way, with its very specific causes.

As we have seen in this section, Greenpeace’s ideology with all its different values and beliefs is based on a range of principles that are left unquestioned and undefined; principles that cannot be proven right or wrong.

#### **4.4.2. Structure**

According to the emic worldview that has been outlined in Chapter 4.3., the network of Greenpeace organisations is held together by similar values, beliefs, aims and purposes. In this section we will analyse how the organisation is structured and which material factors it depends on.

Within the last four and a half decades, Greenpeace has grown out of a small movement into a multinational NGO comprising 27 organisations located in 55 different countries across all con-

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tinents, with its co-ordinating secretariat, the Greenpeace International Office, located in Amsterdam.<sup>115</sup> “At its inception, Greenpeace was not a professional, hierarchical, environmental non-profit organization, but a protest campaign rooted in the international peace and environmental movements.” (Riese 2017:15) While the movement directed its actions first against nuclear tests in the Pacific and then towards the protection of whales, the environmental issues it engaged in has diversified enormously along with its expansion. Since then it has turned into a highly structured international organisation with a clear-cut division of labour.

### ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

Greenpeace's international network is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 26 trustees, one per national or regional organisation. The secretariat is headed by the International Executive Directors and a Management Team, which consists of department and division directors (see Greenpeace 2016c:2). Together, these are the governing bodies of the organisation. The clear division of labour is outlined as follows: While the secretariat is responsible for monitoring the organisational development of its 26 organisations and their compliance with Greenpeace policies, managing its three ships and global campaigns, the national and regional offices run campaigns “to expose and resolve global environmental problems” (ibid.). The international secretariat has a specific role within the network of organisations, as it exclusively fulfils administrative and coordinating functions, but does not directly engage in the campaign work of Greenpeace. However, it is to a large degree (around 95%) funded by the various national and regional organisations distributed across the globe (see ibid.).

The organisation has established the position of an Environmental Manager who fulfils the function of monitoring and reducing the environmental impact of the Greenpeace network of institutions. The clear distribution of functions, rights and duties among the various different positions and departments is characteristic of organisations of similar size. As has been the case with Oxfam, an even larger NGO in terms of employees and revenues, experts are employed in order to fulfil a very specific, detailed function of the organisational whole.

<sup>115</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/worldwide/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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Greenpeace's Science Unit, which belongs to the Greenpeace International secretariat, fulfils the role of collecting evidence for making campaigns successful. This department is assigned the duties of conducting research, communicating technical and scientific trends and issues, carrying out quality controls, detecting possible future issues and risks, and advancing the debate on the relationship of science and society (see Greenpeace 2016c:6). The Global Engagement Department, another department belonging to Greenpeace International, fulfils the function of providing national and regional Greenpeace bodies with best practice consultation on issues such as fundraising and mobilisation of supporters.

The job positions of the national and regional Greenpeace organisations cover a wide range of activities, including Accounts Payable Accountant, Frontline Campaigns Organiser, Payroll & People Operations Manager, Digital Campaigning/Organising Specialist<sup>116</sup>, as well as Executive Assistants, Campaigners<sup>117</sup>, Mobilisation Coordinator<sup>118</sup> and User Experience Designer<sup>119</sup>. As we can see from the job descriptions, most staff works in the field of communication, administration, accounting, human resources and design. Most of these job positions are not directly linked with the emic aims and purposes of the NGO, but rather with the maintenance of a multinational organisation. Greenpeace, just like any other international corporation, provides jobs that are characteristic of a service-and-information based economic system, as will be discussed in the section dealing with Greenpeace's infrastructure.

### SALARY STRUCTURE

Greenpeace currently has 3.2 million members all over the world.<sup>120</sup> In 2017, Greenpeace International alone employed an average of 599 full-time employees, including the crew of its

<sup>116</sup> see <https://careers-greenpeace.icims.com/jobs/search?ss=1> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>117</sup> see <http://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/getinvolved/jobs/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>118</sup> see <https://es.greenpeace.org/es/?search=tablas%20salariales> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>119</sup> see <https://workfor.greenpeace.org/#vacancies> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>120</sup> see <https://es.greenpeace.org/es/quienes-somos/como-nos-organizamos/nuestros-socios/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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three ships operating at sea.<sup>121</sup> Both international executive directors, Jennifer Morgan and Bunny McDiarmid, who form the management of the NGO earned a salary of €162,000 in the year 2017, excluding social security and pension, which represents a significant rise when compared to the previous year (see Greenpeace 2017:46 and 2016c:37). The salary of Non-Executive Board Members, the so-called Supervisory Directors, stands in sharp contrast to these figures. Their salary was much lower and ranged from €5,000 to €36,000 in 2016 and 2017 (see *ibid.*). From these figures we can conclude that the amount that is being paid and the prestige and status attached to different positions varies considerably within the organisation.

Employees working in national and regional offices are paid different amounts, depending on the national and regional organisation's salary scale and the job position. For example, in the UK a full-time Events Support Coordinator or Direct Marketing Executive earns around €31,000 to €36,000 per year, while a Logistics Manager earns between €44,000 and €50,000 a year. Apart from permanent work contracts, the Greenpeace International secretariat offers students and recent graduates internships in the departments Information Technology, Political & Business Unit, Research and Legal Issues, whose remuneration varies from €400 to €800 per month<sup>122</sup>. However, at the bottom of the salary structure we find around 50,000 volunteers worldwide which operate in 1,138 cities and on whose free work the NGO relies (see 2016a:23). The enormous differences in remuneration, labour security and financial benefits represent the complex hierarchical organisational structure of the NGO, which is an outcome of the necessary division of labour due to its size. The fact that Greenpeace outsources its fundraising activities to sub-contracting companies (e.g. in the case of Austria to DialogDirect Management, Wort-Stark consulting training fundraising, TeleDIALOG Fundraising, among others) illustrates its capitalist features. Fundraisers are most often subject to a merit system on which their payment depends, i.e. the more donors they gain, the higher their salaries are.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> This means a remarkable rise in the number of employees since 2016, when Greenpeace employed only 344 full-time employees on average (see Greenpeace 2017:2).

<sup>122</sup> see <https://workfor.greenpeace.org/interns/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

<sup>123</sup> see for example <https://www.dialogdirect.at/> or <https://www.wort-stark.com/> last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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Even though Greenpeace defines itself as a global organisation, from an etic perspective it is clearly based in the Global North in which most of its workers are located. This means that not only the salary levels, but also the number of staff on permanent contracts is distributed in unequal ways. While the African Greenpeace office employs only 55 workers, the European Greenpeace office employs 1250 people, thereby putting a strong bias on certain national and regional offices which receive considerably more funds (see Greenpeace 2016a:24). Not surprisingly, the number of female staff exceeds the number of male staff, which is consistent with the general characteristics of NGOs outlined in Chapter 2.3. and the general patterns of a service-based economy.

