Chapter 5 – The Promise of Humanitarianism

> "Humanitarianism, it is by now banal to observe, has become, with its rights and duties to protect, the secular religion of the new millennium."
> *-Laurence McFalls (2010)*

In this chapter I focus on the discourse around migration from a humanitarian perspective, and how this influences and is at the same time shaped by specific interactive media practices. The interactive practices analyzed in this chapter are "humanitarian." Humanitarian communication is underlined by the belief that in front of the "suffering of strangers" (Calhoun 2008), or "the pain of others," we feel solidarity (Sonntag 2003). Lilie Chouliaraki, a scholar who has questioned contemporary humanitarian communication, approaches it "as the rhetorical practices of transnational actors that engage with universal ethical claims, such as common humanity or global civil society, to mobilize action on human suffering" (2010, 107). Humanitarian discourse frames the production of interactive practices and their aesthetics, stories, and forms of circulation. It is sustained by material and institutional infrastructures that ensure that its message will be fulfilled, and that the "vulnerables" will be assisted.[1]

1 There is no juridical definition of "vulnerable", but here I refer to those people that are constructed through a certain rhetoric as "vulnerable subjects." They are subjects represented as being in danger, or as suffering. United Nations employ a "Vulnerability Index" to assess environmental and social risks (Villagrán De 2006).

I argue that interactive practices about migration, by embedding and engaging with humanitarian discourse, often become, as Lilie Chouliaraki writes "post-humanitarian." (2010, 2013) In other words, these media objects are guilty of re-directing the focus to ourselves and generating feelings of well being instead of asking how we can help vulnerable people (2010, 2012, 2013). Put differently, humanitarian discourse is entangled with media-technological innovations and material infrastructures, which support and address a viewer's feelings and their sense of personal morality. I ask how interactivity as a feature of modern technology is mobilized and responds to calls for "action," or a political and social tool for change.

This chapter explores how humanitarian discourse materializes and how it involves a specific political representation of the vulnerable (Hall 1997). Moreover, I am interested in understanding how specific interactive features reorganize and rematerialize around this discourse. If we consider humanitarianism a *discursive formation*, we can then analyze the production of interactive practices and isolate a set of rules that lead to the proliferation of certain premises and ideas around it (Foucault 1970). Indeed, entanglement with material infrastructures turns humanitarianism into a practice of managing, controlling and disciplining migrants. The chapter focuses on the views that interactive practices about migration construct, and proposes to historically contextualize them so as to understand the shift that humanitarianism has taken more recently.

5.1 Call for (Inter)action

In 2015 Chris Milk, a film director best known for creating an interactive music video for the band Arcade Fire, gave a TED talk to introduce his latest project on virtual reality, *Clouds over Sidra* (2015). At the time,

there was real hype concerning the potential of VR.[2] In 2014, Google had released its Google Cardboard, which consisted of head-mounted viewers made of cardboard. It was a low cost version of other VR goggles that launched at the same time like Oculus Rift,[3] whose first kits sold for 399 dollars and exclusively to developers. On this occasion Milk defined VR as the "ultimate empathy machine" (Milk 2015). The emphasis on "empathy" depended largely on the topic of the video: the story of a refugee from Syria. The 360-degree images of *Clouds over Sidra* were recorded with a special multicamera developed by Milk and his team at the company VRSE—later renamed WITHIN. They showed a refugee camp seen through the eyes of a Syrian girl, who was living in one of its tents with her family after having escaped the civil war. The eight-minute long video can be downloaded from a smartphone, and with Google cardboard it can even be enjoyed as a VR experience. The 360-degree video is low definition, and the camera does not move, so users can only turn their heads and look around (but with a strange feeling of being too high above the ground or discovering a black spot where the camera was positioned).

During the talk Milk, using very emphatic rhetoric, explains to a committed audience his inspiration for working on this "ultimate machine:" while working as a traditional filmmaker, he realized that he wanted viewers not to look through any window or screen, but for them to be able to go beyond it, and to be within the frame. Consequently, he turned to virtual reality, where people could also be present in the world shown to them. He argued:

> you are not looking through the window, you are sitting there, and you look on the ground and you sit where [she] sits. And because of that

2 I refer here to the recent "hype" surrounding VR. Of course, its advent can be traced back to the seventies and Ivan Sutherland's first prototype, not to mention the examples of Early Cinema which include stereoscopic vision.

3 Oculus Rift was one of the first commercial VR headsets. It was initially funded by a Kickstarter campaign in October 2012 which raised more than 2 million dollars. The company Oculus VR was later bought by Facebook for 2 billion dollars.

> you feel [her] humanity in a deeper way, you empathize in a deeper way. I think that we can change minds with this machine. Virtual reality has the potential to actually change the world. (Milk 2015)

For Milk, the feeling of being "there" is necessary for the development of a deeper empathic feeling for a refugee girl. Whether this is true or false, this example reveals a complex dynamic.

In 2015 Milk, together with *The New York Times* and VRSE, developed another similar project for the publication's Virtual Reality app. Released in November 2015, the app featured Milk's 360-degree film, *The Displaced*, which is an account of the exile experiences of Choul (in South Sudan), Oleg (in Ukraine) and Hana (escaped from Syria to Lebanon). Since the camera cannot be carried by a cameraperson but must stay in position, the director used some of early cinema's tricks to create the impression of movement: the camera is positioned on moving objects. We can thus move on a boat through swamps, ride on a bicycle or sit on a truck. Sound often draws our attention; the noise of an airplane passing, for example, makes us look in that direction. The subjects of the film are pitiful, innocent, and bear no responsibility for the events that cause them to suffer. Therefore, the dramatic stories of these three young refugees easily elicit empathy.

But how do VR videos or other interactive practices, in which user interaction is necessary, differ from screen video experiences, in fostering our ethical understanding? I would argue that, in a similar way to several other case studies presented here, the promise of adopting the other's perspective is the result of a historically situated and mediated practice. The construction of a subject is always part of a more complex system of representation (Hall 1997). In other words, the construction of the vulnerable (here a refugee girl) also helps to construct the *non*-vulnerable. It is about the *non*-vulnerable wanting to understand what vulnerability means, and through that creating meaning about it.

Humanitarian communication can be understood as the ensemble of media strategies, aesthetics and narratives that aim towards the

communication of solidarity.[4] It uses what Lilie Chouliaraki claims to be a positive representation of refugees and forced migrants, through "photo realistic imagery" and the "attribution of voices." (2012) As Chouliaraki highlights, it underwent a shift after the seventies, turning towards a self-oriented morality (Chouliaraki 2013, 2012, 2011, 2006). This shift connects specifically to the so-called "West." (Hall 1992; Dirlik 2007) Of course, this distribution is geographically imprecise, but it points to a symbolic, economic and political division which has no physical borders. In this vein, Chouliaraki further claims that the UN's established media practices invoke pity, and can be "criticized for de-humanising the vulnerable 'other' and for naturalizing, rather than problematizing, the power relations of humanitarianism between the West and the 'rest'." (2012,. 22) The case studies already analyzed in "A View from Within," although refusing the negative rhetoric of mass-media, often face such paradoxes. These contradictions I argue are strictly tied to their use of technology (and its utopic promise) and the ambivalent relationship they have to the political figure of the refugee or migrant.

