Audience, distant suffering and moral responsibility in a globalizing society

Audience responses to images of distant suffering on the news and their sense of moral responsibility towards the distant suffering

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<u>Abstract</u>

It has been argued that different societies are drawn together in a globalizing environment. The increased proximity and interconnectedness could broaden the scope of solidarity and care of people towards formerly distant peoples and places. Media play an important role in raising awareness of such globalizing processes. Especially a cosmopolitan discourse could make the audience aware of living as a global citizen in a global society. It is this line of argumentation that is further explored in this thesis. Earlier research has often focused more on emotional reactions of people in the audience such as compassion or care. Other research focussed more on the ways that media (should) present distant suffering without empirically substantiated evidence. This study has aimed to broaden the discussion about audience responses by doing empirical research of audience responses paying special attention to more *rational* responses of the audience by studying how a cosmopolitan discourse can appeal to the spectator's sense of moral responsibility. One of the main arguments in this thesis is that people may be able to still be concerned and feel involved, despite (a lack of) emotional responses such as compassion or care. The study has been carried out by doing focus group session, where participants were asked to discuss the images of the drought and famine in the Horn of Africa in 2011 shown by a Dutch national news broadcaster. It was found that most participants attached great importance to the different actions that could or should be carried out to alleviate the distant suffering. Most participants thought they could and/or should help and were most often prepared to donate money to small-scale charity organisations. Yet, most also assigned great responsibility to bigger (inter-)national (non-)governmental organisations though they did not see themselves play part in these bigger social structures. The most important conclusion from the findings was that most participants considered themselves to be morally responsible for the short term alleviation of the suffering while the responsibility for carrying out long-term solutions for the distant suffering was attributed to bigger (inter-)national (non-)governmental organisations. In addition, their own moral responsibilities and feelings of guilt were attenuated by emphasizing other (more global socio-structural) agents and intermediaries. Another important conclusion was that a cosmopolitan discourse was for most participants not a reason to feel morally responsible. Indeed, it was more the western and Dutch backgrounds, living in a well-to-do society, (opposed to the poor, underdeveloped, undereducated African people) that made them feel morally responsible to help.

Keywords: *Audience, distant suffering, cosmopolitanism, globalization, moral responsibility*

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Introduction

It is often articulated that people are becoming increasingly numb towards images that depict gruesome events shown on television (cf. Bushman & Anderson 2009). Violence is not as shocking to us anymore, movies and television-shows exhibit increasingly blunt, revealing and detailed images of violence and suffering and it is argued that news broadcasters telecast their stories in more and more sensational fashions in order to maximize the viewer's attention (Bushman & Anderson 2009; Moeller 1999; Vettehen, Nuijten & Beentjes 2005). Especially images of *distant* suffering, for example images of humanitarian disasters (e.g. drought and famine, war, floods) are considered to leave spectators indifferent (cf. Moeller 1999). For some this is reason to believe that people have become increasingly indifferent and desensitized over images of violence and suffering in distant places that used to be shocking and provoking (cf. Moeller 1999; Seu 2003; Tait 2008). This depicts a depressing picture of an audience that just doesn't seem to care anymore. On the other hand, there are those who argue that people are in fact still moved by images of suffering on screen. Indeed, from this more optimistic point of view, people in the audience are still moved by images of violence and suffering and people can still feel compassionate and caring (Höijer 2004; Kyriakidou 2008). Moreover, it is argued that within our globalizing society, people are becoming increasingly interconnected which results in more care and compassion of people towards each other at a global scale (Chouliaraki 2006; Linklater 2007).

