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<title>Singing and painting global awareness

<subtitle>International years and human rights at the United Nations

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<text>In June 1975, Mexico City witnessed an exceptional series of events. As host of the World Conference of the United Nations Year of Women, the city's premises were flooded with 1044 UN delegates and some 5000 "assorted feminists."[1] The participants constituted "the world's largest consciousness-raising group" in a conference anticipated as the largest of its kind in history. At the opening event, a select group of male bigwigs stood on an elevated platform in Mexico City's Olympic Gymnasium, including UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, Mexican President Luis Echeverría, and the elected president of the women's conference, Pedro Ojeda, Mexico's Attorney General. Down on the floor, thousands of women were expected to look up and listen to their speeches.

Among them were the members of the U.S. delegation, headed by a man. Only in reaction to harsh criticism was a female co-chair hastily added at the last minute. Many women attended as the *spouses* of male politicians, like Jehan Sadat, Nusrat Bhutto, Leah Rabin, and Imelda Marcos. Infuriated feminists quickly labeled them "wifey-poos." Five miles away from this official setting, a separate, more radical meeting occurred: the International Women's Tribune. Perhaps surprisingly, the UN also sponsored this nongovernmental and much less restrained gathering. Its contributors ranged from the National Gay Task Force of the US to the Federation of Cuban Women and the Aboriginal Island Women. Many participants suspected that the Tribune was purposefully held a significant distance from the major venue to prevent radical feminists from upsetting the polite, official proceedings.

All this led to controversial views about the rationale for this "much ballyhooed, much-disputed" International Year. Did it advance or trivialize the women's movement and the UN's agenda? Similar concerns existed about comparable events: since the World Refugee Year in 1959, the UN has regularly assigned days, weeks, years, and decades to certain themes and topics in order to raise awareness on fundamental issues. In the 1970s–1980s, this included women, anti-apartheid, and drinking water. More recently, the gorilla, microcredit, and quinoa were placed on the agenda.[2]

Some observances received highly positive publicity; others became known for generating conflicts and protests. Still others went largely unnoticed. Typically, they were generously supported by the UN's PR machinery, but much less so by financial means. The observances have become an integral part of the UN's institutional identity and a pillar of its human rights advocacy. Yet, we know very little about their role in the UN's history and their status within the UN's communication and audio-visual politics.[3] Despite the burgeoning historical research on human rights, the contribution of the observances to human rights agendas has not yet been studied.

This chapter argues that the emergence and proliferation of UN years represented a new form of PR activity. As instruments of soft power, their aim was to advocate pillars of a global morality. The years were meant to shape public opinion and expand the UN's outreach in two ways: horizontally and vertically. First, unlike many other elite- and expert-centered events like global conferences organized under the UN's aegis, the years were intended to involve the general public. Second, they expanded the UN's initially Western-oriented focus to a more global one. Audio-visual communication strategies were pursued as advocacy tools for articulating the UN's aims in ways

which could serve as alternatives to more elite-centered schemes. Artistic work (whether "high," "popular," or "applied" art) was expected to represent a universally comprehensible awareness-raising platform that could appeal to people belonging to various social strata and across all continents. That desire of universality on the UN's part became pronounced in conjunction with the expansion of its membership from the 1960s onwards, primarily as a consequence of decolonization. Nevertheless, as the article argues, the intention to assess problems on a global scope, noble as they were, could turn out to be counter-productive. One reason was that the international years were often meant to raise not only awareness, but also funding for specific projects. In order to successfully compete for donors, however, "problems" of the developing world had to be highlighted. Consequently, the developing world was thematized in terms of "trouble" and dependence on Western financial aid.

Organized by the UN and its specialized agencies, the international years were proceeded by 5–6 years of preparation and officially ran for 12 months, with most events at the start and conclusion. Several regional/continental events were held. National committees, including local sub-committees, were formed in nearly every UN member-state. The multi-level organization of these years indicated the UN's intention to reach citizens' doorsteps.

The UN years found the most resounding echo globally in the 1970s, as the world experienced the "shock of the global:" the breakdown of the postwar economic order, the rise of non-state actors, and the intensifying process of globalization.[4] The chapter focuses on three years from this period: the International Year of Women in 1975, the International Year of the Child in 1979, and the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. Despite differences, these three years all focused on (potentially) vulnerable groups, who were often exposed to political and social injustice. From the second half of the 1980s, the significance of the UN's years started to fade.

Although UN documents do not show this was a pre-determined, official, and conscious strategy, all three years' agendas were framed within the context of human rights and as such continued the International Year of Human Rights in 1968.[5] That year emerged from the realization that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights bore the imprint of a specific post-war agenda in the late 1940s, and needed updating for the new political and economic context of the 1970s, including decolonization, the emergence of new postcolonial states, apartheid in South Africa, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most importantly, the concept of cultural relativism became increasingly significant during the 1970s, requiring politicians and policy-makers to rethink the UN's priorities and accommodate them to regional specificities.[6] For instance, development projects in the Global South to rehabilitate disabled people and garner them employment often did not take into account that in those societies working ability was not necessarily as integral a component of citizenship as in Western societies.[7]

The years' channels of communication included newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, radio and television programs, poster exhibitions, international congresses, mega-concerts, documentaries, and feature films. This chapter focuses on three genres: artwork, a mega-concert, and photo journalism. Artwork and photography accompanied virtually every international year and in various reproductions circulated globally. The mega-concert in conjunction with the International Year of the Child provided a template for future fund-raising mega-events. These communication strategies could serve as advocacy tools for articulating the UN's aims in alternative, albeit limited, ways to more elite-centered schemes. Artistic work (whether "high," "popular" or "applied" art) was expected to represent a universally comprehensible awareness-raising platform. [Q1] Yet, these artistic pieces could hardly be divorced from the cultural values and circumstances of their authors and their commissioners. If they made an impact, it was due to their affordable and efficient nature, rather than their assumed universality. In that context, this chapter reveals the conceptual and pragmatic

dilemmas and difficulties which accompanied the UN's attempts at universal representation.