### ACTIVITIES

Greenpeace's work mainly concentrates on spreading information through various communication channels, among others social media, the internet, street fundraising and action campaigning. Supporters are called to "taking action" and "making change happen" by signing online petitions or participating in public protests. The intention is to increase the pressure on companies and governments, which are held accountable for the proclaimed damage and harm inflicted on the planet. The NGO is famous for attracting attention in extraordinary ways in order to raise awareness about its work. Direct action campaigning strategies consist, for example, in flying balloons that carry political slogans over tourist sites such as the Taj Mahal. More conventional activities consist of running open petitions, organising protests, carrying out scientific tests, creating art projects and hosting "scientific missions around the world".<sup>124</sup> Most of its direct actions are symbolic in that they are meant to show to the world its message of resistance and dissent against the actors' exploitative practices. This way, the NGO pretends to change people's minds and ultimately people's attitudes and behaviour (see Greenpeace 2016a:32). For example, the famous pianist Ludovico Einaudi performed his "Elegy for the Arctic" on an artificial island floating between Arctic icebergs, whose symbolic form of protest is praised by the NGO as follows: "A single Arctic Defender, with nothing more than a piano, took governments to task over the need for Arctic protection." (Greenpeace 2016a:16) Any

<sup>124</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-international/en/about/our-core-values/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018] Even though Greenpeace claims that scientific missions are carried out independently, they serve the purpose of defending its own morals and putting pressure on companies and governments (see Greenpeace 2016a:10).

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form of attracting attention, be it walking the streets, dancing<sup>125</sup> or playing the piano, is used to increase the pressure on decision-makers. At the same time, these forms of action serve the purpose of attracting as many donors as possible, who might become short-time or long-time supporters. Fundraising and awareness raising activities are also carried out on mass events such as the Glastonbury festival, one of the biggest rock festivals within Europe. For example, Greenpeace had its own stage at the 2017 Glastonbury festival called “The Greenpeace Field” (including a Greenpeace’s skatepark) with its own line-up consisting of bands, DJs, and mass yoga training.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, with the help of famous actresses such as Emma Thompson and Jane Fonda, and well-known political activists such as Naomi Klein, Greenpeace directs public attention towards one of its major aims: the protection of the Arctic.

Apart from the described forms of awareness raising and direct action, Greenpeace sends volunteers to train communities in how to defend their lands (see Greenpeace 2016a:8), organises events such as Buy Nothing Day to raise awareness (see Greenpeace 2016a:10), files lawsuits against governments for allowing oil drilling in the Arctic (see Greenpeace 2016a:16) and campaigns on its vessels at sea (see Greenpeace 2016a:21).

In the here described ways, the NGO has managed to spread its message to around 63.3 million people in 2016, which the organisation proudly announces to be 16 million more than the year before (see Greenpeace 2016a:29). Raising awareness in manifold ways is one of the central activities Greenpeace focuses on. Why this is crucial to its existence will be discussed in the following section.

### **4.4.3. Infrastructure**

When analysing the infrastructure of Greenpeace, we take into account the material basis the organisation is embedded in – so to speak, the material fundament that it rests on, including the

<sup>125</sup> For example, “Dance for the Congo” was promoted in various countries as an activity to help protect the rain-forest located in the Congo Basin (see <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/campaigns/Forests-hub/congobasin-forest/#section4>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

<sup>126</sup> see <http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/the-green-fields/the-greenpeace-field-2/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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mode of production, the mode of reproduction and the technology, which themselves are part of the larger economic system. These material factors determine how the NGO is organised and hence which ideology (values, beliefs, morals, etc.) it proclaims. As we have seen in Chapter 3 dealing with the philosophy of Science, cultural materialism provides us with a useful framework for understanding and, finally, explaining the workings of NGOs on the superstructural, structural and infrastructural level. Contradictions between the NGO's emics and etics (e.g. its proclamation to do everything it can to protect the environment vs. its focus on collecting funds to cover high salaries of its executive officers and other expert staff) can only be explained through the etics of the organisation, ultimately by considering its infrastructure.

### MODE OF PRODUCTION

When considering Greenpeace's mode of production, we see that the NGO is providing expertise in the following fields of specialisation: public relations (e.g. through campaigning, fundraising) and lobbying. Through its activities it tries to capture public attention in order to spread its messages to as many people as possible around the world. By engaging in extraordinary and often dangerous activities of direct confrontation, it tries to cause public outrage against the "enemies" of the planet and sympathy with the work of Greenpeace. The attraction of possible donors is especially important to the NGO's existence, because it financially depends on donations by the public. The economic principles it uses are the same as those used by any other capitalist corporation: accurate calculation and detailed documentation of funds and its investment (these are laid out in its official financial report, see Greenpeace 2016c), optimisation of strategies to collect funds, maximisation of revenues, minimisation of costs, acceleration of growth in number of donors and members as well as global expansion. Its strategies consist of the right product placement, effective public relations, creation of a strong corporate identity and competition with other NGOs. This becomes clear from the fact that Greenpeace does not publicly support other NGOs working in similar fields but rather emphasises the importance of .10.2018] □ ◦ 聖山 聖刀 聖鋒 聖X 聖X 連D 沙 its vast number of employees work in the fields of public relations, service, accounting and administration is consistent with the macro-economic framework the organisation is operating in: namely the patterns of a service-and-information economy.

Therefore, the NGO is based on the same macro-economic principles as the culture it is embedded in, which is consistent with the theory of cultural materialism: An NGO can only work effectively if it adapts to the determinisms that prevail in a cultural setting, in this case the



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determinism of the economic system, which is a global capitalist one. Only by constant adaptation can it be successful in the culture it operates in. It is no surprise that Greenpeace uses the ideological features of individualism, for example when directing its messages to the individual (“you”) and suggesting it can reach seemingly impossible goals by investing money and effort (“you can change the world”), thereby maximising its performance and its own uniqueness. Even though Greenpeace maintains to fight the system it operates in, the NGO is in fact very well adjusted to it. Emic statements work even though they contradict scientific findings, therefore criticising the world system while employing its very same principles does not harm the NGOs credibility. The widespread belief in Greenpeace’s work is independent of scientific scrutiny and will continue nevertheless.

### MODE OF REPRODUCTION

In 2016, Greenpeace collected an amount of nearly €342 million, the clear majority of which stems from supporters located in the Global North, above all Germany (around €55.5 million), the USA (around €41.6 million) and the UK (around €25 million) (see Greenpeace 2016a:26). The significant difference between the amount of revenues collected in the Global North and the Global South reflects the remarkable difference in infrastructural conditions of these two world parts and results in a fundamental financial bias within the NGO.

In 2017, 72 million people supported the work of Greenpeace, more than three million of which provided financial support. Compared to the previous year, in 2017 the number of volunteers working for Greenpeace increased by 25%, which means that 47,000 people supported the organisation for a small or no remuneration.

The total sum of gross revenues represents a rise in financial means compared to the year before, which is celebrated as a success, as it means that the organisation is growing not only in number of supporters but also in financial contributions which are the material basis of Greenpeace and allow for the continuance of its existence. When taking into account that 30 million supporters worldwide<sup>127</sup> make possible the financial existence of Greenpeace, we can understand that the NGO’s activities concentrate on raising awareness and spreading a humanist ideology that is

<sup>127</sup> see <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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already widely accepted within the cultures of the Global North and compatible with their capitalist way of production. The organisation manages to grow if the number of its donors grow, on whose financial contributions it fully depends, as it publicly proclaims to reject any money stemming from companies or (inter-)governmental institutions. Both symbolic and financial contributions are strongly welcomed by the NGO, as both contribute to the continuance of its work. This continuance is based on the capitalist principle of unlimited needs vs. limited means: Greenpeace is constantly striving towards increasing its financial means which are said to be urgently needed to fulfil its aims. These aims, however, are potentially endless, which enables Greenpeace to persist in the future.