The practices that are the object of this chapter's analysis are addressed to a specific audience: a privileged, connected audience that defines itself as non-vulnerable. These *non*-vulnerables are precisely those who might feel it imperative to help people and provide relief in a crisis situation. They are humanitarians. If we return to Chris Milk's Ted Talk and take a look at the audience, this becomes clearer.

The photo above shows Chris Milk standing in front of a picture of people at the World Economic Forum in Geneva watching *Clouds Over Sidra* (fig. 25). He claims that they were affected by the experience of watching the film. What does he mean and who are "those people"? They are the so-called "decision makers." The World Economic Forum (WEF), is an INGO (international non-governmental organization) which aims to facilitate public-private cooperation. In a video, Chief

4 For IOM (International Organization for Migration), "humanitarian communication" means "the collection and dissemination of critical, time sensitive, life-saving information among crisis affected populations and humanitarian agencies, to enable a more effective response to emergencies." (IOM 2017)

Fig. 25: Chris Milk's TED Talk

Image source: screenshot from Ted.com, https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine.

operating Officer Sarita Nayaar explains: "it is a very unique place, it is a place where industry come together to work with governments, to work with NGOs, with Academics, to truly make a difference in the world" (World Economic Forum 2016). Another interviewee—Indra Nooyi from PepsiCo—repeats: "nowhere in the world is there another forum that brings together governments, NGOs, corporate leaders, activists, artists and musicians, to all come together to talk about the biggest issues based in the world" (ibid.). And finally ‚Adeyemi Babington-Ashaye, economist and contributor to the World Economic Forum, who has an MBA from MIT and a Masters in Public Administration for International Cooperation from Harvard, says: "global challenges, very often there is no right answer, there is a best answer, that best solution only comes by engaging diversity of stakeholders." (Ibid.)

So these are the decision makers who need to empathize (through technology), and who can indeed move or facilitate international cooperation projects that might help the vulnerables. The audience is also

Fig. 26: Chris Milk's TED Talk: a shot of the audience

Image source: screenshot from Ted.com, https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine.

the seated public, who appear as a group of white middle-aged people: WASPs, if I had to guess (fig. 26). But this same video (in English) has 1,550,432 views. It is not only thus a question of global decision makers all over the world, but also a "Western" English-speaking viewership that might feel engaged and choose to donate some money to the UN or INGOs working on humanitarian and development projects. The VR goggles, the ultimate empathy machine lie in between. Between us: the decision makers and the vulnerable.

The way to ensure that this message is conveyed is not just by looking at the vulnerable, but the novelty of the device and its technological features that promise to give us empathy. In addition to the participants to the World Economic Forum, Chris Milk is also confident that "his" machine "has the potential to actually change the world." (Milk 2015) Through this machine, he further claims, we can become compassionate, and ultimately "more human". (ibid.) In other words, this machine can make us true humanitarians. Craig Calhoun distinguishes the humanitarian imperative from other efforts to reduce suffering: its

purpose is not only short-term action and helping the vulnerable, but also long, in its mission to improve humanity (2008). Or as Milk seems to argue, this machine not only has a direct impact on the condition of the vulnerable. It acts upon *us*.

One of the peculiarities of VR and other interactive practices is their common technological promise: the user must engage with the media object and act upon it. A consequence of this is an idealized view of interaction. Interactive practices promise the audience a better and deeper engagement, by getting them involved, and transporting them to where they cannot be. Interaction lets us act. But does this mean that we act as humanitarians?

5.2 Media for Change

In New York, the "Games for Change" festival has become a showcase for interactive media which aims to produce a social impact. This renewed, positive vision of the potentiality of technology has also fueled new marketing strategies. On the web, different institutes, associations, non-profit organizations and independent creators label themselves as working with media for change: to quote just a few examples, the website "mediaforchange.org", the "Media Institute for Social change," and the website "Change for Good." Another website is called "Project Empathy" and concerns a VR video made to foster empathy. Even the BBC has had an associate non-profit aid organization called BBC Media action for decades, which now makes use of big data for development.

Changing the world, *building empathy*, *taking action* on a critical situation. This is what interactive practices about migration promise to do. What concerns me is not the "empathy machine" or Milk's multi-camera device, but a certain media discourse on technology that all these interactive practices, not only VR, share and engage with. It is the interrelationship between what is being marketed as a new, "ultimate" technology and its potential impact; a call to action, but also a "belief"

in the connection between virtual agency and real world agency.[5] The idea that technology might improve our ability to empathize and thus change our behavior is a highly deterministic view. Nevertheless, empathy[6] or this idea of a transcendental imagination is not new at all. Adam Smith wrote about sympathy in a similar manner back in the 18th century ([1759] 2010). Sometime later, at the beginning of the 20th century, a few early cinema strategies suggested that the new stereoscopic technology was seen as capable of giving the "sensation of being there" (Uricchio 2011, 11).

Interactive practices that deal with migration and refugees promise change. Although it seems very broad, once it is connected to the question of vulnerability, it immediately becomes a question of reducing suffering. Lilie Chouliaraki criticizes how concepts such as change are mobilized in the contemporary communication of solidarity. She claims that some practices are not able anymore to address long-term political action seeking justice, but instead these practices offer short-term

5 The discourse around VR as an empathy machine and change is not unique. Jane McGonigal, a game designer, gave a talk in 2010 claiming that videogames might change the world. Maybe it is simply the format of TED talks (I found plenty of other TED talks about "changing the world," whether they were discussing VR, videogames or home cooking"). Media for change, videogames and other interactives engage with a discourse of "change" which goes beyond media, and is part of our modern society.

6 Empathy nowadays is often seen as positive, but for some scholars it is a twofold weapon. It might enhance positive behavior, but it also might produce negative reactions. Paul Bloom, a psychologist, understands empathy as the capacity of putting yourself in the shoes of somebody else (2017). He claims that empathy is extremely biased: we might react with a positive or negative feeling, but that depends also on our personal history, disposition, cultural context, political orientation, etc. Empathy is part of our habitus. He agrees with neuroscientists such as Tania Singer who argue that empathy produces cortisol, which is something that our body produces in stressful situations. For Bloom, to really change behavior, empathy is not enough. For sociologists this is agency, understood as our ability to take action, which is conditioned first by social structures but also by other situations and events.

agency, so as to overcome a crisis of pity (Boltanski 1999). For Chouliaraki, this trend in the communication of solidarity is "post-humanitarian" in that it produces narratives that are self-oriented and often engages with stories that make you as a *non*-vulnerable feel good (2011, 2012, 2013). She writes: "In the search to reconcile the competing demands of market, politics and the media the public actor of humanitarian communication has turned the audience in an 'ironic spectator' of the vulnerable others." (2013, 2) In other words, "the pleasure of the self has become the heart of moral action." (Ibid., 4) This recent shift signals an ethic that "no longer aspires to a reflexive engagement with the political conditions of human vulnerability." (Ibid., 4)

The discourse over humanity is a fundamental issue for humanitarian communication, which goes beyond the media object itself, and becomes part of the goal of different international organizations (UN, WEF, etc.) and global communities. How do you elicit not only compassion, but bear witness to pain or misfortune? Do we need a machine to become more human? Probably not, but this idea addresses our deepest feelings and thus captures attention. If we can empathize, we also feel better about ourselves. That's what Chouliaraki critiques: post-humanitarian media does not call into question the political conditions of human vulnerability, but organizations and legacy media such as The New York Times use this rhetoric to legitimate their position as institutions for the practice of solidarity. They do so by "inducing positive warm feelings and motivating longer-term support" in donors or subscribers (Chouliaraki 2016). VR and interactive practices promise that we will be there, act, and change the world, and stimulate a positive feeling in *us*.[7] These interactive media reveal a bias in the communication of solidarity. In the following paragraphs I will explore how this same logic is embedded in two interactives.