<head1>International years and UN communication

<text>Motivated by the Hungarian refugee crisis after the failed uprising of 1956, a young British conservative politician, Timothy Raison, floated the idea of the first UN year: the World Refugee Year of 1959–1960. The event was also expected to highlight the conditions of many displaced persons and refugees in Germany, Austria, Italy, and Greece still living in camps long after 1945.[8] Though not involved in the UN himself, Raison's idea was recommended by British delegates to the UN, which ultimately accepted the proposal. The Year sought to raise public awareness of the refugees' situation, collect funds, and facilitate the closure of refugee camps. The World Refugee Year received generous media attention, contributing to its success: increased awareness of refugees and the sharp rise in the number of member states ratifying the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 after the Year.[9] The year's communications strategy was to inform the extremely heterogeneous "general public" about refugees' problems. It quickly became clear, however, that finding the correct dose of media exposure could constitute a particularly serious challenge. Over-exposure could prove counter-productive, leading to fatigue and desensitizing the public.

Another challenge was the diverse nature of information. The UN's PR machinery had to tackle the practically impossible task of conveying the diverse and often contradictory viewpoints of myriad parties involved in the events. The fundamental (if somewhat ambiguous) principle of the UN's communication agency and public diplomacy instrument, the Department of Public Information (DPI, founded in 1946), was "objective language."[10] As such, the UN's *public information* differed from the typical strategies employed by governmental institutions and companies which sought to influence people's attitudes proactively. This was often referred to as *public diplomacy*.[11]

In the 1970s and early 1980s, new developments within the UN compelled the Department of Public Information to recalibrate its communication strategy. The East–West, Soviet–American Cold War polemics had penetrated the UN's communication from the start. In the case of the World Refugee Year, the Soviet bloc countries refused to contribute, claiming that the refugee problem could be easily solved if the Western governments pressured displaced persons from Eastern Europe to return to their home countries.[12] Such ideological divides often hindered UN messages from attaining their intended global validity.

Decolonization fostered a new, North-South fault line. A new, vocal group of UN members represented interests often significantly different from or in conflict with the North-American and European member states. Yet, the latter group, albeit now in minority, supplied most of the UN's budget. Moreover, the production and circulation of information continued to reflect development hierarchies: news was typically produced in the first world and received by developing countries. Representatives of new UN members initiated a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and accompanying New International Information Order (NIIO, launched in 1976) to correct the unidirectional flow of news from developed to developing countries by creating self-reliant communication infrastructures for the developing world.[13] While these intentions had some rhetorical impact, they never materialized in reality. The process of technological advancement remained characterized by "electronic colonialism." Only in more affluent countries and societies did television news gradually surpass radio, newspapers, and picture magazines as the public's major source of information on current events starting in the early 1970s.[14]

These factors meant that the "problems" highlighted in the UN's international years, especially related to human rights, were detected in the developing world, while their communication and solutions

were expected to stem from Western countries. This could lead to reiterating stereotypes about the tumultuous, violent nature of a developing world unable to govern itself and needing intervention from "the West." Thus, these years could be appropriated by some Western member states –especially former colonial powers—to try to reassert their moral leadership on the world stage by presenting themselves as benevolent donors and advisors to "needy" regions and states.[15]

Lastly, while the UN aimed to create social change for groups with vulnerabilities, it is worth remembering that "elite" or "privileged" members of these groups, across both sides of the Iron Curtain and the South/North divide, often became the international spokespersons of their own group and made appearances in UN media, because they had access to unusual opportunities, like travelling abroad or an education in a Western country. A further complicating factor was that these elite groups claimed to represent an "authentic experience," yet they relied on a set of values which they had internalized in the course of their "Western education."[16]

Although the UN aimed from the start to protect individual human rights, only from the mid-1960s did the organization gain some power to condemn and intervene in gross violations.[17] The UN's agenda resonated with global developments in the field of human rights, a burgeoning field for recent historical scholarship. One of the most disputed historiographical issues is dating the real "breakthrough" for human rights and identifying why it became an irreplaceable *lingua franca* (or even *doxa)* of international politics. Nearly every postwar decade from the 1940s to late 1990s has been deemed decisive.[18] This study of the international years supports the thesis about the 1970s representing the "breakthrough." The 1970s were fundamental for the explosion of international civil society, the increasing role of NGOs, and the growth of dissent in the Soviet bloc.[19]

Still, the years also point to continuities of human rights claims from specific groups. Organizers of UN observances advocating the rights of women, children, and disabled people had to take into account the "pre-history" of these initiatives. For example, social movements had advocated for women's rights since the nineteenth-century suffrage movement. Thus, in 1975 the International Women's Year *continued*, rather than created, a new cause by turning it into a global concern. Although non-discrimination on the basis of sex had been an integral element of the UN's charter, the increasing impact of feminism over the previous decade added further impetus. Both policy-makers and those collaborating with the UN at the grassroots level were expected to pay attention not only to rights but also to responsibilities: it was "the duty of women to make full use of the opportunities available to them."[20]

UN communications suffered from a specific problem with any year. The UN was mandated to maintain "neutrality." Yet, the precedents for advocating women's rights were embedded in an ideological framework with a very clear socialist leaning, even at the time of the suffragette movement. Many experts believed that the selection of the main themes to stand for the Year—equality, development, and peace—emerged from a political compromise between Western non-communist nations emphasizing equality, non-industrialized countries opting for development, and the Soviet bloc settling for peace. In fact, these themes corresponded with the earlier agenda of the women's movement.[21] It soon became clear, however, that global politics, rather than the worldwide status of women, would become the dominating factor in the debates. This became particularly evident in the fierce discussions about the official documents of the Mexico conference of 1975, the World Program of Action and the Declaration of Mexico. Jehan Sadat, wife of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, declared that as long as the Arab states remained occupied and the Palestinians homeless, there was little reason to discuss more specific issues. The U.S. delegates, whose main preoccupation was to fight patriarchy, felt challenged by the Soviet anti-imperialist rhetoric which critiqued colonialism and exploitation in the interest of wealth accumulation.[22] The world's first

female astronaut, Valentina Tereshkova, boasted that in the Soviet Union, women enjoyed full rights and unmatched opportunities.