Revenues are invested in the staff and campaigns of the NGO. As we have seen from the range of job descriptions outlined in Chapter 4.4.2., money is invested in experts of various fields, such as fundraising, business and accounting, communication and management and attractive and well-paid work opportunities are offered in various fields to hundreds of people in the countries it is located in, mostly European countries as well as the USA and Canada.

### TECHNOLOGY

Due to modern technology, it is now more than ever possible to get connected in a fast and easy way. To an NGO of considerable size modern communication technologies are crucial means for existence. Modern communication technologies enable Greenpeace to connect with people all over the world to spread its messages about distant strangers in need, be it endangered animals, polluted oceans or people suffering.

Modern means of communication made it possible to connect with unknown places and to perceive the threats to living beings and the environment. The contact created thereby to people, animals, and environments in distant parts of the world caused an involvement and a notion of moral responsibility. Greenpeace's work relies on this moral responsibility. Social media, the internet and television are commonly used to spread Greenpeace's messages, e.g. through fotos, blogs, videos, newsletters. They enable Greenpeace members to share their opinions and keep supporters updated about campaigns and urgent environmental issues. Thus, mass media enabled the ideology of environmentalism to spread around the world as a "mindbomb" (see Riese 2017:17). Modern means of communication are effectively used to cause public outrage and emotional attachment, and to connect with people all over the world, which is why they are so

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important for the NGO's existence. Their importance is illustrated by Greenpeace's call to "donate a tweet"<sup>128</sup> and its celebration of the rapid increase of followers on its social media channels (see Greenpeace 2016a:26).

Altogether, it is the means of production and reproduction as well as the availability of modern technology that primarily makes Greenpeace a successful and continuously expanding NGO. Its language adapts to the people's culture it reaches out to: One might say that Greenpeace's language, as we have seen in Chapter 4.3., is full of discontent, outrage, fear, hatred and at the same time compassion, hope and love, which might seem contradictory from an etic point of view. The language used by the NGO aims at causing emotional attachment with distant strangers. When looking at emic statements, we can develop an understanding of the work, ideas and goals of Greenpeace. From an emic point of view, it makes sense to strive towards the protection of the environment. However, how exactly this goal can be achieved is not specified. Despite of the inaccuracy and the lack of scientific proof, Greenpeace's proclamations are efficient in attracting ever more donors and supporters.

Only from an etic point of view can we find answers to the questions of how Greenpeace manages to exist and expand. It does so by adapting perfectly to the macro-economic and ideological "environment" of the culture it is embedded in: a capitalist culture that spreads around the globe along with globalisation.

<sup>128</sup> This means allowing your twitter feed to automatically sending out one tweet per day to Oxfam in order to make other people aware of its work (see <http://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/getinvolved/Donate-a-Tweet/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

#### 4.5. The emics of VGT

After having analysed one of the largest globally working humanitarian organisations and an environmental organisation of medium-to-large-scale, I will now turn to the analysis of an NGO working in a different thematic area: animal welfare. Another difference consists in its size: While the NGOs already discussed are of considerable size, this one is operating locally rather than on a global level. We will see whether and how this affects its emics and etics.

##### SELF-DEFINITION

The Association against Animal Factories (*Verein Gegen Tierfabriken*, VGT) serves our purpose of analysing an NGO of small scale. It does not focus on saving poor people or the environment, but on the advancement of animal rights: “We at Association against Animal Factories (VGT) are dedicated to reducing animal exploitation and abuse and stopping these practices in the long run.”<sup>129</sup> The members of the association define themselves as being independent from political parties and financed by public donations only (see G., 08.05.2018). Moreover, they reject any kind of violent action. Rather, they exert pressure in democratic ways, e.g. by using petitions, protests, demonstration or the media to cause public outrage (see *ibid.*).

VGT directs its actions against certain groups of human beings, such as associations (e.g. hunters associations) and companies (e.g. animal factories), that act against animals' wellbeing. However, VGT does not only work against people, but also for people, namely the general public. Therefore, on its official website the NGO defines itself as the defender of civil rights: “VGT sees its role as empowering and supporting members of civil society alarmed by the treatment of animals, to exercise their democratic rights for change.”<sup>130</sup> NGO members define themselves as the protectors of civil rights, such as the freedom of expression and the right of democratic participation, and animal rights: “These basic rights are to be protected regardless of whether their violation is culturally, historically or religiously motivated.”<sup>131</sup> In both cases,

<sup>129</sup> <http://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>130</sup> <http://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>131</sup> <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed in 22.10.2018]

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fundamental rights are threatened by the unethical practices of human beings who mistreat animals or protect the interests of those who do so.

### SELF-REPRESENTATION

VGT describes itself to be a “politically independent organisation with the aim of reducing and eventually ridding society of animal abuse and exploitation.”<sup>132</sup> On its official website, it exposes its major achievements of the past which, despite of their local character, are represented to have made a global impact on the protection of animal rights: “After many years of direct campaigning, VGT has achieved an impressive set of laws protecting animals that sets a new standard worldwide.”<sup>133</sup> Among these major achievements are the ban on ram fighting in Zillertal in Tyrol, a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses, the establishment of an Animal Ombudsman, the ban on the use of great apes in experiments, and the ban on trade fairs for wild animals, all of which represent important changes in Austria. In some events, no legal changes but mere campaigns are celebrated as a milestone in the NGO’s history, such as the campaign for abolishing the shooting of captive bred animals in Austria<sup>134</sup>, which has not shown the desired results so far.

Even though its impact is limited to Austria, the NGO cooperates with other alliances fighting for animal rights such as the globally operating Open Wing Alliance, an organisation promoting campaigns against battery cages, which connects animal rights NGOs in all continents<sup>135</sup>.

### VALUES AND BELIEFS

The belief behind the mission and actions of VGT is that animals are no different than human beings and therefore must be treated with respect. The similarity of humans and animals is

<sup>132</sup> <https://vgt.at/en/whatwedo.php> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>133</sup> <https://vgt.at/en/whatwedo.php> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>134</sup> see <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed in 22.10.2018]

<sup>135</sup> see <https://openwingalliance.org/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018].

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stressed in many campaigns, and nowhere is it expressed clearer than in the words of the chairman during one of the vigils organised by VGT:

“These are not commodities, these are persons, these are not things, these are beings with life, and with a wish to live, and they have feelings and emotions. They breath like us, they move like us, [...]”<sup>136</sup> (Martin Balluch, 2016)

According to the emics of the NGO, it is this kind of similarity and the injustice resulting therefrom that makes a change necessary: “What we do to animals is the biggest injustice in this world and the time has come to change this system.”<sup>137</sup> This moral injustice is so profound that VGT activists have engaged in risky operations and have been confronted with legal prosecution and police repression on several occasions, especially since the legal process initiated by the Austrian state against animals protectors in 2010 which lasted fourteen months and finally resulted in an acquittal of all accused. During his career at VGT, Martin Balluch, who is now head of the NGO, has been faced with numerous accusations, legal trials, bans on speaking and harassments as the consequences of his activism directed against certain companies, politicians and other groups of people. A VGT voluntary declares that because of the members' readiness for confrontative forms of direct action, politics have even denied them the tax-deductibility of donations (see G., 08.05.2018). This is but one example that exemplifies the antagonist relationship between the NGO and local politics. Nevertheless, according to the emic view of the organisation, it is this conflict that makes change possible: “If you are kind and nice, you are kind and nice, but this way you cannot change anything.” (ibid.) However, not all political parties are opposed to the actions of VGT, and vice versa. It does not come as a surprise that the Austrian Green Party is the party that cooperates the most with the animal rights NGO, which is why G. calls it an important political complement to VGT's campaigns (see ibid.).