Reactions of a public to images of suffering and violence are an important indicator of how people engage with each other throughout society. Especially in a globalizing society such a question becomes more relevant. After all, when all societies are becoming more interdependent, it is vital that people are willing to engage with each other and can work and relate with each other in the most peaceful way possible. It has been put forward that media can spur processes of globalization which can draw different people and different societies closer together (Appadurai 1996; Artz 2003; Chouliaraki 2006; Norris 2000). Media can make people aware of globalizing trends and increase a sense of interconnectedness and shared global citizenship (Beck & Cronin 2006; Szerszynski & Urry 2002). It is thought that a cosmopolitan discourse in the media, which advertises a cosmopolitan culture and celebrates diversity, can make people aware of a shared global citizenship (Linklater 2009; Norris 2000). This could broaden the scope of people's care and increase solidarity and compassion towards distant suffering (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Boltanski 1999; Chouliaraki 2006; Höijer 2004; Linklater 2009; Smith 1998). The idea that media can contribute to a more cosmopolitan

society by making people aware of globalizing trends which can broaden the scope of care, solidarity and responsibilities of people is central to this study.

For this study, I will focus on the way that people in the audience react to images of distant suffering. That is, the suffering that takes place in faraway countries shown by national news broadcasters. More specifically, I will examine how people in a western audience are moved by the images of the hunger and famine in the Horn of Africa as shown by the Dutch news broadcaster.

Previous research has extensively discussed the ability of people in the audience to feel compassionate towards people who are shown to suffer in distant places. Moeller (1999) has argued that western audiences are suffering from 'compassion fatigue'. She argues that the increasing amount of moral appeals made by charity organisations and the recurring images of distant suffering on the news, result in a sense of helplessness. Since taking action does not seem to have any effect, people are starting to dismiss the appeals for help. Such feelings of powerlessness and not doing anything results, according to Moeller (1999), to an impression amongst the western audience that "we don't care" (p. 9). She argues that it is media that are to blame since their typical way of covering disasters "helps us to feel overstimulated and bored all at once." So the constant influx of images of disasters and suffering, according to this line of argument, leaves us numb and indifferent to the distant suffering. Another line of argument is brought forward by Cohen (2001) and Seu (2010) who both argue that audiences tend to deny the suffering. Seu (2010) argued that people in the audience deny the suffering by undermining the credibility of the messenger of the images (in her case, Amnesty International) thereby undermining the severity of the suffering. On the other hand, Höijer (2004) argues that people *can* be compassionate towards distant others, though this is influenced by the kind of images that are shown on television. She asserts that compassion is dependent of the kind of narrative that images are shown in. Images of an 'ideal victim' (i.e. a mother with her child, infants, orphans) for example are considered to be more inspiring and moving (Höijer 2004, p. 516). In addition, it is argued that processes of globalization can lead to a more cosmopolitan sense of citizenship and increase a global kind of solidarity of people towards each other (Linklater 2007; Chouliaraki 2008). Such a cosmopolitan attitude can ideally result in more compassion at greater geographical distances since people are brought closer together both culturally and psychologically (Chouliaraki 2006).

The above discussion mostly deliberates much on the human capacity to be compassionate towards people who are suffering at great distances. The position on 'compassion fatigue' is directly opposed to the 'cosmopolitan ideal' in this discussion. Indeed,

much previous research either focuses on the negative, rational responses of an audience (i.e. denial, fatigue) or discusses people's concern and compassion towards the distant suffering. This hardly leaves any room for discussing non-emotional yet still involved and concerned reactions from the audience. Such a missing gap in the discussion became even more evident during the preparatory research of this thesis. No studies were committed to examine how people, *despite* (a lack of) emotional responses, still considered themselves involved and concerned towards suffering in distant places. In addition, much previous research heavily focused on media-content, not grounding the arguments with empirical evidence amongst audiences. Studies have often focused more on how images of distant suffering are being portrayed by the media, or how it *should* be portrayed by media (cf. Boltanski 1999; Chouliaraki 2008a, 2008b, Tester 2002). Also, scholars have discussed how people *should* feel morally responsible to distant suffering (cf. Abelson 2005; Singer 1972). Empirical evidence on how audiences react to images of distant suffering is rare. More empirical data on audiences' reactions to images of suffering is needed because, as Höijer (2004) noted: "We need to ask about and study how people as audience react to and interpret documentary media reporting on violence and human suffering" (p. 528).