Alongside the Cold War's political cleavages between the two superpowers and their allies, the North-South divide was also evident. The conference's goal was to prepare a ten-year plan of action. Some of the desiderata which participants raised—such as calls for equal pay for equal work and the need for adequate day-care centers—found little resonance among women from the developing world. Those who spoke on their behalf argued in the spirit of NIEO that only a fundamental transformation, leading to the redistribution of wealth and political power, could address women's problems on a global scale.

The dynamism of the International Year of the Child in 1979 was entirely different. Not only did the International Year of the Child attract the most resounding echo of the three observances, but its communications success was significantly enhanced by financial support from UNICEF.[23] Initially, it was not evident at all that a year dedicated to children would make sense. In 1973, it took a great deal of effort for its initiator Canon Joseph Moerman, the Secretary-General of the Catholic Child Bureau in Geneva, to convince UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim to support the proposal. The consensus around children's rights (as expressed in 1959 in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child) seemed so strong that a year was superfluous, unlike women's rights. Still, it was acknowledged that these had not been implemented in practice, particularly in the developing world.[24]

Thanks to UNICEF's and numerous donors' contribution, some innovative artistic productions could be funded in conjunction with the Year. For example, the artist Edwina Sandys (Winston Churchill's granddaughter) was invited to design three sculptures (marble, bronze, and aluminum) which were installed at UN centers in New York, Vienna, and Geneva: Child, Family, and Generations. Sandys might have been chosen for her sensitivity to big societal questions and for her mind-provoking, but simultaneously playful style.[25] Another instance was a short animation film *Every Child*, directed by Eugene Fedorenko by the National Film Board of Canada in association with UNICEF. The film, which contains no words but incorporates "mime sounds" by the group *Mimes Électriques* (Electronic Mimes), tells the story of an abandoned baby who is repeatedly left on a series of doorsteps in a well-to-do community, while a bureaucrat tries to find a place for her. Finally, the infant ends up in a garbage heap where two tramps find her, adopt her, and treat her with compassion. Its aim was to call attention to solidarity and to the complacency often observed in developed societies by promoting one of the ten principles of the Declaration of Children's Rights that "Every child has the right to a name and a nationality when born." It won numerous prizes, including an Oscar for Best Short Film in 1980 (awarded for producer Derek Lamb).

Although today the film is no longer in the public memory, its virtues are evident.[26] The film conveyed such a consensual message that it could trigger no further discussion. Yet, the message was communicated in a counter-intuitive way. It was crisp, amusing, and engaging, and lacked the "humanitarian pathos" and "Third World drama" which was an omnipresent component of the other events associated with the Year. Instead, it was humorous, while artistically of outstanding quality with a delicate color scheme and the innovative incorporation of mime sounds. Altogether, it demonstrated that "sledge hammers need not be used to hammer home a point."[27]

The UN reached the decision to dedicate 1981 to Disabled Persons five years earlier. One justification was the problems of disabled children in preparing for the International Year of the Child. The Libyan government submitted for the year of disabled persons to show how their country, the Arab League, and Islam displayed compassion and cared for its disabled citizens, even if this protective stance was not defined in the Western terms of human rights. Immediately after the Second World War, the rehabilitation of disabled children had been placed onto the agenda of international organizations, but

faded away shortly thereafter. The reasons were primarily financial: malnutrition and poor health were so common in many regions of the word that large-scale programs going beyond "pilot projects" were not deemed feasible. However, disabled adults were just as likely to be exposed to inequality and discrimination. To that end, the International Year sought to promote the rights of people with disabilities and integrate them into mainstream society. Although this intention had its precedents in legal developments in the 1970s, compared to the issues advocated by the International Women's Year and the Year of the Child, the addition of disability to the human rights agenda was a novel phenomenon. This was enabled by the emergence of a new understanding of disability. Until the 1970s, the condition was primarily understood in medical terms, as a "lack" related to the individual. This notion was gradually replaced by the so-called social model that sees disability as a social construct. Thus the "problem," for example the inaccessibility of buildings, lies in the attitude of society/the environment and not in the individual.[28]

Protests broke out in several Western countries—for example in West Germany, Austria, Australia, and Great Britain—during the year because of the patronizing rhetoric of the UN's and national communications. The original title suggested by the UN, the International Year *for* Disabled Persons, had to be replaced by the International Year *of* Disabled Persons, because representatives of the emerging worldwide disability movement found the original title condescending. The International Year turned disability within the framework of human rights into a global discourse by introducing the concept into parts of the world where it did not even exist. Several development projects were carried out for the occasion. But the accompanying ideological tenets—equality, independence, self-reliance, and personal self-fulfillment—did not always gel with the norms and values of "developing societies" where the disabled person is seen as part of a larger whole: the care-giving family and kinship networks.

A large number of reports, pamphlets, and other written documents were produced by the UN and its agencies to provide information about these years, but these were primarily aimed at an expert audience. The general public was addressed mostly through visual and audio-visual means. What were then the strategies to translate the abstract notions related to human rights into more tangible forms? And how did those means reflect the political and ideological controversies around the UN's agenda?