Because of their strong moral engagement with animals and the belief in the same right of animals and humans to live a fulfilling life, most activists lead a vegan lifestyle, even though this is not a requirement for participation, as G. points out: “We are happy for everyone who

<sup>136</sup> <http://vgt.at/tierrechte-jetzt/previous-de.php> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>137</sup> VGT supporter (see <http://vgt.at/tierrechte-jetzt/previous-de.php>, last accessed on 22.10.2018)

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joins us” (08.05.2018). This emic statement illustrates that moral attitudes are secondary to the importance of growth of the association.

### AIMS AND PURPOSE

As we have seen so far, the central purpose of VGT's actions is to ensure the welfare of animals<sup>138</sup>. This purpose includes several aims: making people question their actions, making politics change laws, making hunters stop hunting, etc. Raising awareness is not only a strategy to reach their aims, but an aim in itself, because it is believed to trigger rational behaviour. As for animal cruelty, one voluntary states the following: “We are hoping to sow a seed which may develop until the meanest are against it.” (G., 08.05.2018)

In its official semi-annual magazine *Tierschutz konsequent*, Martin Balluch insists that VGT's actions are based on rational thinking, thereby emphasising the objective character of his NGO: “We always provide scientific reports and argue in a rational way.” (VGT 2017:3, transl. from German into English by C.L.) However, as he claims, this is not enough to change things. Often, confrontational action is necessary, even though it might be inconvenient: “Those who want to change society cannot avoid conflict. All great reformers knew this already in the past, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.” (ibid.) As we have seen from the emics of other NGOs, it is common practice to associate confrontational actions with reformers of the past that are praised for their great achievements and taken as moral idols who, like NGOs, have stood up for a good cause.

In order to bring about the desired change in society, VGT concentrates on a moral mission, namely the one of exhibiting disrespect for animal rights visible in the deliberate disposal, use and abuse as well as the killing of animals, which is denounced as “assassination” (see VGT 2017:30).

### METHODS

From the emics already discussed, it becomes clear that VGT members strive towards saving animals from harm. But how do they intend to bring about the desired change? The NGO's

<sup>138</sup> see <http://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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strategy consists of an engagement in issues society is already sensitised for: “We are constantly looking for issues that have the capability of attracting the masses in order to change a law” (G. 08.05.2018), a voluntary explains and names the campaigns against canned hunting and fur farms to illustrate his point.

The media plays an important role in increasing public support for VGT campaigns and exerting pressure on the groups of people held responsible for the injustice committed against animals. In many occasions, it is the documentation of injustice that causes conflicts with the accused party, which then attracts media attention, which increases the pressure even more:

“The media very welcomes such conflicts, because writing ‘boar suffers here and there’ is not as interesting as ‘animal protectors against Mensdorff-Pouilly<sup>139</sup>’ – *that’s* interesting! And at this level we achieve our aims.” (G., 08.05.2018)

From an emic point of view, the key to positive change is resistance coupled with medial outrage under the condition of previous public support. Animal rights can only be imposed through social and political action triggered by democratic resistance and media support that increase the pressure on the key players to change laws (see *ibid.*). “This way, it is possible to change society from ‘everyone eats and buys battery eggs’ to ‘even farmers are against it’ within one generation.”, G. proudly announces, thereby alluding to the nation-wide ban of battery eggs, which is praised as one of VGT’s numerous achievements (see *ibid.*).

According to the NGO’s emic view, positive impact can be achieved most successfully by constantly increasing pressure on decision-makers and certain groups of people found to be guilty of animal mistreatment. However, it is counterproductive to exert pressure from the start. Rather, VGT members begin by repeatedly asking politicians what they think about a certain topic and provide them with detailed reports on abuses in order to urge them to do something about it. Then they increase the pressure more and more by making themselves heard and seen repeatedly, e.g. through regular demonstrations and interruptions of press conferences, until the responsible people agree to act.

<sup>139</sup> Alfons Mensdorff-Pouilly is an Austrian business man, lobbyist and farmer engaging in canned hunting who initiated a legal trial against Martin Balluch in 2016.



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The belief in the possibility to change society is what holds supporters together. VGT's actions are deeply rooted in a community of individuals sharing the same values and supporting the same aims. G. states that he himself did not believe in VGT's mission until he had the possibility to participate in one of their campaigns from the beginning until the end:

“Since then I was convinced. Before, nobody knew of the problem and now so many people know of it and there are bans only because some individuals came together and said ‘Come on, let's do something!’ And *this* convinces me [...]” (G., 08.05.2018)

Individuals are believed to have the capability of stopping existing inequalities, which is why it is each and everyone's responsibility to “do something”. The documentation of injustice against animals is regarded as an effective method for raising awareness and causing public outrage within society. The NGO therefore faces people with the injustice they are causing when eating meat, buying products made of silk or down, consuming chickens that have been bred for fattening. It accuses people of causing harm and supporting the inhumane treatment of defenceless beings. Detering visual and sensational, fact-based documentation of the cruelty against animals is used to sensitise people for the culturally accepted practices they might support: “With our demonstrations, information stalls, tours and actions we are able to reach many people and expose important facts about the treatment of animals.”<sup>140</sup> According to the NGO, this way change in individual actions can be engendered.

According to the emic logic, human awareness can cause people to change their behaviour. This means that the more people know of the harm they cause the more they will be willing to change their actions. By concentrating on the uncensored exposure of harm inflicted on animals, common practices that have been widely accepted so far, such as the slaughtering of animals for meat production or the confinement of diary cows, are questioned from a moral standpoint, and people are urged to change their consumer practices. This way, conventional cultural practices are associated with negative terms, such as uncivilised, backwards, unjustifiable and morally reprehensible. This might cause inner conflicts and conflicts within society. They increase the

<sup>140</sup> <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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pressure for each and every individual to make up their own mind and decide whether they still want to belong to “the bad” (animal abusers) or switch to “the good” (animal protectors).

Among the probably most extraordinary of these activities meant to change people's minds are the vigils: In these public events taking place at frequented sites, supporters gather to hold dead animals in their hands for about one hour while the histories of animal suffering are read out aloud, thereby illustrating that each of these dead corpses “was an animal, a personality, it was an individuum and not an anonymous piece of meat.” (G., 08.05.2018) This way, participants and the public are directly confronted with the harm they actively or passively inflict on animals. The special value of animals' lives celebrated by VGT characterises the humanist ideology shared by its members, which will be analysed in the following chapter dealing with the super-structure, structural organisation and material infrastructure of the NGO.

## 4.6. The etics of VGT

What becomes clear from the analysis of the emics of VGT is that the organisation is considered to exist necessarily and primarily because of the injustice inflicted upon animals and our moral responsibility to react. The belief in universal human and animal rights is fundamental for the organisation to legitimise its work. These and alike values and beliefs are features of a humanist worldview and cannot be verified or falsified. In this chapter, therefore, I will turn to an etic analysis of the three levels proposed by cultural materialism to scientifically approach the functioning of this nationally operating “social organism” (see Chapter 2.1.).