7 I suggest that you take another look at Milk's Ted Talk audience and study their reactions while watching the images of *Clouds Over Sidra*.

5.3 Ironic Spectators

In the serious game *Against All Odds* which I introduced in "A View from Within," the home page welcomes users with a headline: "Against All Odds: The game that lets you experience what it is like to be a refugee."

Fig. 27: Against All Odds: the opening sequence

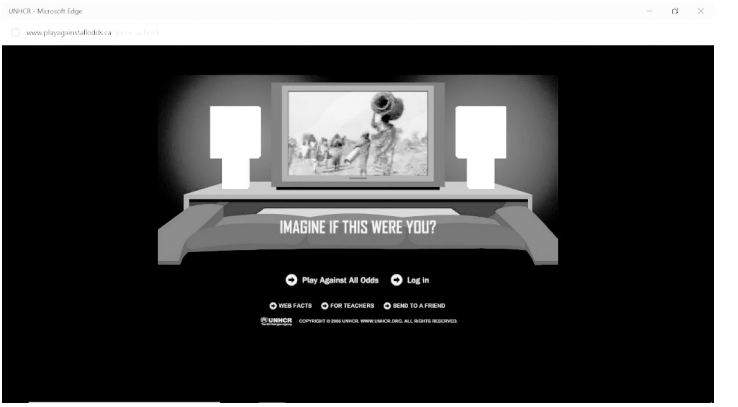

Image source: screenshot from Against All Odds (2005), © UNHCR.

In the background, we can see an illustrated image: a scared young girl holding a backpack. The following sequence is more revealing. It is a view from a couch facing a television, which is projecting random scenes of supposed refugees from a mainstream media source. The titles run: "*People you see every day, but you don't really see them*. Imagine if this were you?" This sentence, along with the short animation sequence, immediately outlines the premise of this serious game. First, we are in a comfortable position, on a couch and watching TV. Second, we see people—on television but also just in every day circumstances—and yet we *do not* really see them. This "invisibility" is driven by a lack of attention, or perhaps an exhaustion of attention. We see them perhaps every day on the news—there were no ubiquitous social networks in 2005—but

we do not really know enough about them. The moving image in this scene looks like a random crowd of supposed refugees, and can be interpreted as a "negative" and de-individualizing image of an anonymous group of people. The feeling of not doing enough, as evidenced by the sentence "but you don't really see them" interests me. How is our agency in the real world connected to an experience in a virtual world? How can a game and its promise of immersion and interaction bring us so close as to actually act? I expect this game to give me an answer. I expect it to give me sufficient agency to feel immersed and interact as a refugee would.

Chouliaraki argues how the communication of solidarity after the seventies went through a process of instrumentalization, combining a retreat from grand narratives with increasing technologization. *Against All Odds*'s opening remarks, as well as Milk's talk, and arguably every sort of consumerist act, invoke our wish to be excused from not caring enough. Think of our daily activities: we might buy something only because we know that a part of our money will go to charity. In all these acts, and especially as it relates to the development of interactive practices about migration, there is a profound need to justify our well-being while not forgetting the vulnerable lives of those we see every day. We interact instead of acting, and see through instead of look at. However, these media, instead of encouraging us to act upon the vulnerable and change their condition, asks us to interact with the game. This ambivalence affects the way humanitarian communication addresses change, and obscures fundamental questions. Chouliaraki stresses that to address this paradox of humanitarian communication a new morality is needed, one that re-addresses not only our perspective on the vulnerable, but also leaves open a space for a critique. The problem lies, then not exclusively in the way that communication is constructed but how its premises are posed. There is indeed a collapsing of the distinction between action and "interaction." But the user needs to do more than play or watch.

Another example might shed light on the same rhetoric that informs interactive practices about migration. *Bury Me My Love* (2017) is an interactive text-adventure based on real-life accounts, available on the ARTE

website, on gaming platforms, and as an app for Android and IOS systems. Here, interactivity is mostly text-based. Indeed, as in text-adventures, you can choose between options but they do not always lead to a change in the narrative action. Drawings often stand in place of photographs. You play the new husband of Nour, a Syrian nurse that decides, after losing part of her family in Homs, to leave the country. You stay in Syria and text message her. You can choose different speeds for the game. For example, for a more convincing effect, you can choose for it to be slow. That way, you receive push notifications on your smartphone when Nour messages, and you can chat with her during the day, as you would normally do with your real friends or relatives. The app is based on a simple WhatsApp chat, and you exchange funny and romantic texts with your wife and support her in her journey by offering advice from time to time (pre-made text messages), pictures (pre-made drawings) and voice-messages. You cannot really help her, although you might warn her to make less risky decisions when she has to find smugglers and decide where to go next. But mostly what you experience is a feeling of helplessness. This is what the creators wanted to achieve. Your choices will not determine whether she succeeds—we cannot save her. All that you will receive is a sad voice message that is hard to listen to. But she may also live and succeed. There are 19 possible endings and most of them are neither good nor bad, but something in between. Here you are not asked to make a journey in first person, instead you are an emotional witness to Nour's long exile. You relate to her story because the way you exchange messages feels similar to other daily interactions you might have. But in the end, after the game, what is your commitment? Interactivity here informs your ability to choose between options during the game. At some point you cannot really be there, support Nour or see the situation with your own eyes. You see only through her texts or snapshots. Does this feeling of helplessness merely transform us into Lilie Chouliaraki's "ironic spectators" (2013)?

Many players have commented on the game on the Google Play platform. They like it, but note some bugs (which I also experienced). One player argues that the game "develops your empathy towards the others

Fig. 28: Bury Me My Love: mobile app version.