<head1>Human rights translated into the language of art

<text>One of the DPI's Promotion and Public Services Division's strategies to advocate the years was commissioning renowned artists to produce artwork. Some pieces were also designed by the UN's staff members, particularly professionals working for DPI's Graphic Design Section and Exhibition Unit. Thanks to its mission of promoting cultural expression and diversity, UNESCO emerged as a pioneer of such initiatives. A particularly well-known instance of collaboration with architects and artists was the construction of UNESCO's headquarters in Paris in the 1950s: the much-disputed building was expected not only to represent a certain type of aesthetics ("the genius of the age"), but also to convey UNESCO's political mission with concrete messages.[29]

Artistic projects could help counter the logic of news transmission that made problems and difficulties much likelier to receive attention than positive messages. At the same time, UNESCO also relied on artistic projects to emphasize the role of culture in the promotion of the *political* goals of peace, tolerance, and democracy, as a shield against the "war in the minds of men."[30] Art, particularly modern art, was a focus for Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN's second Secretary-General, who entertained friendships with artists such as Barbara Hepworth. He believed in the ambassadorial role of culture. In

particular, he forged a connection between *the unconventional nature of modern art* and the *necessity to break conventions for the purpose of political and societal progress*: "we have to approach our task in the spirit which animates the modern artist. We have to tackle our problems without the armor of inherited convictions and set formulas, but only with our bare hands and all the honesty can muster."[31]
One of the most effective and affordable ways to popularize the UN's human rights agenda was to commission posters. Some of the world's foremost contemporary artists designed posters for UN observances.[32] Victor Vasarely designed a poster for the International Literacy Day in 1965. His artistic innovation—three-dimensional illusionistic painting which anticipated Op Art—went hand in hand with social commitment. He created a visual language which was not only pleasing to the eye, but also engaging and universally accessible. Joan Miró had closely collaborated with UNESCO since its inception. He produced ceramic murals for the UNESCO House. In 1978, he was commissioned to design a poster to mark the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Paul Rauschenberg, an American painter and graphic artist who was well-known for working with 'non-traditional' material in "non-traditional" ways, designed seven posters for the UN's various observances. Kaii Higashiyama, a Japanese artist representing the traditional school of painting, designed a poster for International Year of Peace, 1986. In its center was a strong symbol of truth in Asian culture: the moon, reflected in peaceful waters.[33]
For the International Women's Year in 1975, UNESCO and its collaborating partner, the International Association of Art, commissioned a female artist, Sonia Delaunay, to produce a poster. She was 90 years old and, tellingly, refused to be interviewed by feminist magazines because she believed that there were no "woman painters," only painters who could be either men or women. When asked about her "liberation" as a woman, she responded: "The only liberation I ever took interest in was the liberation of colors," which also indicated her preference for abstract over figurative art. In fact, abstract art was for her the "new realism."[34] Delaunay, a decorative artist and coat-maker to the stars, was generally known as "the woman who made color dance." Born in Odessa in 1885 (as Sarah Stern), she settled in Paris and collaborated with Apollinaire and Tristan Tzara. She was the ultimate modernist artist, working with tensioned, sexualized, and confrontational themes. She distinguished herself both for her playful style and her serious manner of abstraction.[35] The poster she designed for the Year adhered to Delaunay's personal style: it was a single abstract image with a bright, bold color scheme.
The poster for the International Year of the Child, *Boy with a Dove*, was produced by the Cuban painter René Portocarrero. For many viewers, it may recall Picasso's painting of 1901, *Child with a Dove*. However, birds were omnipresent in Portocarrero's paintings. The artist's individual style was a sort of semi-abstract expressionism and he was noted for his spontaneous working technique. He is said to have had no design of the kind of work that would emerge from his hands until his brush was about to hit the canvas.[36]
It may not be a coincidence that no poster for the International Year of Disabled Persons was commissioned. Perhaps the theme did not lend itself so easily to an invitation or the organizers felt uncomfortable inviting a specific artist. Instead, UNESCO organized a poster competition in collaboration with the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). The winning entry was designed by the Polish artist Jacek Ćwikła, who also designed posters for Poland's Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Unlike the two previous abstract posters, Ćwikła's work contained a figurative image, though it still had a degree of abstraction. The black and white poster contains two candles: one is "regular" and the other one is "different" because it is bent in the middle. The flames of these two different candles are however united to express the Year's main message: "full participation of disabled persons in society." As such, Ćwikła's design was refreshingly different from

the majority of visual material published for this year, which typically included the image of a wheelchair, or other "traditional" items such as a white cane or a Braille script. Whether by invitation or competition, collaboration with artists on posters was successful for UNESCO: these were short-term, smaller assignments which did not require the sometimes risky commitment of a major architectural or sculptural project. The scheme enabled the inclusion of numerous artists and because expectations were modest (usually confined to one single poster), they were likely to be met.
Posters also held particular advantages as a medium for conveying messages about human rights. Posters are created for an immediate purpose and usually have a short life-time. As one UN graphic designers, Paul Davies, noted: "posters are transitory as leaves of a tree, yet they are also the leaves of a diary of popular culture."[37] Precisely because observances occurred on a repetitive, annual basis, the "transitory" genre of poster proved a suitable medium. Posters were also cheap and unpretentious. They represent a straightforward form of popular arts which can appeal even to people with limited education and experience. Some advocates of this medium, for example Edward B. Marks, a primary organizer of the Year of the Child and the editor of a collection on UN posters, went as far as to claim that posters create bridges as instruments of democracy and social justice, even if in many countries that intention was wishful thinking.
Alongside the advantages of posters as a medium, there were benefits to choosing artists whose social commitment combined unconventional styles and methods. The preference for (a degree of) abstraction and the use of archetypical images (such as a dove) proved useful in tackling a fundamental problem of the international years: the very heterogeneity of the groups that they represented. As we have seen, the clashes between different ideological orientations—East versus West, global North versus global South—were frequently insurmountable. The differences between the needs of the elite members of the groups and the marginal ones could likewise be enormous. In 1980, 23 percent of men and 33.9 percent of women in the world were illiterate. Abstract posters could also appeal to them. Abstract art was far from an ideologically "neutral' medium."[38] But it did offer ample space for individual interpretation. The combination of non-confrontational and aesthetically pleasing artistic styles with the accessible genre of the poster conveyed not only the international years' message, but also the *general* mission of the UN and its agencies.