### 4.6.1. Superstructure

The ideology proclaimed by VGT members and supporters involves specific notions of values, beliefs, aims and morals. In this section, I will outline the basic principles this ideology is based on.

#### EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The ideology of VGT parts from a specific moral point of view: the conviction that any harm caused on animals is immoral. This makes animal factories the epitome of evil and people chasing animals “for fun” or working in the livestock industry malicious and selfish. The use and abuse of animals is judged from a specific moral point of view which rests on the same principles as the humanitarianism of Oxfam and the environmentalism of Greenpeace. Instead of perceiving the suffering of distant strangers or landscapes, the suffering of different species is put at centre stage. Whether an NGO focuses on humans, landscapes or animals, these are found to be more connected to us than we used to think.

Among the people believed to cause the harm inflicted on animals are entrepreneurs, industrialists and hobby hunters, as well as those supporting them, such as politicians and consumers. On the other hand, consumers and activists who are aware of the problematic conditions animals live in, as well as enlightened consumers who decide to buy “ethical” (vegan, vegetarian, organic, fair trade, etc.) products, are defined to be morally good. VGT is eager to spread its ideology and its values to make consumers change their habits and acts in order to make the world a better place for animals.

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The reason for the harm caused on animals is believed to lie in the immoral and corrupt character of human beings using animals as a mere source of profit. Instead of adopting a scientific, holistic point of view and considering the animal industry as a necessary result of the course of world history, with its mode of production changing from small farming to massive food production, the NGO considers animal exploitation as something that has to be eradicated. Instead of taking into account social and economic factors and asking whether or not it is possible to eradicate animal suffering, VGT maintains that it is our moral responsibility to protect animal rights. However, in contrast to Oxfam and Greenpeace, its objectives are limited to Austria. This local focus makes the NGO's aims more realistic and their activities more transparent. What activists say is more consistent with what they do, i.e. the goals they announce and the impact they have, than it is in the case of Oxfam and Greenpeace which promise to stop poverty/climate change worldwide.

Even though VGT's arguments are backed by scientific reports, these are not withstanding scientific criteria, especially the one of objectivity. Scientific reports are rather used to deduce moral statements, for example: a scientific report maintains that canned hunting causes the reduction of biological diversity and the fragmentation of natural habitats<sup>141</sup> and is therefore used to call for action. The definition of good and bad does not become clear from scientific reports, but from the moral interpretation of results. Scientific results are turned into moral statements by attaching value judgements to them.

According to the emics of VGT, natural diversity is in danger, which is why we have to protect it. This logic is consistent with the cultural values of our society, and with humanism as an ideological framework operating in our culture. From an etic point of view, however, this is a clear example of the is-ought fallacy. A moral statement (something *should be*) is deduced from a scientific fact (something *is*). However, in science there is no such thing as scientific facts making moral claims. Morals and facts are two different things: While the first belong to the (culturally specific) emic domain, the latter belong to the (culturally independent) etic domain. From the humanist approach used by VGT, however, science is confused with moral statements.

<sup>141</sup> see <http://vgt.at/presse/news/2018/news20180425mn.php> [accessed on 22.10.2018].

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In the emics of VGT, what *is* and what *should be* are not treated separately, but together. Thereby, scientific fact is used for a moral purpose.

### THEORETICAL PRINCIPLE

The aim of VGT is similar to the aims of Oxfam and Greenpeace: to bring about change. However, its focus is limited to Austrian law and culture. As it is with Greenpeace and Oxfam, individual human beings coming and working together are found to be the carriers of change. Different to animals, they have the ability – and the moral responsibility – to defend the defenceless and make their voices heard.

The underlying theoretical principle is the one of humanism, namely that rational human beings can change culture. However, as becomes clear from the interview with a VGT voluntary (G., 08.05.2018), this change does not only happen because people want it to happen, but needs politics (legislative bodies) and often the media to exert pressure on politics. Change in society is therefore determined by change in law, which is influenced by the media and public pressure. According to VGT's superstructure, the NGO can bring about change only if the wide public is already sensitised for a certain topic, which stresses the cultural embeddedness of the NGO. Topics already supported by part of the public have the potential to engender media attention and can eventually lead to legal change effectuated by decision-makers. The limited power of VGT's actions is taken into consideration. In order to change the behaviour patterns of companies (for example to make production standards ethical), similar procedures are necessary: VGT detects the topic to be culturally relevant and informs people about the committed injustice in order to cause consumer outrage, which is then backed by media attention in order to exert pressure on the responsible companies. Without pressure, no change will happen, so the logic goes. Change is found to be something deliberately fought for instead of something happening by itself. Only if people decide to make it happen, it will happen. The rational faculty of human beings is a precondition for change. Therefore, the NGO appeals to people's minds. Human beings are found to be the carriers of progress – informing them about existing injustices means making them conscient about their impact, which will eventually make them choose “to do the right thing”. According to the humanist ideology spread by NGO members, people can change other people's minds and behaviour, which can lead to a transformation of society. It is their emic goal to effectuate this change.

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According to scientific facts, entire systems cannot be overthrown by human will. Neither can the harm against all animals be ever stopped. VGT does not make universal claims such as promising the end of animal suffering. Instead, the theoretical principle of its ideology limits the power of people to particular events and minor changes which are nevertheless celebrated as victories.

### METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The ideology spread by VGT is based on the principle of methodological individualism, because it is directed at every individual and their individual lifestyle and attitude towards animals. This methodological individualism is illustrated by the organisation's central slogan "I give animals a voice" (VGT 2017:3), which consists of the urge directed towards individual human being to support animal rights along with VGT. At the same time, however, it takes into account society as a whole and the determinant and restrictive forces of political systems. It is not enough that individuals change their behaviour, e.g. their consumption patterns, but necessary to change laws to ensure that animal rights will be protected in the future.

As it becomes clear from the interview with G. (08.05.2018), it is individual human beings who can start to change something. The more people come together and support the ideals of the organisation, the more likely are they to have an impact. In fact, the constant growth of the NGO is meant to prove this. Since 1992, the NGO has managed to change several laws and make outstanding achievements for the advance of animal rights. Everybody is therefore welcome to participate or contribute to the further existence of the NGO. This methodological individualism is, however, not as strong as in the ideologies of Greenpeace and Oxfam. Potential supporters of the NGO are not promised to change the world. Achievements are clearly connected with individual, often slight changes, in Austria's legal framework. Hardly any promises of worldwide change or global impact are found in the humanism proclaimed by VGT. Campaigns focus on one particular local law at a time, one after the other, such as in the case of banning fur farming or restricting animal transports by law. The organisation refrains from pretending to change animal rights worldwide. It rather focuses on local events and policies and chooses direct confrontation or simply "being present" at crucial sites in order to campaign for animal rights.