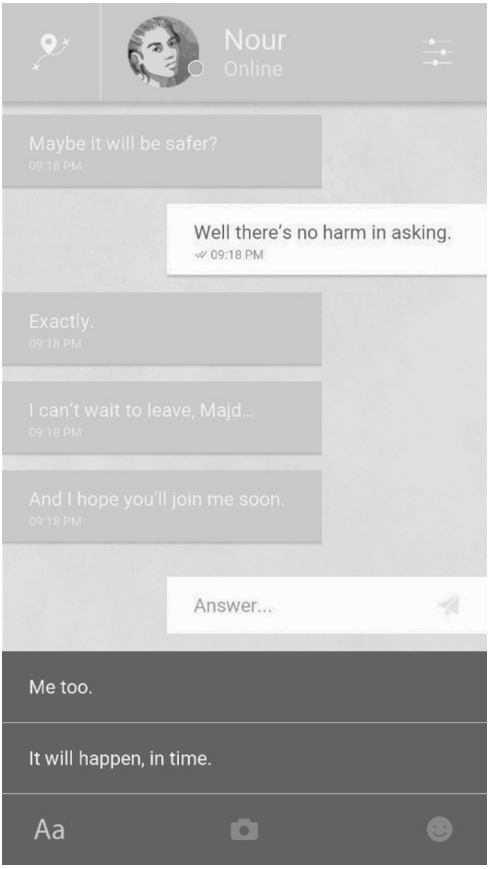

Image source: Bury Me my Love (2017), © The Pixel Hunt, Figs and ARTE France.

and makes you feel happy with what you have." (Google Play n.d.) This is an ambivalent statement.

You feel sorrow for their condition but the effect is that you feel happier about your own privilege. I (personally) liked the game but did not think of my own privilege. That said, I did feel sorrow and helplessness. This one comment synthesizes the position of serious games and other interactive practices about migration, and their complex reception. What is certain is that this game seeks to address our emotional attitude towards the vulnerable.

Next, I would like to investigate how interactive practices and their way of addressing emotions might encourage a certain political rationality about migration, engaging viewers with an ethic of empathy.

5.4 From Pity to Irony, to an Ethic of Empathy?

Are emotions being employed and solicited in political discourse? That is what Didier Fassin thinks when he argues that "moral sentiments have become an essential force in contemporary politics: they nourish its discourses and legitimize its practices, particularly where these discourses and practices are focused on the disadvantaged and the dominated" (2012, 1). The consequence of this general trend is compassion fatigue (Moeller 2002). In other words, exposure to continuous images that address our sense of morality and compassion risks producing ambivalence, indifference—or worse, hostility.

For instance, the issue of asylum seekers generates contradictory responses. It suffices only to mention recent events that happened on the coast of Italy. In the summer of 2018, Italy's rightwing-populist interior minister publicly denied entry to a rescue ship (Aquarius), filled with hundreds of refugees that had been saved by NGOs in the Mediterranean.[8] In August of the same year, another ship, (Diciotti) was ini-

8 The Aquarius is a vessel-ship chartered by different NGOs such as medecins sans frontieres with the aim of rescuing migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The ship collected around 600 migrants in the summer of 2018, and asked authorities to help resolve the issue. However, both the Italian and Maltese governments denied the ship entry, so it eventually docked in Spain. Nevertheless, the ship's authorities were denied entry to Valencia, due to the health condi-

tially refused entry by the Italian government. It was only after days of protests by activists and NGOs that migrants could disembark from the vessel and enter Italy. This event triggered a public debate, and in that same year people took to social networks to discredit and question the rescue of a female refugee in particular. The dispute concerned another photo of the refugee in question with painted fingernails. A series of viral threads on social networks accused NGOs of staging a *mise-en-scène* of her vulnerabilty.[9] This rise in hate not only targeted refugees themselves but also addressed the humanitarian organizations who supported them; it demonstrates a failure to adequately communicate vulnerability and is an example of "compassion fatigue" (Moeller 2002). But it is also an outcome of a collective distrust of non-governmental authorities, European political institutions, and the state, which has failed to preserve the well being of its own citizens following the economic crisis of 2008. Compassion fatigue means that even images of women or children in extreme danger no longer elicit pity. The validity of their suffering is called into question, as there is a suspicion that photos are staged in order to allow migrants to benefit from the European social system.

This distrust not only manifests on social media, but also in bureaucratic practice. An ex French aid doctor that worked for Médicins Sans Frontières, Didier Fassin, explores this in his book *The Humanitarian Reason*, which focuses on the discourse of humanitarianism through practices in the medical field. He explains that in France, as the number of asylum requests has increased, the rate of acceptance has dropped drastically. What he observes is that there is an increasing distrust of

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tions of the migrants, so they asked to disembark to an Italian port. The interior minister Salvini once again denied the ship entry, so the migrant were brought by 3 other smaller ships to Valencia, where they were medically treated. (Agren and Holpuch 2018)

9 The authorities in fact explained that aid workers had painted her fingernails after she was rescued to make her feel comfortable. The migrant was shocked after having survived on a shipwreck with another woman and a child who were already dead when they were found (Il fatto quotidiano, 2018).

refugees' claims and accounts of persecution, and that only medical/legal certifications can prove the truthfulness of their accounts and thus help them succeed in their asylum applications. This demonstrates a morality behind politics and state-run practices, which Fassin calls "humanitarian reason" (2012). This reason, he claims, is built upon clear structures of power-knowledge, where only the state apparatus can determine the veracity of vulnerability, and thus the lives—sometimes in a biological sense—of others.

Humanitarian government functions today, not only in the realm of international aid but, claims Fassin, as a "form of political theology" that exemplifies an inequality of power (2012, 251). He explains it as the paradox of "a politics of compassion that feeds Western morality," which he sees as a new form of government, understood in terms of a set of different procedures or actions to "manage, regulate, and support the existence of human beings." (Ibid., 1) Thus, I would add, in terms of "governmentality:"

> On the one hand, moral sentiments are focused mainly on the poorest, most unfortunate, most vulnerable individuals: the politics of compassion is a politics of inequality. On the other hand, the condition of possibility of moral sentiments is generally the recognition of others as fellows: the politics of compassion is a politics of solidarity. This tension between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance, is constitutive of all humanitarian government. (ibid., 3)

On the other side of the coin Fassin's close critique suggests that this same humanitarian reason is used by governments to justify more questionable practices such as armed interventions, as for example, in Kosovo (Pandolfi and Corbet 2011). It is this ambiguity that makes humanitarianism a tool not only for solidarity but an instrument that justifies other, often more dubious, practices.