I aim to begin to fill these gaps in the discussion about people's reactions to distant suffering by focusing on the moral deliberations people make when they are confronted with images of distant suffering. By aiming the attention at the moral responsibilities that audiences articulate after seeing the images, more can be found on the more *rational* contemplations that people have. This could serve as an attribution to the literature on audience responses to images of distant suffering. Considering that cosmopolitanism can broaden solidarities to a more global level and increase compassion, globalizing processes might also lead to a more global reach of moral responsibilities. From these considerations the following main question has been posed:

How do people in the audience process images of distant suffering in a cosmopolitan discourse on the news and how will such cosmopolitan images of distant suffering make an appeal to their sense of moral responsibility?

Focus groups were carried out where participants were asked to discuss their thoughts and feelings with each other after seeing a video clip about the famine and drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011, shown by the Dutch news broadcaster 'Nederlandse Omroep Stichting'[1]. By doing this more light has been shed on the different issues, (both emotional

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[1] 'Dutch broadcast foundations', the Dutch national news broadcaster.

and more rational) that were the most important for people in the audience after being confronted with images of distant suffering. Over the course of this thesis I will present the theoretical foundation, the methodology and the most important findings made during this study.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will elaborate more on the different existing theories on moral responsibility, compassion and audience responses to distant suffering. In the first part, I will give a more elaborate epistemological discussion about the three concepts 'moral responsibility', 'globalization' and 'cosmopolitanism'. This will serve as the theoretical basis on which further discussion about audience's responses on images of distant suffering will be build. This discussion will first elaborate more on how media use cosmopolitan discourses in their (re)presentations. This is followed by an explanation of the different ways that media could contribute to people becoming more cosmopolitan and solidary towards distant societies. This chapter closes with a discussion about the different ways that people can feel morally responsible towards people who are shown to suffer on television. In the methodological chapter (chapter 2) I will explain more about how the focus groups were organized, executed and analysed. This chapter will also include a discussion about the pros and cons of doing focus groups. In the third chapter I will show the most important findings that were obtained during the focus group sessions. This chapter will present the different issues that were discussed by the participants during the focus group sessions. The fourth and last chapter will discuss the findings in context with the theoretical discussion of the first chapter. It will also include a discussion to examine some missing gaps in this study and, following from these short comings, some suggestions for more research will be proposed here.

Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

In our globalizing society it is often argued that distances are becoming increasingly relative (cf. Appadurai 1996; Artz 2003; Beck & Sznaider 2006; Olausson 2009). Economically, politically and culturally people are becoming more and more interconnected with each other (cf. Appadurai 1996; Linklater 2009). Distance and agency are two important factors that influence people's moral behaviour (Alicke 2000; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Fisscher, Nijhof & Steensma. 2003). That is, the closer someone's moral behaviour is to the effect of his or her behaviour, the more likely that someone will take moral responsibility for his/her actions. So, it is possible that the increased proximity between different societies has influence on people's moral behaviour. In the first section of this theoretical framework I will explain these ideas more closely. This will be done by exploring the concepts of moral responsibility, globalization and cosmopolitanism and their relation with each other. These three concepts form the theoretical basis upon which the discussion of moral responsibility and distant suffering will further be based in the remainder of this chapter.

1.1 Moral responsibility, globalization and cosmopolitanism

1.1.1. Moral responsibility

Discussions about moral responsibility deal with questions such as what exactly moral responsibility entails, who can be held morally responsible and how far the scope of our moral responsibilities should reach (cf. Abelson 2005; Nichols & Knobe 2007; Scanlon 1998; Singer 1972; Smith 1998; Williams 2003). For this thesis, a loose definition of the concept of moral responsibility will be given. In addition, by looking more closely at some socio-psychological findings, more explanation will be given about how moral responsibility is attributed. It will become apparent that this influences people's behaviour (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Jones 1991; Paharia, Passam, Greene & Bazerman 2009).