<head1>Human rights and celebrities

<text>Among all the events organized for the UN's international years, one received the most publicity: the mega-concert including several superstars on January 9, 1979 which launched the International Year of the Child. This is not to say that "celebrities" were not used to enhance the visibility of other years. Yet, the presence of Mother Theresa or Valentina Tereshkova at the World Conference of Women in 1975 signaled a different message than celebrities at a concert. As one commentator on the event declared, a musical summit transformed the hall of the UN General Assembly in New York into a music arena.[39] Instead of heads of state and diplomats, this time a "galaxy of pop stars" featured on the podium. Among the superstars were Abba, the Bee Gees, Earth Wind and Fire, Olivia Newton-John, John Denver, John Stuart, and Donna Summer. They sang a "Gift of Song" for the world's children.
The concert represented a new element in the UN's communications by treating donors as consumers who needed to be entertained.[40] The background for this trend was provided by the forging of new synergies. The UN and its specialized agencies (particularly UNICEF) had developed collaboration with prominent personalities from the world of (high and popular) arts and sports from the early 1950s. A well-known manifestation of this trend is the Goodwill Ambassador scheme which also

engaged Hollywood stars, such as Audrey Hepburn. But around 1980, a shift occurred: the UN started to appeal to celebrities systematically and international pop and rock stars transfigured into main agents of mass-mediated international relations. This new hybrid of politics and pop culture needed a revolution in global telecommunications in the Western world with the rise of television. Celebrities from the world of cinema, fashion, and sports were utilized for political purposes and their attractiveness could be "claimed" by far less attractive professionals. This phenomenon, which was accompanied by the increasing use of market strategies for humanitarian purposes, became so pronounced that it was difficult to see "where pop culture ends and politics begins."[41] The UN's uses of celebrity diplomacy were motivated not only by its hope to gain a new form of international credibility, but also by fundraising: as the richest UN members were unwilling to make serious financial commitments to the UN, fundraising via civil society became a new strategy.[42] Very little, if anything, appears to connect the "business" of the UN and the world of entertainment. The former has the reputation of being the epitome of boredom and bureaucratic rigidity and it operates mostly away from the public view. The latter is considered glamorous, but superficial and ephemeral. What makes the collaboration between these radically different worlds fruitful is the mutually beneficial legitimizing effect for the parties involved.[43] This motivated, for example, the UN's close connection to Hollywood during the San Francisco conference of 1945, a link which quickly faded over of the 1950 with the burgeoning Cold War.[44]

There is no doubt that this "marriage" also radically expanded the scope of the audience and of donors targeted by UN communications. But the ethical repercussions of such mega-events are ambiguous. At their best, they provide opportunities to turn consumers into committed citizens who care about the developing world. At their worst, they denigrate noble humanitarian incentives into apolitical and ahistorical commodities.[45] They can act as integrating forces and create bonds of solidarity, but they can also lead to commodification and the depoliticization of solidarity.[46]

The pitfalls of this "ceremonial humanitarianism" become especially obvious when the impact of this concert is assessed against the desiderata of the "New International Information Order" to create a more proportional representation and interdependence in the production and dissemination of information between the developed and developing world. The concert represented the tendency for the West as "we", an imaginary collectivity to fashion itself as an agent acting on behalf of "they:" vulnerable children far and wide.[47] As such, it ran counter to the NIIO claims and hence showed the NIIO's limited success. After all, the event primarily satisfied the needs and tastes of a Western public, which was meant to provide the majority of donations. It was also unclear who was really at the center of attention during this event—the world's children in need or the performing stars and the United Nations? This new synergy between the UN and international rock stars resulted a certain extent the result from the declining influence of state-centric public forms of diplomatic initiatives. Some critiques argued that this placed a "happy but ultimately impotent face" on the UN, and potentially compromised the promotion of its values.[48]

Despite these ambivalent effects, the concert had enormous impact: transmitted in 60 countries, the audience was estimated to be around 250 million people. It was also a financial success because every performer offered UNICEF the right of a song (although not necessarily the one they had performed). In addition to the album sales the fundraising resulted in $4 million.[49]

<head1>Human rights and photography

<text>From its foundation, the DPI recognized photography as a powerful form of visual narrative for documentation and education. The DPI also recognized the interdependence between visual culture

and (the possibility of) social mobilization. Photos enable individuals to "participate" in events in regions of the world they would never reach themselves. Photos often rely on certain archetypical constructions that allow them to condense meaning and activate deeply ingrained cultural and religious frames of reference. The public can generally understand, at least to some extent, such strong archetypical representations without possessing intimate knowledge of the historical, political, and social circumstances of how the image was produced. Last but not least, photos enable the personalization of abstract notions of political oppression and can shock hesitant viewers into action.[50] However, people do not necessarily react to photographs as expected by the people who produce and disseminate them.[51] The instrumentalization of photos for political mobilization may also involve some ethical pitfalls, like trivializing human suffering. Susan Sontag has argued that the camera as an object is predatory in nature. The act of photographing people, "by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have contained," makes its educational possibilities questionable.[52] More recent scholarship has critiqued the reductive nature of Sontag's bipolar opposition of positive/negative and ethical/unethical aspects and stressed ambiguity instead.[53] The exclusive emphasis on the exploitative nature of humanitarian photography implies the dominant (or even colonizing) position of the photographer, while it automatically renders the photographed subject into a subaltern situation, as if the photographed subjects and photographers are always unaware of the potential impact of the camera. The disproportionate attention to the truth value of images over-emphasizes the problem of representation and diverts attention from the problems of inequality and injustice. It is possible to portray negative situations in a dignified manner, for example by calling attention to the agency and resilience of the photographic subjects.[54]

The UN employed photojournalists on specific missions and also organized numerous exhibitions to convey the work and activities of the UN in visual form around the world. The intended audience included experts, the general public, and, as a specific category, students and schoolchildren. For the international years, DPI commissioned well-known, even celebrity, photographers. The images for the International Year of Disabled Persons were produced by John Isaac, a photojournalist of Indian origin living in New York City, who also worked for celebrities such as Audrey Hepburn and Michael Jackson.