Drawing on the concept of pity, Luc Boltanski, a French sociologist who works on the idea of "distant suffering," investigated the different ways that the spectacle of suffering is mediated. In his opinion, a "politics of pity" (1999) can lead to action, provided that there is specific

distance between spectator and sufferer, which nonetheless maintains some aspects of a "face to face encounter." (Boltanski 1999) This politics of pity prevails over justice in situations of urgency.[10] For Boltanski, action might be taken by offering financial assistance to those in need, or by speaking—thus through public opinion. For this mechanism to work, though, a certain distance is necessary: the closer sufferers get, geographically and politically, the greater the likelihood of "compassion fatigue" (Moeller 2002). But for Chouliaraki, contemporary, technologically mediated constructions of vulnerability create an "improper distance" that shifts focus from solidarity towards self-oriented morality (2011). She argues that this represents a transition from a "politics of pity" to a "politics of irony," referring to Rorty's figure of the 'liberal ironist.' This figure, she adds

> best exemplifies this complacent use of self-distance in the morality of neo-liberalism. Much like the post-humanitarian activist who expresses solidarity with distant others from the comfort of her living room, the liberal ironist treats, what Rorty calls, the 'vocabulary of justice' as a private matter, which enables the ironist both to remain skeptical of any claims as to the justification of solidarity and, simultaneously, to engage in solidary action towards vulnerable others as part of her own project of moral self-fulfilment. (ibid., 370)

And here lies the paradox: the situation of migrants crossing the sea, or the European border by land often does not inspire pity due to a perceived distance in culture and identity. However, addressing this distance via the post-humanitarian discourse of solidarity, only works to shift the focus upon ourselves. In fact, Chouliaraki not only accuses

10 In her book *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt explains how compassion became the driving force of every uprising since the French revolution, and is understood as the "capacity to suffer with the 'immense class of the poor'" (1963, 75). Pity is key to the logic of humanitarian communication. Arendt separates those who suffer from those that might be considered fortunate and that merely watch the "spectacle of suffering". For Arendt, pity is thus just a sentiment, while solidarity is a principle "that can inspire and guide action." (Ibid.)

implicates technology, but also celebrity advocacy and the spectacle of others "like us." Here I refer to the stories of refugees that "speak our language," like our TV series, etc. For example, there is the story of Nujeen Mustafa, a disabled Syrian girl, that came to Germany and, as the *Telegraph* writes, already loves German food, and learned perfect English by watching American soap operas (Smith 2016).[11] Stories like Mustafa's attempt to overcome distance by highlighting things we have in common. But what happens with all the others that are not like us at all?

For all the rest, vulnerability addresses our moral sentiments and triggers empathy. Strategic empathy finds an almost natural outlet in modern technology—just think of Chris Milk's "the ultimate empathy" machine, or "emergent" storytelling techniques on the web which aim to offer a closer look. But what is empathy? It is typically described, as a sentiment, a feeling: "our colloquial usage of the term empathy suggests that it involves 'feeling another's pain' or 'stepping into another person's shoes,' but the original definition of empathy suggested that it involved "feeling with" another person" (Oxley 2011, 4).

The notion of stepping "into another's shoes" is exactly the aim of *Against All Odds*, *The Migrant Trail*, and other text-adventures previously discussed. However, Julianna Oxley suggests, in fact, that what we usually consider to be empathy might be misleading. She quotes empirical research by psychologists that shows the more one is able to identify with another person, the more likely she/he is to empathize or to feel *for* this person. But the possibility of identification is higher for those who come from an environment closer to the empathizing person (family members, friends, etc.), or someone that is suffering in front of them. This is empirical proof of what Boltanski discussed. Empathy might help us reflect on someone else's point of view, but by itself does not lead to good moral actions. It might only be an instrument to fulfil a certain ethic. Empathy arrives after compassion fatigue and a crisis of

11 Besides being touted as the "new Malala Yousafzai" (a young Pakistani activist who was shot while giving a talk, and now studies at Oxford University. She is still a supporter and activist for human and especially women's rights), Nujeen also gave a TEDx talk in Exeter about her journey.

pity (Moeller 2002; Boltanski 1999). When there is urgency. And more importantly, when the vulnerables are far away.

Departing from this definition and returning to our definitions of pity and compassion, what we are witnessing is not a politics of irony but an "ethic of empathy." This ethic wants to simulate the point of view of the other or offer a way of becoming closer to them. From this perspective, it is interesting to recall Chris Milk's Ted Talk, and compare it with Adam Smith's description of "sympathy:"

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel some-thing which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (Smith [1759] 2010, 8)

Smith talks about imagination, while Milk discusses his "machine." One talks about sympathy, the other about empathy. And yet, the discourse stays the same. The promise of technology sustains a belief that empathy can overcome a crisis in humanitarian communication.

To understand humanitarianism today, I offer next a short historical overview of its origins. Through this, I demonstrate how its moral imperative transformed and became the basis of institutions and infrastructures across the globe.

5.5 Humanitarianism in Perspective: the "Emergency Imaginary" in Interactive Maps

As the sociologist Craig Calhoun explains, humanitarianism first took root not as a response to incoming emergencies but as a belief in the power of sympathy and our responsibility to others, which aimed to change the world by alleviating suffering (2008). The concept and the discourse of humanitarianism has nevertheless changed: it is no longer simply an extension of the Christian concept of charity and the cosmopolitan practice of philanthropy, but also a way of responding to

emergencies. Behind this effort there was of course a belief in a universal concept of humanity:

> That human beings intrinsically have ethical obligations to one another as such requires a notion of transcending kinship, nationality, even acquaintance, and a notion of "bare life" dissociable from specific cultures and webs of relationships. (…) These universalistic notions bear the marks not only of a philosophical history of thinking about self and ethics but also of specific religious traditions, of the growth of modern markets and contract relations, They also underpin the notions of humanitarian obligations and human rights. (Calhoun 2008, 78)

Humanitarianism focuses on relief rather than justice with regards to human rights, but both concepts originated in the modern world. Samuel Moyn claims that "human rights" came from an idealized notion of equality in the late 18th century, which itself appeared after the American and French Revolutions. He explains that it was then that a just and global society was dreamed of, where equality would be of "intrinsic moral importance." (Moyn 2018, 20) Equality meant having equal rights as citizens. However, after the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* was signed in France in 1793, the question moved from this broader notion to "a vision of basic sufficiency." (Ibid., 22) This meant that societies only aimed to provide "basic needs" instead of economic and social equality. This failure of the aspirations of the earlier transnational egalitarian view left space for a global-scale charity program (ibid.). In other words, the ideal of creating equality transformed into the urgency of humanitarian aid to bring relief on a global level (ibid.). During the 19th century, the cosmopolitan idea of humanitarianism materialized in international efforts to create a network to provide aid and alleviate suffering. In 1863, for instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded, and more and more efforts were made to alleviate the consequences of spreading civil wars across the world.

As a consequence of this cosmopolitan view, many other organizations were founded. The United National High Commission for

Refugees was created in 1921 by the League of Nations (a proto United Nations). At that time, their concern was for displaced people fleeing the Russian Revolution, but it later extended to other refugees.[12] Its founder, Fridtjof Nansen, developed a special passport that would allow stateless people (or refugees that could not request one from their country of origin) to travel across countries (Clapham 2007). It is under these conditions that humanitarianism began to be associated with the concept of mitigating the effects of war on civilians, to respond not only to human suffering but also to suffering as "displacement" (Calhoun 2008). But the concept of human rights was, with the exception of the efforts of Nansen, still tied to national citizenship. Hannah Arendt called for an extension of these basic rights beyond national citizenship. She called this the "End of the Nation-state" in her seminal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "true freedom, true emancipation, and true popular sovereignty could be attained only with full national emancipation, that people without their own national government were deprived of human rights." (Arendt 1951, 272)

In the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of "human rights" was defined in the way we understand it today, while the ideal of transnational equality died, or was limited to the national citizenship status.[13] Human rights, as defined by the 1948 Declaration, included the French Revolution principle that every human is born equal and has the same rights. Also, every individual is declared free to move between states or to reside in one state, and has the right of a citizenship. There is no mention of nationality. Although the declaration was signed at

12 In 1930, it was renamed "Nansen" after Fridtjof Nansen, head of the commission for Russian Refugees who died that year.