Responsibility is first and foremost about a person or a group of persons involved in causing something to happen or failing to prevent something from happening (Alicke 2000; Basil, Ridgway & Basil 2006; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Fisscher et al. 2003). This is best explained by Fisscher et al. (2003) who explain that the question associated with responsibility is 'who has caused this'? (p. 210). However, this is too thin a description for the *morally* based responsibility that is sought after in this thesis.

There are at least two aspects that set moral responsibility apart from *causal* responsibility: The expectation to act and a person's deliberate intentions (Doris & Murphy 2007; Fisscher et al. 2003; Paharia et al. 2009). The first, the expectation to act, involves not only the question 'who has caused this?' but also the question "who ought to take care of this?" (Fisscher et al. 2003, p. 210). It is, in Fisscher et al.'s (2003) words an "attributive concept" (p. 210) that asks for a certain obliged expectation to act. Indeed, moral responsibility refers to the conception that, if an occurrence is happening or about to happen, a commitment is demanded of those who can influence the outcome of the occurrence. Whether this is done by helping to stop something from happening or prevent something from happening in the first place (Fisscher et al 2003; Shepherd 2003). A demonstrating example of this is that of a doctor and his or her patient. If a person gets injured or ill and goes to the hospital, a doctor has the moral obligation to take care of the patient. It is *expected* that the doctor ought to do something to cure the patient. After all, if the doctor does not help the patient, this patient might eventually die of his or her injuries or illness. There is a causal relationship between the patient's possible death and the doctor's behaviour. This causal relation, leading to moral obligations for the doctor, makes the doctor responsible for helping the patient so as to prevent further illness.

In addition to Fisscher et al.'s question of 'who ought to take care of this?' the question 'why did a person cause this?' can be asked. After all, if someone is unable to deliberately and reasonably choose a course of action (e.g. a young child or someone with a psychiatric illness or mental handicap) is that person morally responsible for something he or she has caused? Most have accepted that the answer to this question is that only persons who *are* capable of moral reasoning (i.e. are aware of the consequences of their actions) can be held morally responsible (Doris & Murphy 2007; Fincham & Roberts 1984; Fisscher et al. 2003; Jones 1991). It must be emphasized that the morally reasoned decision is truly about *choice*; only when a person has the free will to choose between different courses of action and is able to foresee the consequences of his or her actions, can a person be held morally responsible for his or her actions (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Paharia et al. 2009).

Summarized, moral responsibility implies a causal relation between an actor and an occurrence. The actor has the ability to make a choice by moral reasoning and is aware of the consequences of his or her actions. When it is concluded that a person ought to act that person can be held morally responsible for the outcome of the occurrence. People have a choice, but the morally *right* decision is not always clear which complicates how moral

responsibility is attributed to a person. In the next section I will show some important factors that influence how moral responsibility is attributed.

1.1.2. Attribution of responsibility and moral behaviour

People think about moral responsibility in different ways and these different ways are of influence on their moral decisions and attribution (i.e. how they judge themselves and others to be morally responsible). How and when a person considers him or herself to be morally responsible is of influence on their moral *behaviour* (Bandura 1999; Paharia et al. 2009).

Social psychological research has focused on different aspects that are considered to be of influence on moral attribution and behaviour in the past. Physical and demographic characteristics, age and income can all influence moral decisions (Bandura 1999; Paharia et al. 2009). In addition the social consensus about morality in any given society is determinative for individuals' own moral reasoning (cf. Alicke 2000; Jones 1991). While there are many factors that influence the moral behaviour of people there are two factors, namely proximity and agency that will be looked at more closely for this study. It is commonly understood that these concepts are important for people's moral deliberations, in both attributing moral responsibility and the consequential moral behaviour (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Jones 1991; Paharia et al. 2009).