The images produced for the UN Year of Women fall into two categories: a smaller number of them revolved around the international conference in Mexico, while others sought to portray women in everyday situations.[55] The representations of the Mexico conference show the UN's leaders (mostly men) and some "celebrity women," such as Mother Theresa and the anthropologist Margaret Mead. Photographers appear to have paid special attention to portraying (or perhaps even composing) groups of women to represent different ethnic backgrounds. In that context, many observers noted that the visual landscape of the conference could hardly be more different from the representation of the stereotypical UN conference, characterized by "the conventional sea of gray suits."[56] Yet, most of the photos documenting everyday situations revolved around motherhood and the mother–daughter theme, while some of them also showed "working mothers (to-be)" in responsible situations, for example a UN film-maker–editor who was visibly in an advanced stage of pregnancy.[57]

The majority of the photos produced for the International Year of the Child portray the multiple vulnerabilities of children in the developing world.[58] Some exceptions include a Japanese family bathing together and apparently having fun and a young boy with a reindeer in Lapland (Norway) on an image which conveys a somewhat "exotic" impression.[59] Another photo from Israel shows three children who are "drawn together and smile for the camera"—one of them has white, the other one black, and the third one brown skin, an obvious allusion to the (desire of the) harmonious coexistence of people from different ethnic backgrounds.[60] The rest of the photos are paradigmatic instances of

humanitarian photography. Some show mothers feeding their children; these typically employ the Christian iconography of the Madonna and Pieta. The exploding shanty towns in the developing world and the dangers of these environments for children also feature, for example by showing a young boy looking for treasures in a garbage dump in the Philippines.[61] Other photos call attention to the dangerous working conditions for many children such as portrayals of children working on a construction site.[62] They carry loads of material so heavy that they would pose danger even for an adult. Lastly, a large number of photos show disabled children, such as a boy receiving instruction in an art class in Madras and a child in a wheelchair at a special hospital in Oslo. The latter photo is accompanied by the text: "handicapped children need special help—they have been neglected for too long."[63]

The photos commissioned for the International Year of Disabled Persons also abound in portrayals of children. Every disabled child on the photos taken in the United States is Afro-American, such as "a blind boy learning to record his voice on a cassette tape with the help of a friend."[64] The right to education was a crucial message of the UN Year, as testified by the photos that show special schools in Columbia, Kuwait and Western Australia—the last one showing an undergraduate student born without arm and legs as he uses a typewriter at the Western Australian Institute of Technology in Perth.[65] Another important theme, prevention, was represented by two images: an overcrowded bus in Bangladesh (as falling from buses was a typical reason of becoming disabled) and a child being vaccinated in Yemen.[66] The traditional "Madonna"-style representations were adjusted to portray mothers with disabled children. Lastly, the theme of recreation features prominently. An especially strong one shows a paraplegic and a tetraplegic young man in a rehabilitation center in Bangladesh. Lying on their beds, they are deeply engaged in playing chess, from which they apparently derive great pleasure.[67]

What was the DPI's intention with commissioning these images and how did the photos contribute to the "translation" of human rights into everyday settings? Of course, even seemingly timeless and universal representations have a historical and particularistic dimension. The common trope of childhood innocence may seem universal, but it draws on a modern and Western concept of childhood.[68] Thus, even if they were deeply committed to addressing the interests and needs of a global public, photojournalists could hardly escape their socialization as citizens and professionals. The same applies to another notion that often seems to underline the message of these photos—that of *agency*, which can likewise be associated with "Western values" such as autonomy, independence, and individual self-fulfillment. Several photos show their subjects as active agents: women in responsible positions and as participants of a world conference (typically reserved for men) and disabled people *not* necessarily "in need" or in a situation where their dependence is nearly an irrelevant issue: they are portrayed as "ordinary" citizens enjoying life. Many of the children—working, getting education, or simply enjoying life as a boy on crutches playing with his puppy—appear to have the potential to become architects of their fate.[69] These latter photos may reflect the emergence of a new discourse on children which was based not so much on the notion of compassion, but on *human rights* and *social justice*.[70]

Photojournalists had to grapple not only with their own internalized values, but also the problem that the universal(izing) language of human rights in the context of women, children, and disabled persons did not necessarily resonate across the entire globe. For example, while there was universal agreement that poor sanitary conditions and the high mortality rate of women at childbirth required urgent intervention, the abstract notions of dignity and gender equality could hardly be rendered meaningful for the purposes of, say, women in rural Africa. Equally, the fact that the 1.5 billion children who populated the world in 1979 were entitled to rights was not necessarily self-evident in societies where

the admittedly "Western-rooted" discourses remained alien and entirely different concepts of "childhood" prevailed. Similarly, the principles of autonomy and the "emancipation," which were frequently voiced desiderata for improving the conditions of disabled people, seemed ill-suited to societies where interdependence, rather than independence, constituted a fundamental value. Here, a single photograph or even a series of photographs could only represent a small segment of the targeted group.

These reservations, however, do not imply that the photojournalistic missions and their outcomes were insignificant. No data appears to be available on the circulation numbers of these photos. They were exhibited in various UN exhibitions, but the audiences for those events was certainly restricted. More importantly, they reached a much wider public as reproductions in myriad publications: newspapers, magazines, and policy reports. In addition, they were circulated as *slide films*. Though a forgotten genre today, collections can frequently be found in archives holding materials related to the international years. Because slide films had minimal space and storage requirements, they were affordable and easy to transport. This made them feasible for developing countries.