13 Moyn thus distinguishes what he calls an "ethos of equality," which calls for a just moral order that depends on everybody having the same amount of the "good things in life" such as material goods but also political power, and an "ethos of sufficiency" that makes sure that every individual meets some minimal requirements of human rights. Today, when we talk about protecting the rights of refugees and migrants we are usually referring to an ethos of sufficiency, because what is clear is that they have been deprived even of these basic rights (2018).

a time when welfare States were becoming popular, this international agreement that aimed to extend beyond the borders of nation-states and highlight a global issue did not include the broader ideal of economic and social equality sought by the French and American revolutions.[14]

In *Against All Odds*, the narrative reinforces inequality by exemplifying the gap between who is an economic migrant and who is eligible to be (recognised as) a refugee. There is no space in the game for the stateless, or the internally displaced. One part asks the player to choose between becoming an economic migrant or refugee. However, since the game was developed around 2005, some refugees in the game would now be considered economic migrants. For instance, Afghans, whose country, according to the latest European policies, is not one from which you have to flee (Constable 2018). The concept of "refugee" is therefore strictly bound to international and national policies, and is based primarily on a juridical definition that can be understood differently by different countries in different times. Humanitarianism, then, aims not to deliver justice but relief, and does not intercede into national politics or transnational conflicts.

Today, the notion of bringing relief to victims of war has been extended to other causes, like climate-based disasters. The definition of a refugee is stated as follows by the UNHCR website:

> someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. (UNHCR 2020a)

14 Still, although everyone might be born equal, rising inequality nowadays suggests the contrary. Although the declaration stressed the necessity of a right to work and a "basic sufficiency," there is no mention of the ideal of income and political equality of which Moyn talks (and which also resembles Arendt's concept of "isonomia").

Those that can become refugees need to be recognized first as vulnerable others. Today, the UNHCR does not only care for refugees—they also identify "stateless" persons, as those who hold no citizenship, and "asylum seekers," thus refugees in a foreign country who await asylum. Moreover, a large part of refugees are defined as "internally displaced persons," thus people that were forced to flee but never crossed an international border. The juridical complexity shows a shift in the practice of humanitarianism, which is no longer concerned merely with refugees but with different categories of displacement. Indeed, the discourse has shifted from talking about refugees to talking about displaced persons, or to the new concept of "persons of concern" or simply PoCs (UNHCR Philippines n.d.). These include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and returnees (those that have returned home after being displaced). These categories are what humanitarian agencies consider as *vulnerable*.

Noticing the ongoing trend of displacement and exile, the UN met in September 2016 for a summit in New York. During the meeting, leaders and UN officers proposed to sign a new declaration, which included a plan to address large movements of refugees and migrants. The amendment expanded the definition of refugees to include those fleeing countries due to climate change and natural disaster. On that occasion, UN members also addressed the rising problem of human trafficking, the need to combat gender-based violence, and the importance of offering prompt education services—especially to children and youth. Perhaps the most relevant development was that the International Organization for Migration—which deals exclusively with internationally large movements of migrants—was part of the discussion, and joined the Declaration. It is now not only refugees, but migrants that are part of the agreement.

Today, the question of protecting the vulnerable has turned the basic idea of humanitarianism into a dynamic, organized system that prevents and alleviates different emergency situations. Humanitarianism informs a complex set of international organizations, institutions and laws that aim to frame the vulnerable. Individuals thus become subjects

of and to a global infrastructure that regulates humanity and ensures order. As Calhoun argues:

> The term 'emergency' became a sort of counterpoint to the idea of global order. Things usually worked well, it was implied, but occasionally went wrong. Emergencies were the result, and they posed demands for immediate action. Neither calamities nor population displacements were new, but this way of understanding their human consequences and ethical implications was. Taking hold of these events as emergencies involved a specific way of understanding them- what I have called the 'emergency imaginary.' This is the complement of growth of humanitarian intervention on a new scale. (Calhoun 2008, 85)

This trend, highlights Calhoun, started in the aftermath of World War II, and gained popularity in the 1980s. It brought with it an implicit need for better management and governance on a global scale. The ethical obligation of humanitarianism, then, is also a consequence of an ongoing process of globalization. As Calhoun underlines, this belief informs a specific vision, or what he calls a "distanced view" of the global system—a point of view from which "distant troubles appear as emergencies." (2008, 86) This thought is echoed by some interactive practices that engage with this distant form of viewing, or what I call "A View from Above." Despite deploying a different rhetoric to serious games, virtual reality and interactive text-adventures, interactive maps also demonstrate this same humanitarian impulse (Rangan 2017). As I investigated in the fourth chapter, mapping migration practices not only aim at defining a certain cartographic practice, but they also make use of humanitarian data to provoke immediate action.

I would like to highlight this shift in humanitarianism by looking at a further example of data visualization in Al Jazeera's interactive documentary, *Life on Hold* (2015). The game presents a collection of stories of Syrian refugees (or shall we say PoCs?). The first image you see once you land on the documentary website is a map. This shows Syria and its neighbouring countries, while an animated, rapidly increasing number depicts the amount of refugees that left Syria starting in 2011.

Fig. 29: Al Jazeera's Life on Hold: introductory sequence

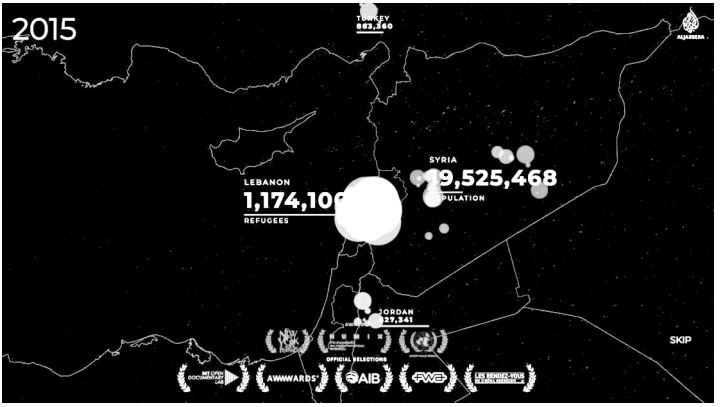

Image source: *Life on Hold* (2015), http://lifeonhold.aljazeera.com.

In the visualization, you also notice that while Syria's population decreases, refugee numbers increase, as well as the population of neighbouring countries like Lebanon and Turkey (fig. 29).