The more distance stands between an actor and the effect(s) of his or her behaviour, the less likely he or she will feel responsible for his or her actions. Distance in this case constitutes a wide concept. It not only constitutes the physical or geographical distance but also the psychological distance (Alicke 2000; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Paharia et al. 2009). Paharia et al. (2009) describe that the psychological distance constitutes the chain of events between act and result and found that when there is more than one agent involved, this increases the psychological distance. In other words, when more than one person is involved in the outcome of a certain occurrence, moral responsibility will less likely be attributed. Indirect intermediaries made it easier for people to deny or diffuse moral responsibility; "Acting indirectly through another can hide the fact that one has caused harm, hide the fact that one knowingly chose to cause harm, and hide the extent of one's control over the harmful outcome" (Paharia 2009, p 141). Thus, the greater the (psychological) distance, such as having more than one different agent between behaviour and outcome, the more difficult it becomes to determine who is morally responsible for an occurrence. Distance makes it easier for people to deny being moral responsible or it can be more easily be distributed and diffused. Besides denying morally responsibility, any still attributed moral responsibility is

considered to be less significant. Because of this the severity of not acting out moral obligations is considered less severe since the responsibility is now diffused over many different people and influenced by many different events (Paharia 2009, p. 141). Consequently, at great distance, moral responsibility is less often attributed and easier distributed to others. In addition, even the moral obligations that *are* appointed to someone can be more easily dismissed since the individual significance of not acting out any moral obligations becomes less severe.

This leads directly to the second concept of importance in attributing moral responsibility and consequential moral behaviour, namely agency. This term must be viewed as an umbrella term that constitutes both the level of an individual's soundness of judgement (i.e. self-control and reflexivity) (cf. Doris & Murphy 2007) and an individual's control of outcome (cf. Alicke 2000; Basil et al. 2006). With 'control of outcome' the "extent to which constraining forces altered the event" is meant (Alicke 2000, p. 559). That is, the more external influences there are the less control a person has over his or her primary intended actions. Bandura (1999) for example found that people who live in more totalitarian regimes show less moral engagement and attribute less moral responsibility to themselves since they do not experience a high level of agency. This agency complicates ascription of moral responsibility since it is not always clear how much control someone has over the outcome of events so that it remains unclear who is responsible for the outcome.

These two factors, proximity and agency, are intimately linked to each other and influence a person's moral behaviour. Moral behaviour can be explained as the different actions that are performed by a person after moral obligations have been imposed. The more distance between a person's mode of operation and the resulting effect, the less agency he or she is considered to experience of that effect (Alicke 2000; Bandura 1999; Paharia 2009). Less moral responsibility is then attributed to occurrences that happen farther away from people which will lead to less morally responsible behaviour of people (Alicke 2000; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Paharia 2009). Indeed, as just discussed, even those moral responsibilities that are attributed can be easily dismissed by anyone. However, the dismissal of moral obligations can lead to feelings of guilt. Basil et al. (2006) have pointed out that guilt is 'an emotional state in which the individual holds the belief or knowledge that he or she has violated some social custom, ethical or moral principle, or legal regulation' (Heidenreich 1968, in Basil et al. 2006, p. 1036). Burnett and Lunsforth further describe that guilt is a result of having violated one's internal standards and results in a lower individual self-esteem (1994, p. 35). Guilt can be seen as the inevitable outcome dismissing moral responsibilities. As Basil et al. (2006) write; "a

sense of responsibility is necessary for the induction of guilt" (p. 1037). Guilt is thus a result of having violated one's individual moral standards and leads to feelings of low self-esteem. So when an individual acknowledges being morally responsible for a situation, that person will either act upon the morally imposed obligations or show feelings of guilt. Yet, distance and decreased perceive agency can attenuate feelings of guilt. When moral responsibilities are distributed and diffused over a great distance, there is less perceived agency so the consequences of not acting upon the moral obligations become less severe and feelings of guilt are considered to be less.