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### ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

VGT members regard human beings to only gradually differ from “non-human animals”<sup>142</sup>. This perspective is consistent with the ontological principle of sociobiology, which regards human beings to be subject to the same biological determinism as animals. Instead of considering these two ontological entities to be different, an emphasis is put on the characteristics they share, especially the ability to suffer. This similarity is the moral basis of their ideology, according to which animals and humans have the same rights. On its official website, VGT makes the following statement: “There is no ethically acceptable reason to exclude non-human animals from having the same basic rights afforded to humans.”<sup>143</sup> According to this worldview, animals are considered to be equally conscious, to share the same forms of expression (feelings and emotions), similar attitudes, behaviours and personalities, which is why it is immoral to treat them in a substantially different way. Human rights are animal rights, too, VGT proclaims.<sup>144</sup>

As we can see from these examples, the principles of humanism are applied to animals: Not only people but also animals face immoral, or more precisely, inhumane treatment. As they are defenceless, it is necessary that people give them a voice, which is a major aim of the NGO. Humanitarian values are considered to apply to human and animal species, which means that humanism is extended to include the non-human domain.

#### 4.6.2. Structure

### ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

VGT was founded in 1992 by Hans Palmers who was head of the NGO for 10 years (see VGT 2017:5). Since then, the association, which has its official headquarter in Vienna, has been engaging in several activities within Austria. Its current executive board consists of Martin Balluch (chairman), Harald Balluch (treasurer), Christine Braun (secretary), and David Richter

<sup>142</sup> This emic term suggests that there is no qualitative but only a gradual difference between human beings and animals (see <http://vgt.at/en/>, last accessed on 22.10.2018).

<sup>143</sup> <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>144</sup> see <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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(vice chairman). There is a clear division of tasks within the executive board concerning the use of donations, fundraising, data protection and management. Campaigns are run not only by certain members of the executive board but other employees as well (see VGT 2016:5). In 2017, the organisation consisted of 30 employees, of which only four people belonged to the management board, and around 400 activists worked for free (see VGT 2017:pp.6). The percentage of paid personnel amounts to less than 10% of all people working within the organisation, which makes this NGO a voluntary-based organisation. Additionally, this means that the plausibility that donations are spent on campaigns rather than NGO staff is higher than in the other cases already discussed.

### SALARY STRUCTURE

The salary scheme of VGT is rather simple. It is divided into three salary groups, each being defined by the tasks and responsibilities that are linked to certain positions: Employees working within campaign support belong to salary group A, the lowest salary group. In 2016, a full-time worker of this salary group was paid €1,184.96 per month within the first five years and was then upgraded to €1,280.87, after 10 years to €1,412.74 and after 15 years to €1,543.44. Full-time employees with a position in campaign leadership, belonging to salary group B, were paid €100 to €200 more within each time period. The best-paid employees, which belong to the management of the association, were paid €1,537.92 per month during the first five years of their job and €2,039.93 after 15 years of permanent employment (see VGT 2016:55). From these figures, we can deduce that there is a limited differentiation and hierarchy between the salary groups. Despite of slight differences in remuneration, the voluntary and non-profit character of the NGO is maintained to a large extent.

### ACTIVITIES

VGT's activities focus on raising awareness and collecting funds. In its beginnings, the initial strategy aimed at attracting media attention in order to sensitise the population for animal rights. Only one action was organised per month due to limited technological means: communication between members was slow as no mobile phones or computers were available (see VGT 2017:5). Since then, the organisation has become ever more publicly well-known by means of their outstanding activities and forms of protest. With the improvement of technological innovations, the NGO grew in number and its activities changed: Along with the increase in size, the NGO started to engage in more and more controversial campaigns and forms of direct action.



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Currently, VGT engages in campaigns that are meant to raise public awareness and influence political decision-makers.

The topics for future campaigns do not come about by chance but are carefully selected. Those topics that are already being publicly discussed and causing public outrage are put on the NGO's agenda (G., 08.05.2018). The issues VGT addresses are already culturally predefined: What is already considered as "unethical" in Austrian culture is adopted as a major issue by animal rights activists. This points to the cultural embeddedness of the morals proclaimed by the organisation. The etic standpoint suggests that cultural change affects VGT's actions more than it is the other way round.

A central topic the NGO has increasingly been concentrating on during its 26 years of existence is consumption practices. This focus not only reflects the culture's infrastructure, our economic system based on mass production and consumption, but also the ideology of individualism. In bringing consumption practices to the forefront, it is suggested that consumers are causing harm through their everyday actions and that they have the power and the responsibility to change things. For example, in its semi-annual magazine *Tierschutz konsequent* (VGT 2017:17, 33-35), the NGO provides advice on how to consume "ethically". This advice is based on tests that critically examine the production standards of a variety of brands and quality labels.

Apart from the endorsement of vegan food products and shoes (see VGT 2017:35), the NGO reports on a series of scandals and inhumane practices used by farmers, companies, hunters, and others. However, rather than arguing for a reduction of consumption, the NGO engages in promoting an increase in "moral" consumption practices: The slogan "shop and save lives" which is used to promote the products of the NGO's online shop is but one example (see VGT 2017:2). In a similar way, another online website called "shop2help" is promoted which enables customers to buy their favourite products in the internet and support VGT's campaigns at the same time (see *ibid.*). This is done in the following way: The companies one buys goods from automatically transfer a part of their profit to the NGO. Thus, the more you shop, the bigger the impact your impact on saving lives becomes. Thus, due to the financial dependence on donors, consumption is used as a way of raising money.

Another detail that illustrates the NGO's engagement in economic activities is the promotion of discounts in its online shop for those supporters that become permanent animal protection sponsors. What is emically declared to benefit poor animals serves, from an etic point of view,

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for-profit interests, namely the maintenance and growth of the organisation. With their regular financial aid, supporters contribute to the NGO's existence in the long-term future. From an etic perspective, we can identify that permanent sponsors are praised for their support for material reasons, which stands in sharp contrast to the idealism of emic explanatory levels which find that common values, beliefs and ideals are the driving force behind the association.

Even though from an emic point of view, the NGO's main activities consist of political campaigning (see VGT 2017), from an etic point of view there are numerous other activities the NGO engages in. These other activities concentrate on spreading the ideology of humanitarianism, recruiting supporters and thereby raising financial support. They include animal advocacy presentations in schools, the organisation of Animal Rights Congresses, Animal Liberation workshops, Academic talks, summer tours exposing a selected animal rights topic within Austrian cities, annual marches, social meet-ups for activists and consumer guides for ethically produced goods.<sup>145</sup> For example, facts about the (un)ethical standards of food production of different products are collected in order to assess the moral quality of a product (see VGT 2017:34-35). Also, the empathy with and the respect for animals is a precondition of VGT's work. To increase the intensity of this empathy, VGT uses uncensored videos and pictures documenting the harm that is inflicted on animals to point out the defenceless character of the victims. The message behind this strategy is clear: animal creatures suffer because of the greed for profit of individual human beings.

Money is spent not only on these recruiting and awareness raising activities, but also on political conferences: In 2018, several panel discussions on a series of topics linked to campaigns are regularly taking place in the SkyDome, a conference room in Vienna's seventh district, which charges €440 per night.<sup>146</sup> Financial support from donors is urgently needed in order to run these and other activities.

<sup>145</sup> see <https://vgt.at/en/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

<sup>146</sup> see <https://www.skydome.at/preise/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

### 4.6.3. Infrastructure

#### MODE OF PRODUCTION

VGT specialises in the documentation and communication of abuses committed against animals and political campaigning for animal rights. The range of activities it engages in concentrate on raising awareness and are a feature of the service-and-information economy it operates in. This becomes apparent in the NGO's focus on the provision of well-documented information about animal abuses and consumer practices. Just as other associations dedicated towards awareness raising, VGT dedicates its efforts to "enlighten" the minds and conscience of consumers and to exert pressure on decision-makers. Actions (e.g. the vigils) are primarily used to sensitise of people. This is done by confronting people with the culturally unacceptable exposure of brutality against and suffering of animals.