<head1>Conclusion

<text>Perhaps surprisingly for an organization which played an instrumental role in fostering and applying international statistics,[71] there were no attempts to measure the influence or success of these observances. The impact of (assumed) "soft power" is hard to quantify. Moreover, as the International Years addressed vast groups and had broad agendas, contradictory assessments may be perfectly justifiable. For example, the Australian author, Germaine Greer (author of *The Female Eunuch*) ironically referred to the UN "extravaganza" of the Women's Year as "an extension of Madison Avenue feminism."[72] On the other hand, four years later, in 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 1980, a Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980, to be followed in 1985 with a third one held in Nairobi. All this happened in a new framework: the UN expanded the recognition of International Women's Year by declaring 1976-1985 the UN Decade for Women.

In other cases too, the communication activities around these years contributed to legal change. While the rationale of the International Year of the Child had initially been questioned by several legal experts, in 1979 the Polish government initiated a text for the Convention of the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the UN in 1989. Poland's interest in the rights of children had historical as well as cultural roots and the Polish government had proposed a similar motion already as early as 1959. The senior judge, Adam Łopatka, who led the delegation, was deeply indebted to and influenced by the pedagogical ideals of Janusz Korczak, who had run an orphanage for Jewish children in the interwar period and believed children deserved a larger share in running the world. Yet, initially UNESCO, the main sponsor of the UN Year, had been against the idea of the Convention, because it considered it to be a distraction from its own development priorities: children's health and welfare.[73] The resounding publicity created by and for the year seems to have increased awareness of the problem that without any legally binding text it would remain difficult to effectively protect the rights of children, and hence paved the way for the adoption of the Convention in several countries.[74]

The International Year of Disabled Persons also initiated new legal frameworks. It was followed by a UN Decade, that of disabled persons, between 1983 and 1992. Moreover, like the World Refugee Year and the Year of the Child, in the longer run this year contributed to the emergence of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.

Yet, the evolution of these human rights-based discourses was neither a teleological nor an even

process. Some periods saw intensified debates on the rights of the group in question; in other periods, discussions slowed down or were pushed into the background. The three international years were certainly marked by "compressed" moments, when great attention was paid to those to whom they were dedicated. UN publicity and communications contributed to process of "compression."

In different ways, all the three genres analyzed here served the UN's communication agenda differently. Official reports, pamphlets, and brochures were expected to contain concrete information about specific developments and achievements. This chapter has shown that photographers often made conscious efforts to represent (or even create) diversity on their images. These "products" conveyed messages with an exceptionally broad scope for interpretation without creating many conflicts or contradictions. Whereas official documents were read primarily by experts, the posters, photographs, and concerts appealed to the "general public." The vivid posters and photos literally added color to the somewhat bland and bureaucratic image of the UN, while the mega-concert increased the volume with which its achievements were communicated to the world. Moreover, photos and posters were easier to circulate in regions where radio and TV transmission was not (necessarily) an option. Another reason for the proliferation of visual material and the dearth of radio programs might have been that the latter were better suited to convey more context-specific messages. As such, numerous radio broadcasts about local events and developments related to the international years were produced for national radio programs.

A closer look at the production and dissemination of these products reveals that they sought to target a global audience with universalizing messages. Nevertheless, neither the hierarchy of world politics nor the UN's communication infrastructure underwent a fundamental transformation in this period: information continued to be produced and circulated from the Western world to developing countries. Furthermore, the mega-concert showed it was impossible to escape the paradox that the fundraising success of an innovative communication strategy depended on perpetuating the stereotype that the developing world (and particularly Africa) was synonymous with disaster and its very existence depended on Western financial aid.

From the 1980s onwards, the global attention paid to the UN's international years started to wane. One reason may be that promoting human rights had become a self-explanatory element in the UN's agenda. Another reason may be that a certain weariness emerged from the "year after year" mentality. This motivated some critics to describe these events as "calendar propaganda," alluding to the UN's strategy to rally opinion around a cause by naming a day, year, or month after the issue, conducting a number of activities, and encouraging action during the time period.[75] Paradoxically, a further reason for the fatigue might have been the very success of the International Year of the Child in 1979. As a contemporary observer put it: "The volume of sound made on behalf of children around the world during the Year was almost deafening."[76] Moreover, as the UN's increasingly accepted a new communication strategy with greater roles for commercial providers, the organization needed alternative ways to propagate its core values.

Nonetheless, international years and other types of global observances have continued to remain on the UN's agenda, if somewhat diminished in significance. Beyond the specific human rights agendas and global morality they sought to advance, they have provided evidence of how the UN could amplify global concerns, for better or worse.

<head1>Acknowledgments

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<head1>Notes

<note>1 The following account and quotations come from "The Sexes: Ms v. Macho in Mexico," in *Time Magazine*, June 30, 1975, retrieved from www.vocesprimeras.com/downloads/1975-time-iwy-mex-city-B2031636-text.txt. [Q2]

2 For a list of years, consult www.un.org/en/sections/observances/united-nations-observances.

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4 See Niall Ferguson et al., eds., *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

5 See the article by Roland Burke, "From Individual Rights to National Development: The First UN Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968," *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 275–296.

6 Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), 144.

7 See for example Benedicte Ingstad, "Public Discourses on Rehabilitation: from Norway to Botswana," in Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds White, *Disability and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 174–195.

8 Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times, The First Fifty Years of Oxfam* (Oxford: Oxfam and Oxford University Press, 1992), 59.