In case of viewing distant suffering, the chain of events between the suffering and the spectator are seemingly endless. From international aid organisations to the most insignificant individual, everyone can do something which means that everyone is involved. It is difficult to unravel who at such a great distance, with so many different agents involved is morally responsible for helping those who are suffering. This distance between spectator and sufferer also lowers someone's perceived agency. Moreover, even if people will find themselves at least partly morally responsible for the distant suffering, neglecting obligations to act is much less severe since there are many other involved agents. It is these moral contemplations that so many people face when thinking of helping distant suffering. Does any contribution, even the most modest kind of action actually help? It is nigh to impossible to discover if intended help is actually received where it is needed at such a distance. Moreover, even if it would help, the effects would most likely be minimal so that *not* helping will also have minimal negative consequences. Inversely, with closer proximity and a decreased chain of events, experienced agency will be higher which can lead to a higher sense of moral responsibility towards those who suffer. After all, through a high perceived agency, consequences of *not* helping would be much more significant. More will now be explained about the concepts of globalization and cosmopolitanism before turning more elaborately on these kinds of contemplations.

1.1.3. Globalization

Just as the concept of moral responsibility, globalization is a process that is still subject of discussion and can be explained in different ways (cf. Artz 2003; Beck & Sznaider 2006; Norris 2000). Globalization has been explained as a consequence of increased economic interdependency and flexibility (cf. Amin and Thrift 1995); as a result of increased mobility and migration (cf. Eriksen 2007; Sassen 1999) and as being caused by the rapid rise of the internet (cf. Volkmer 2003). In addition, globalization has been considered to be caused by the increased speed of overall communication and transportation around the globe (cf.

Castells 1998; Sassen 1999). Appadurai (1996) gives a very thorough explanation of the process of globalisation that is focused on the socio-cultural aspects and consequences such as the cross-cultural flows of communities, the ideological views that come with globalization and the ways the transnational media influence people's perception of the global society. Therefore, in order to define and delineate the term 'globalization' for this thesis, the concept will be based on Appadurai's explanation of society consisting of different social 'scapes'.

Much of Appadurai's theory is based on Anderson's (1991) idea that societies can be viewed as 'imagined communities'. So, before turning to his explanation, it is important to introduce the concept of 'imagined communities' as explained by Anderson (1991). Anderson (1991) argues in his book 'Imagined Communities' to think of the national society as an imagined community, where people are linked by an imagined shared culture and shared experiences (p. 36). Imagined, because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991, p. 6). An example Anderson gives to explain this is that of reading the newspaper. In a society where it is a cultural tradition to read the newspaper in the morning, all people who read their newspaper will feel an imagined connection with all those who also read the newspaper (Anderson 1991, p. 36). In addition, the newspaper gives information about what is happening in that given society which further strengthens the imagined connection between people who never met in real life. In this example, the imagined connection by sharing a tradition and a sense of belonging in a community by reading about events is what makes people feel connected.

When a medium such as the newspaper makes it more plausible to form an imagined national community, the current transnational mass media and the internet could make a global imagined community more plausible. Indeed, it is hard to deny that media are becoming more global (cf. Machin & van Leeuwen 2007). Appadurai (1996) argues that Anderson's described imagined community is indeed becoming more transnational and more interconnected. He argues that the transnational media combined with other societal, economic, political and ideological mechanisms shape the current globalizing processes (Appadurai 1996). He proposes to regard any given society as being constructed by five 'scapes' called: financescape; ideoscape; technoscape; ethnoscape; and mediascape (Appadurai 1996, p. 50). In a nutshell, he argues that money (the financescape) makes our economy possible, ideologies (the ideoscape) give meaning to people's lives, technologies (the technoscape) give us movement and new possibilities, ethnicity (the ethnoscape) shapes identities and media (the mediascape) inform us of our surroundings. His main argument is

that these different scapes intersect and set 'different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national boundaries' (Appadurai 1996, p. 60). So, the scapes are not bound by geographic boundaries and can intersect with each other across national boundaries, thereby creating disjunctures in formerly delineated spaces (such as the nation-state), thus moving on the process of globalization. It is the mediascape that is of influence on the awareness of the globalizing processes. The globally constructed community is fuelled by images from the international media. These images further build up the construction of an imagined transnational community by letting different people in different places share the same images. So along with the media going global, audience who view this media are becoming increasingly interconnected with each other within a global imagined community as well (Appadurai 1996).