VGT is based on capitalist principles in that it strives towards growth. The membership in global networks such as the Open Wing Alliance is but one example for this tendency. However, VGT does this to a much lesser degree than the internationally operating NGOs discussed before, as its regional mode of production and reproduction are limited to Austria. Even though conventional consumption practices are rejected in emic terms because of their moral implications, VGT promotes capitalist consumption by promoting certain brands and selling VGT branded clothes and other products in its own shop, thereby participating actively, however to a very small extent, in the economic system it criticises.

VGT's mode of production is restricted to a national economy which provides for its subsistence. Even though the NGO strives towards growth, this growth is of limited extent. Moreover, the organisation refrains from striving towards abstract, unrealisable aims, and rather concentrates on particular and concrete actions. In comparison to the mode of production of the larger NGOs discussed, its own mode of production is not as diversified and complex. This is consistent with the structure of VGT, which is not as complex as the structure of Greenpeace and Oxfam (e.g. regarding the fields of specialisation, the division of labour and activities, the hierarchical structure).

#### MODE OF REPRODUCTION

From the organisational structure discussed in the previous section, it has become clear that many activities run by the NGO concentrate on the collection of funds. Not surprisingly, the

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greatest part of the total sum of revenues, nearly 87 percent, originates from donations alone (see VGT 2016:55). According to official figures, no single euro is derived from public funds. Other sources of income are operating activities and asset management.

In 2016, the greatest part of funds, around 76 percent, was spent on the objectives as defined in VGT statutes, including the campaigns on hunting, livestock, animal shelters, pigs, fur, slaughterhouses, animal transportation and animal protection lessons in schools (see VGT 2016:55). Nearly 5 percent were spent on administration and nearly 19 percent on fundraising, which represents a significant difference with larger globally operating NGOs (see VGT 2016:55). As outlined in its annual report, the salary of the VGT management personnel is remarkably lower than the average Austrian salaries of comparable positions (see VGT 2016:54). The limited hierarchy between different salary groups and the wide voluntary participation point to a greater similarity of emics and etics than in the NGOs studied before. The limited size and local embeddedness of VGT determine its organisational structure to be less differentiated, which is reflected in a more equalitarian distribution of funds. The NGO greatly depends on voluntary support; therefore, everyone is welcome to participate. In fact, it manages to exist because of the many voluntaries and donors which offer their support for free and keep the organisation alive.

### TECHNOLOGY

As the mode of production and reproduction consists to a large degree of raising awareness and raising funds, the NGO uses technologies that enable an effective collection of funds and communication with potential donors and supporters. It uses the internet, social media, e-mail and other means of communication in order to reach out to civil society, spread their message, endorse their actions, and call for participation. VGT is not only present on diverse social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, but actively uses these communication means in order to reach as many people and collect as many funds as possible. Means of communication are also continuously used to expose images, videos and opinions about current abuses and happenings to the outside world and to sensitise people for the issues VGT declares to fight against.

From the analysis of VGT's infrastructure we can deduce that this NGO is adapted to the regional means and needs rather than to a globalised world-system. Apart from the cooperation

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with the Open Wing Alliance, hardly any partnerships exist between VGT and other organisations, which makes the organisation rather self-sufficient, both in terms of funds and work. This becomes also clear from the figures of revenues and expenses. VGT's emics and etics partly overlap, for example in terms of financial independence from governmental or intergovernmental entities. In general, VGT's emics do not differ as much from its etics as in the case of Oxfam and Greenpeace. VGT does not insist on freeing the world from animal suffering, nor do its members believe in a certain creation myth which idolises a founding figure. Even though, in terms of their emic views, all of these organisations strive to trigger change, the change proclaimed by VGT is conferred to small legal changes within Austria, while the change endorsed by Oxfam and Greenpeace implies transformations on a global level. Also, while the latter two strive towards possibly "endless" growth, VGT's objectives and organisational structure is aimed at local campaigns that concentrate on very few issues at once.

VGT's emic objectives are more concrete and lack the profound contradictions that become visible in the emics of Greenpeace and Oxfam. However, their difference in emic superstructure, structure and infrastructure is one of degree rather than kind: Whereas VGT rests on regional economic conditions, which is only possible as long as it maintains its limited size, the other two NGOs operate within a globally extended economic system to which they have adapted very well in the course of their existence.

## 5. Conclusio

NGOs are deeply intertwined with humanism, which is an ideology and an epistemological principle that rejects the principles of determinism and objectivism and proposes idealism, subjectivism, free will/free choice, individualism and particularism instead. It is no surprise that the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead is taken as a reference for the promotion of humanist values and cited by Greenpeace in its 2017 Annual Report: “‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.’ Margaret Mead”.<sup>147</sup> The ideology transmitted by humanist anthropologists is strikingly similar to the one promoted by NGOs: Their work consists to a large degree of creating awareness about the injustices in the world and calling for action to change it. Just as organisations of the political and religious sphere, postmodernist researchers as well as NGOs engage in their mission of bringing about a “moral enlightenment” by spreading certain values, beliefs and defending humanist morals. They strive towards influencing people’s minds and actions in order to save the world.

According to the dominant emic view among NGO supporters, it is “our” (referring to themselves as a descriptive rather than a corporate group) duty as responsible global citizens to contribute constantly towards the improvement of humanity. Whether it is fighting against poverty, protecting the earth or defending animals’ rights, the world needs “us”. However, if these moral missions *can* be accomplished by a descriptive group of people around the world is neither questioned nor discussed. What matters is good will and determination, NGOs proclaim. This is why the spread of hope and belief is already celebrated as an important step forward. Moreover, people are believed to have the power and hence the moral responsibility to “help distant strangers” and “make the world better” by supporting the NGO that works towards this change.

However, the values and aims promoted by NGOs are vague and open to interpretation. The imprecise definition of morals lies at the very heart of every NGO and allows for greater adaptability and flexibility towards new situations. It enables potentially anybody to sympathise with them (as in the case of vegetarianism/veganism highly welcomed but not obligatory among

<sup>147</sup><https://www.greenpeace.org/international/annual-report/> [last accessed on 22.10.2018]

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VGT members). In short, the emics of Oxfam, Greenpeace and VGT are based on one single mechanism: the application of the ideology of humanism for the recruitment of the largest number of possible supporters.

Looked at from an etic point of view, we grasp a remarkably different picture that shifts our perspective from ideas to material conditions: Seen from a macro-perspective, NGOs operate as a complex, highly specialised form of organisations competing with others to assert themselves and, eventually, grow in order to prevail. Instead of merging with other NGOs pursuing similar targets, let alone giving up after major failings, they constantly seek to attract more and more funds. NGOs have a potentially unlimited number of present and future issues to engage in before they reach their final aim, which guarantees for stability and longevity. The potentially infinite number of missions and unachievability of aims (not least because of their lack of definition) causes scarcity which builds on the same principle of unlimited wants and limited means deeply grounded in our globalised economic system.