This map/data visualization and others like it, made using data collected by the UNHCR, clearly exemplifies a shift in the subject of humanitarian discourse towards a so-called "state of emergency." Similarly, in *The Refugee Project*, the state of emergency is clearly global and spreads over a long time period. The timeline starts in the 1970s and continues to the present day. It suggests a state of constant emergency, where crisis, although localized, is a global concern. These maps build an image of global vulnerability, for a cosmopolitan humanitarian audience. The use of data visualizations like those found in *Life on Hold* shifts the attention not toward the singular experience of individuals but towards a collective experience of exile that echoes internationally.

Here, our attention is called to act upon emergency situations which are global and widespread. As Calhoun argues about humanitarianism today: "we see not one large emergency dismissed as an exception, but

Fig. 30: Refugee Project: data visualization before September 2018

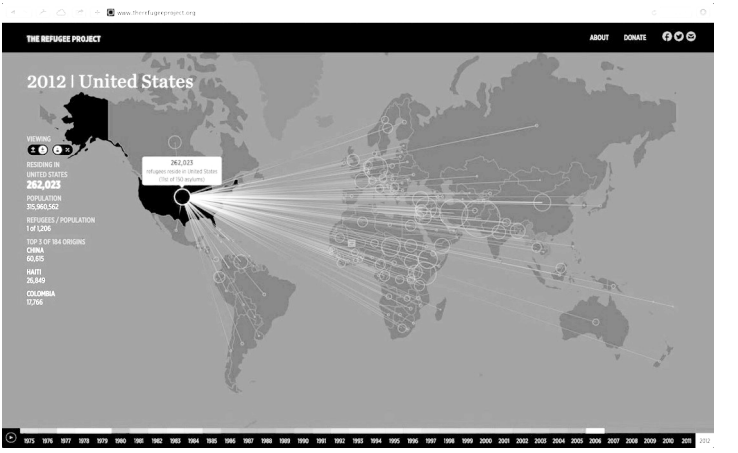

Image source: screenshot by author.

innumerable smaller ones still treated as exceptions to an imaginary norm but repeatedly so frequently as to be normalized." (Calhoun 2008, 87)

These maps are sometimes used to complement other interactive practices, such as, for instance, video material (as is the case with *Life on Hold*). In other cases, such as *The Refugee Project*, they are themselves complemented by historical information which displays a flow of migrants moving between an origin and destination country. The emergency imaginary is therefore connected to the politics of compassion or pity. On the one hand, "humanitarian reason" informs individual stories; on the other, the global perspective of collected data conveys a cosmopolitan urgency and interest in restoring supposed order (Fassin 2012). This distanced view of a world with no order that can be re-established through the coordinated aid of humanitarian agencies, exemplifies an *episteme* (Foucault 1970):

> The same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time (what Foucault called the episteme), will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society. However, whenever these discursive events 'refer to the same object, share the same style and [...] support a strategy [...] a common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern' (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, pp. 84–5), then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation. (Hall 1997, 29)

For Foucault, the episteme—or a discursive formation—has no fixed meaning, but changes over time in different historical situations. Viewed through this lens, humanitarianism today has become not only a moral imperative but an integrated global response to vulnerability. In a liberal and globalized world:

> humanitarian action has become the province of large scale organizations, donors with demands for evidence of efficacy and efficiency, and a profession with its own standards of good performance. Against the "value-rational" sources that have given much impetus to humanitarianism there is a growing instrumental orientation. Reconciling moral self justification and instrumental assessment is difficult. (Calhoun 2008, 32).

Humanitarian aid is today a 10 billion dollar industry, which has dedicated trade fairs and a global infrastructure. Indeed, humanitarian agencies are established institutions that work in a global environment of permanent risk, where the extraordinary becomes routine. At least, this is what the underlying discourse suggests: emergency is not the exception but the norm. If interactive practices, as part of the trend of humanitarian communication, still focus on incoming emergencies, the truth is that this crisis is quotidian. Today, humanitarianism's goal is not limited to helping the vulnerable and the progress of humanity, also the corporate purpose of saving as many lives as possible. As Calhoun explains:

> Efficient aid saves more lives. Nor is it a problem that humanitarianism and emergency assistance are becoming increasingly professionalized fields of work—whether for the state or for NGOs and multilateral organizations. But each of these developments raises questions about how to understand humanitarian action as part of the contemporary global order (or disorder). It cannot be understood adequately simply as an ethical response to suffering. (2008, 23)

Interactive practices, especially interactive maps, address the urgency of a humanitarian response. They contribute to complex, coordinated industry that, beyond any border, tries to reshape the order of things. The trust we have in the effectiveness of humanitarian aid is not made explicit in these media, but it is implicitly addressed through their depiction of actual material infrastructures. Data on refugees is only one of the outcomes of these infrastructures. This global network of aid also holds a promise. I will explore these specific infrastructures in the following paragraphs.

5.6 The Promise behind Humanitarian Logistics and Infrastructures

Interactive practices about migration might move us to donate or support international aid agencies. This means that we believe in and trust such organizations to provide immediate help and relief to the vulnerable. Why? I argue that there is another promise that such interactives carry, which derives from another form of technology: the humanitarian material infrastructure. This infrastructure gathers not only the agencies and institutions that represent or provide humanitarian aid, but also their logistical infrastructures which aim to respond efficiently in the case of emergencies. The humanitarian infrastructure is part of a broader notion of "migration infrastructure," which Xiang and Lindquist define as the "systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility." (2014, 124)

The system of humanitarian relief is a globalized network of infrastructures and actors that needs to be efficiently coordinated. The OCHA, for example, (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) is responsible for "bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies." (OCHA n.d.) This organ shows how complex the management of humanitarian relief has become on a global scale. And in many interactive practices about migration, it is not only refugees and migrants we see in camps but also humanitarian aid workers and the supply chains that support the settlement of refugees and migrants. This material and human infrastructure facilitates the flow of goods, people and ideas and their mutual exchange.

Brian Larkin, an anthropologist, argues infrastructures not only allow practices of exchange and circulation, but they also highlight how certain practices of government are organized. Consequently, there is a belief that they might enact change or progress. For example, the construction of certain roads between places facilitate the increasing mobility of goods and peoples—but also ideas. The Internet, too, facilitates the circulation of ideas over social networks, and it allows geographically disparate people to communicate on almost the same timeframe. What Larkin argues is that infrastructures not only enable connections, circulation, and exchange—enhancing economic and scientific progress—but they also operate on the level of "fantasy and desire." (2013, 333) He says that in this sense, they

> encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real. Benjamin similarly argued that for those who grew up with the railway, […] They were embodiments of objective historical forces, but they simultaneously enter into our unconscious and hold sway over the imagination. They form us as subjects not just on a technopolitical level but also through this mobilization of affect and the senses of desire, pride, and frustration, feelings which can be deeply political. (ibid., 333)

The promise of the humanitarian infrastructure is therefore a promise to provide the required care, save lives and better the world.