9 See the UNHCR document "Assistance to Refugees," retrieved from www.unhcr.org/4e1ee775b.pdf.

10 Mark D. Alleyne, *Global Lies? Propaganda, the UN and the World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3 on the early UN's public communication task: Benjamin Cohen, "The UN's Department of Public Information," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1946): 146–148.

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13 James Brennan, "The Cold War Battle Over Global News in East Africa: Decolonization, the Free Flow of Information, and the Media Business, 1960–1980," in Heidi Tworek and Simone Müller, eds., "Communicating Global Capitalism," special issue of *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 2 (2015): 333–356. See also Chapter 8 of this volume, by Jonas Brendebach. On the NIEO, see the special issue in *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015).

14 Mary Warner Marien, *Photography. A Cultural History* (London: Pearson, 2002), 364.

15 On Britain, see Alice West, "Britain has Taken the Lead: An Exploration of British Involvement in World Refugee Year 1959–60," BA thesis (2016), 20, retrieved from

www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/history/documents/dissertations/Alice_Best2016.pdf.

16 This problem is famously conceptualized in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence, eds., *Grossberg Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–316.

17 Jussi Hanhimaki, *The United Nations: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 111.

18 Some scholars argue for the 1940s as the "breakthrough" decade based on the path leading to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. See Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*: A *History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008). Others emphasize the 1960s and the global South's substantial role in shaping human rights agenda. See Steven Jensen, *The Making of International Human* Rights (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). A final view sees a new era only with the Kosovo War of 1998–1999, as earlier interventions were not justified by human rights. See Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann, "Human Rights and History," *Past and Present* 232, no. 1 (2016): 279–310.

19 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

20 Arvonne Fraser, *UN Decade for Women: Documents and Dialogue* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 16. On the International Women's Year, see Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

21 Fraser, *UN Decade for Women*, 16,

22 Kristen Ghodsee, "Revisting the United Nations Decade for Women," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33 (2010): 6.

23 UNICEF was established in 1953 to focus on children most acutely affected by poverty. See Roger Normand and Sarah Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN, The Political History of Universal Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 282–283.

24 Maggie Black, *The Children and the Nations* (UNICEF: New York, 1986), 353–355, retrieved from www.unicef.org/about/history/files/Child-Nation-M-Black-Ch15-p353-377-year-or-child.pdf.

25 See www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2011/09/06/artspublish/2348913082.html.

26 The film is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUhbbP9X8LE (accessed January 6, 2017).

27 Animation Blog, "the best world of animation," retrieved from www.animationblog.org/2010/02/eugene-fedorenko-every-child-1979.html.

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30 This is an allusion to the preamble of UNESCO's constitution: "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defenses of peace must be constructed."

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33 S. P. Argawal and J.C. Agarwal, eds., *Unesco and Social Sciences: Prospect and Retrospect* (New Delhi: Concept, 1988), 128.
34 Axel Madsen, *Sonia Delaunay. Artists of a Lost Generation* (New York: Open Road Media, 2015), no page number.
35 Olivia Singer, "Delaunay's Fabric and Feminism," retrieved from www.anothermag.com/fashion-beauty/7273/sonia-delaunays-fabric-and-feminism (accessed April 14, 2015).
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37 Edward B. Marks, *For a Better World: Posters from the United Nations* (San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate, 1989), 6.
38 For example, the CIA exploited this to claim American art's superiority over rigid and narrow-minded Socialist realism, see Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: the Critical Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 125–133.
39 Black, *The Children and the Nations*, 359.
40 On this phenomenon argument for the case of modern humanitarisnism, see Davide Rodogno and Heide Fehrenbach "Introduction. The Morality of Sight: Humanitarian Photography in History," in Rodogno and Fehrenbach, *Humanitarian Photography*, 11.
41 Alleyne, *Global Lies?*, 173.
42 Ibid., 182.
43 Andrew F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2008), 15–16.
44 See Chapter 7 of this volume, by Glenda Sluga.
45 Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 201), 111.
46 Ibid., 108.
47 Ibid., 107.
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49 Black, *The Children and the Nations*, 353.
50 Eckel, "The Rebirth of Politics from the Spirit of Morality," 245. [Q3]
51 Ibid., 254–246.
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53 Sanna Nissinen, "Dilemmas of Ethical Practice in the Production of Contemporary Humanitarian Photography," in Rodogno and Fehrenbach, *Humanitarian Photography*, 301.
54 Ibid., 306.
55 See the photos in the UN Media Archive, with links provided in following notes; here, www.unmultimedia.org/photo/gallery.jsp?query=International+Women%27s+Year+1975.
56 Jocelyn Olcott, "Empires of Information: Media Strategies for the 1975 International Women's Year," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 25.
57 See www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=121/121894&key=17&query=International%20Women%27s%20Year%201975&lang=en&sf=.
58 For example, a photo of a child suffering from malnutrition; see www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/117/0117086.html.
59 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/124/0124443.html and www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/645/0064511.html.

60 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/642/0064263.html.
61 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/149/0149479.html.
62 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/569/0056962.html.
63 See www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=591/59183&key=3&query=handicapped%20children%201979&sf=.
64 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/313/0313793.html.
65 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/315/0315669.html.
66 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/315/0315837.html.
67 See www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/647/0064721.html.
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69 John Barker and Fiona Smith, "What's in Focus? A Critical Discussion of Photography, Children and People," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 91.
70 Black, *The Children and the Nations*, 361.
71 See Michael Ward, *Quantifying the World. UN Ideas and Statistics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).
72 "Ms v. Macho in Mexico," *Time* (June 30, 1975). For a major account, see Olcott, *International Women's Year*.
73 Brian Milne, "From Chattels to Citizens? Eighty Years of Eglantyne Jebb's Legacy to Children and Beyond," in Antonella Invernizzi and Jane Williams, eds., *Children and Citizenship* (London: Sage, 2008), 47–49.
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75 Alleyne, *Global Lies?*, 102–104.
76 Black, *The Children and the Nations*, 369.