It comes as no surprise that from an etic point of view NGOs are based on similar principles as the social organism they operate in. The NGOs discussed here are well-adapted social suborganisms embedded in a highly complex and hierarchical globally extended social system. What is more: As social suborganisms, they cannot substantially differ from this complex social system, but *must* necessarily be adapted to the predominant social, technological and economic conditions order to survive. For example, as becomes clear from the analysis presented here, Oxfam cannot eradicate “the injustice of poverty” (referring mainly to economic inequality), which is their self-proclaimed final goal, and will most probably never be able to do so. However, even if the proclamation “We won’t live with poverty” appeals to many of us (meaning the readers and myself) trapped in the most unequally structured stage of evolution that has ever existed since the beginning of humankind (see Sahlins 2004 and Scheidel 2017), this does not mean this is feasible in practice. As the hierarchical structures within Oxfam and Greenpeace illustrate, inequality is not a question of human will but one of social organisation which is determined by the size of a population and its material conditions. While in small associations equality is achieved easily, it is in fact impossible for an NGO of many tens of thousands of employees and voluntaries to be structured non-hierarchically.

Differences in the degree of hierarchy become clear when comparing the organisational structure of VGT to the one of Oxfam. The great disparity between the income of the chief executives

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and low-paid staff (or non-paid voluntaries) only illustrates the highly differentiated stratification within NGOs of considerable size. Considering that the hierarchical structure of growing organisms increases along with their size, Oxfam, Greenpeace and VGT are striving towards greater rather than less hierarchy within their organisational structure, just as humanity strives towards more rather than less inequality on a global level (see for example Carneiro's (2004) fact-based research on the future political unification of the world).

This and other contradictions between emics and etics are not only characteristics of NGOs but of any highly complex organism in which similar mechanisms are at work. As becomes clear from the analysis of NGOs, the prevailing ideology is always adapted to the predominant material conditions. The humanitarianism, environmentalism and animal rights activism spread by the NGOs analysed in this thesis is perfectly compatible with an industrial mode of production guided by the principles of scarcity, competition and the need for constant advance and improvement to achieve ever greater profits to maintain oneself alive. Such ideology does not exist among hunters-and-gatherers but is peculiar to our present mode of production and the social organisation resulting thereof.

Even though it might seem, from our own emic point of view, one that is influenced by the same dominant ideology, that human beings can effect substantial change in the world, from a scientific point of view this assumption is not sustainable. For example, in his research on the causes of inequality, Scheidel (2017) finds that throughout history it was not free will but mass mobilisation warfare, transformative revolution, state failure and lethal pandemics that have substantially diminished economic inequality, which means that only violent ruptures caused by external factors could have such impact. As for the end of poverty, Sahlins (2004:36) points out that our ethnocentrically celebrated "affluent society" is in fact more afflicted by scarcity and poverty than hunter-and-gatherer societies were in the Stone Age. While it is a widespread belief that our living conditions are improving constantly by the advance of technology, the reverse is true: "the amount of hunger increases relatively and absolutely with the evolution of culture." (ibid.) Much contrary to the humanist worldview, both examples show that what is promised by the ideology of "enlightenment" is scientifically untenable.

From the analysis of selected NGOs it becomes clear that science and ideology are based on highly conflicting principles and therefore incommensurable. While science strives towards discovering universally valid facts, ideology is relative, varying from culture to culture. Nevertheless, numerous anthropologists still take the culturally dominant ideology as a starting point



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for their own scientific work, as in the case of Margaret Meads' research against war, which led her to the following conclusion:

“[T]wo conditions, at least, are necessary [to get rid of war]. The people must recognize the defects of the old invention, and someone must make a new one. Propaganda against warfare, documentation of its terrible cost in human suffering and social waste, these prepare the ground by teaching people to feel that warfare is a defective social institution.”  
(Mead 1940:405)

The concept of human free will has guided much anthropological research. Whenever cultural phenomena are referred to individuals and their free will, this hardly contributes to any reasonable understanding. Rather, as researchers engaging in the project of science

“[w]e want to know why culture developed as it did, why it assumed a great variety of forms while preserving at the same time a certain uniformity, why the rate of cultural change has accelerated. We want to know why some cultures have money and slaves while others do not, why some have trial by jury, others ordeal by magic; why some have kings, others chiefs or presidents; why some use milk, others loathe it; why some permit, others prohibit, polygamy. To explain all these things by saying ‘Man wanted them that way’ is of course absurd. A device that explains everything explains nothing.” (White 1949).

As was shown by this thesis guided by the principles of science, an etic perspective on NGOs is necessary in order to make sense of them as a culturally specific type of organisation. Only from an etic perspective can we understand that NGOs are not accidental or human-made “inventions” but brought into existence by external factors. While from an emic point of view it seems that NGOs that are entirely guided by the morals and ideals they defend, from an etic perspective we recognise that their existence mainly depends on material conditions, just as any other organism does.

Moreover, as values and morals are culturally variable, it is highly probable that religious-based NGOs function in similar ways. While Christianity and other monotheistic religions are built on the idea of an almighty god, NGOs promote human beings to be all-powerful and thus able and free to change the world. However, both apply the ideology of humanism, either in its sacred or secular form, which is transmitted through socialisation and fulfil a particular function in our society. Both are directed at individuals and make them feel they belong to the social system they live in, thereby contributing to the maintenance of structure and proper functioning of the social organism. As my research suggests, the humanism adopted by NGOs is a culture-

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specific ideology unifying people within a complex social system based on an ever more technologised service-and-information based economy. It is the driving force for people living in a globally expanding social organism whose increasing structure results in ever greater inequality and in which the power of individuals to bring about substantial social change remains beyond their reach.

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G., 08.05.2018, 20:54 minutes, led by C. L., transcribed by C. L.

## 7. Abstract

Since the mid-20th century, so-called non-profit non-governmental organisations have increased enormously in number and size. How can we explain this cultural phenomenon?

In this master thesis, the emics and etics of three selected NGOs of varying size operating in different thematic fields are analysed: OXFAM, Greenpeace and VGT. From their superstructure, structure and infrastructure it becomes clear that their ideology and organisational structure rest on the very same mode of production they openly declare to combat: a capitalist service-and-information economy based on the principle of growth. The fact that NGOs increasingly spread around the globe is consistent with cultural materialism, according to which similarly structured organisations evolve under similar infrastructural conditions.

*Seit Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts sind die Anzahl und Größe von sogenannten gemeinnützigen Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGOs) erheblich angestiegen. Wie kann dieses kulturelle Phänomen erklärt werden?*

*In dieser Masterarbeit werden die Emik und Etik dreier ausgewählter, unterschiedlich großer NGOs analysiert, die in verschiedenen Themenbereichen tätig sind: OXFAM, Greenpeace und VGT. Anhand ihrer Superstruktur, Struktur und Infrastruktur wird klar, dass ihre Ideologie und Organisationsstruktur auf derselben Produktionsweise basieren, der sie offen den Kampf erklären: einer auf Wachstum ausgerichteten kapitalistischen Dienstleistungs- und Informationsökonomie. Die Tatsache, dass sich immer mehr NGOs weltweit ausbreiten ist vereinbar mit dem Kulturmaterialismus, welchem zufolge sich unter ähnlichen infrastrukturellen Bedingungen ähnlich strukturierte Organisationen entwickeln.*