I would like to return to an example of an interactive to highlight this promise. At a certain point in *Refugee Republic* (2014), there is a map of the Domiz camp in Iraq. It highlights the actual infrastructures and structures around which the site was chosen, which has now become an almost permanent settlement. When we click on the camp's interactive map, we can choose different routes which take us to certain streets, and we view them from a first-person perspective. Along these paths, we recognize goods and materials provided through the supply chain of international aid (especially the UNHCR). These will contribute to the construction of tents and temporary buildings, but also the welcome packages that each family receives upon arrival, along with their tent. The artist Jan Rothuizen documented the different kind of constructions he found in the refugee camp in *Refugee Republic*. For instance, he illustrates how from a basic tent, residents started to improve their UNHCR- provided units with different goods and materials. People in the camp started building steel or wooden structures to help sustain a plastic tent or to cover plates. Later on, due to the perishable nature of wood and plastic, they began to work with more durable materials such as brick. We can also navigate through the premade routes around the camp and discover how residents were able to re-create living spaces within the frames and structures provided by the UN and NGOs. We can see a photo of a "kitchen set," which contains tools for cooking, eating, cleaning etc. We even find out on the "money route" that people started creating businesses within the camp in order to provide residents with goods not offered by the UNCHR; some even went into business in money transfer logistics, restaurants and as expert mechanics. Last, in the camp, there is also a school where teachers were recruited from the resident population (although, as they explain, they were not paid for many months)[15].

15 In another case study, *Refugees* (2014), we are able to see the humanitarian aid supply chain in different refugee camps. For instance, in Nepal, some refugees relied on the food provided by UNHCR but unfortunately had no space to farm.

The way interactive practices narrate infrastructures also connects to the non-linear (infra)structure of the story[16]. In both *Refugee Republic* and *Refugees*, we can navigate through the intricate routes and streets of the camp in the same way that we navigate the interactive structure of the newsgame. From video testimonies, we also understand how people in these camps, especially those established most recently, rely on the UN and NGOs to obtain medical care, a working permit and all the supplies they need to sustain a decent life. But this is often is extremely different to the lives they had before. These interactives narrate a certain promise that humanitarian infrastructures carry within them. The kind of infrastructures that become visible in the examples above are only part of the migration and humanitarian infrastructure, which include also other sort of technological structures such as all the machinery needed to map and document, register, count, etc.

In the chapter "A View from Above" I highlighted how interactive maps make use of data gathered and distributed by the UNHCR and other organizations to create a harmonious visual aesthetic. In Story Maps, for instance, we saw how data on over population is gathered through governments and NGOs and is combined with satellite data, statistics and algorithmic modelling to prepare for future scenarios. As I already argued, these images are "operational," and outline humanitarian efforts towards what is called risk assessment (Farocki 2004). OCHA's 2019 annual report explains that humanitarian aid aims not only to relieve, but also to prevent. Since 2019, they also employ new parameters to assess risk:

> INFORM is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. During 2019, it expanded its analysis to the hu-

However, as most of the refugees were former farmers, they were not able to pursue another job or work as they had been trained. Consequently, they sometimes ended up in a spiral of depression and substance abuse. In Beirut, a camp that was established in 1947 has become a district of the city where residents are not recognized as citizens and can only work within the decadent and unregulated space of the "camp."

16 I refer here to the concept of non-linearity by Aarseth (1994).

> manitarian community. It developed and added two products to its portfolio – a Severity Index to measure the severity of existing crises globally, and a tool to collate early warning information. Since 2013 INFORM has published a global Risk Index, which is now a well-established indicator that influences the resource allocation processes of agencies and donors. With these three products, INFORM will support decision-making across the crisis-management cycle, from prevention to preparedness and response. (OCHA 2019, 42)

In the same report they discuss "anticipatory approaches" as one of OCHA's priorities after "traditional responses" have been exhausted (OCHA 2019, 48). The gathering of imagery to prevent disasters forms part of these anticipatory approaches; for example, the Story Maps-produced 3-D-map in *Rohingya Refugees: Emergencies at a Glance*. Cartographers created this 3D-simulation to provide information on and prevent a flood within the refugee camp in Bangladesh. The UNHCR also employs cartographers and scientists to gather data they collect in camps as well as a network of satellites and drones to mitigate risk. Its satellite infrastructure is called UNOSAT. Part of UNITAR, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, UNOSAT delivers satellite analysis and applied research. Their mission is a "response" to "the increase in the occurrences of natural disasters and the high numbers of victims of conflicts are urgent issues that require effective and rapid action." (UNITAR 2019)

The coordination of several organizations and the common use of data sets need to respect certain format and standards. The United Nations and in particular the UNHCR share data as Creative Commons. These can be easily shared and gathered to produce infographics, data visualizations and of course story maps to raise awareness on the situation and target so-called decision makers. OCHA's HDX website, an open platform for sharing data in the humanitarian context, collects data from everywhere in the world and provides tools to share it.[17] Its

17 "We define humanitarian data as: data about the context in which a humanitarian crisis is occurring (e.g., baseline/development data, damage assessments, geospatial data), data about the people affected by the crisis and their needs,

mission "is focused on increasing the use and impact of data in the humanitarian sector" (OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data n.d.). Therefore, they focus on four areas, of data use: data services, data literacy, data policy and predictive analytics. As they explain, the point of "predictive analytics" is "to be more anticipatory, to predict what is about to happen and to trigger the response earlier." (Ibid.)

As Brian Larkin suggests, infrastructures are interesting because they "reveal forms of political rationalities" and they carry with them a technological promise (2013). Data is not only used to create visualizations, but it is also a tool with which to perform the humanitarian agenda. And, as Larkin would argue, this demonstrates certain political rationality behind it. This rationality not only aims at collecting, managing and simplifying operations concerning a given population's movements. It also wants to predict any emergency event. The infrastructure, which we see and which is visualized by interactive practices, carries this promise or a belief in humanitarian rationality to create a better world. But at the same time it is self-fulfilling, because humanitarianism determines the emergencies it then seeks to mitigate or prevent.

Humanitarian communication today exemplifies, as Lilie Chouliaraki argues, a post-humanitarian trend—a morality that instead of calling for pity or compassion, aims to provide viewers with an immersive and realistic experience that promises that they will get closer and understand more. It is also a form of governmental rationality. As Didier Fassin writes vis-à-vis bureaucracratic process, humanitarian reason is a moral imperative, and its images of vulnerable people address us as compassionate, empathetic individuals. Our empathy encourages us to be charitable with strangers and make donations, but we can only do so if we believe that the humanitarian system is functioning.

Calhoun contends that the emergency imaginary "reinforce[s] the tendency—already long established—to approach humanitarian action

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data about the response by organizations and people seeking to help those who need assistance." (OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data n.d.)

as 'value rational,' an end in itself and intrinsically self-justifying[..]." (2006, 97) But at the same time, because of its large global scale of operations, it also encourages a form of governmentality with instrumental concerns (Foucault [1978] 2008). The infrastructures of humanitarianism carry this hope and they point towards a future of order, where events perceived as emergencies might even be predicted. Humanitarianism has become a new sort of secular religion, and a force which drives politics, economics and society, by addressing our most human feelings. It, has become, as interactive practices about migration demonstrate, a "potent force of our world." (Fassin 2012, xi)