It has been argued that the process of globalization increases the interconnectedness between different people and societies and that transnational media play a major role in realizing this (Beck & Cronin 2006; Linklater 2009; Ong 2009). It is especially up to media to increase *awareness* of globalizing trends amongst individuals (Linklater 2009; Ong 2009). The increased awareness of living in a globalizing society could lead to an increased sense of global citizenship with a more including, cosmopolitan set of identities (Linklater 2009; Norris 2000). However, these arguments have been scrutinized, mainly because of the ideological assumptions that are made in these argumentations (Beck & Levy 2013; Cheah 2006; Kothari 2005). Critics doubt the possibility of the more inclusive society that cosmopolitanism proclaims.

1.1.4. Cosmopolitanism
There is still much debate about the effects of globalization and the possibilities of moving towards a more cosmopolitan society. In this section I will show to some greater extent what the most important arguments in this discussion are.

Advocates of cosmopolitanism argue that international media and the possibilities through the internet and other technological advances, allow distance to become less significant. This leads to closer cultural and socio-psychological proximity (Artz 2003; Chouliaraki 2006; Ong 2009). In addition, globalizing processes can result in a growing awareness of living in a global society which leads to a sense of globally shared citizenship and increased human interconnectedness (Beck 2002; Linklater 2009; Norris 2000; Ong 2009). Both the increased proximity and the awareness of being interconnected in a shared global community can result in a more open and accepting attitude of people towards each other

(Linklater 2009; Ong 2009). Besides a more including attitude towards others, Norris (2000) argues that social awareness of such globalizing processes will lead to an altered set of social identities, one that is based on the world community instead of current national boundaries (Norris 2000, p. 156). It is this increased proximity between people at a socio-psychological level, resulting in the realization of the shared global citizenship and more including set of social identities that ideally results in an increased willingness of people to "engage with the Other" (Ong 2009). The 'Others' being those who come from other distant societies with different cultural traditions. Linklater (2007) argues that if a more cosmopolitan citizenship is heralded it can "broaden the scope of ethical concern" (p. 21). Cosmopolitanism can advocate an ethic that goes beyond national borders and results in greater concern, care and moral obligation towards those who are less fortunate in other places around the world (Linklater 2007, 2009). In short, cosmopolitanism is thus about being a global citizen with an open and inclusive attitude towards other people in different (distant) societies. It is also an identity that can be performed in various situations and eventually leads towards "a willingness to engage with the other" (Hannerz 1990 cited in Ong 2009).

A more critical view towards cosmopolitanism is based upon the social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Tajfel 1981). According to this theory, people construct their own identity by comparing themselves with the Other (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Brown 2000; Tajfel 1981). The search towards coherence of individuals in society leads people to categorize different groups in different settings according to certain hierarchy, where the in-group is considered to be positive and normative and out-groups are categorized and portrayed as socially inferior (for example negative stereotyping) (Brown 2000; Tajfel 1981). This process of 'othering', where 'us-them' categorizations of societies and individuals are made, leads to the construction of different social groups. By the constant comparing and reconstruction of these different groups, differences are reiterated and unequal relationships are reinforced (Kothari 2005; Tajfel 1982). The social identity theory discharges the possibility of a cosmopolitan identity on the basis that people need an Other in order to construct their own identity (Beck & Levy 2013; Kothari 2005). Billig (1995) argues that every society identifies in accordance with such categorizations. This 'banal nationalism', he argues, happens in everyday life and is constantly reinforced by both political bodies and other societal institutions such as media. He further notes that this banal nationalism is hardly ever criticized or discussed in everyday life since it happens so automatically and naturally (Billig 1995, p 81). This persistence of a banal nationalism and categorizing of different societies in a hierarchic way

decreases a possibility of a more inclusive sense of belonging. After all, according to this theory an Other is needed in order to establish and delineate the Self.

Besides arguments based on the social identity theory doubt has been cast as to whether western nations will ever include other, non-developing or underdeveloped countries. It is asserted that western societies prosper only because of the unequal relationship that is maintained with developing countries (Cheah 2006; Greig, Hulme and Turner 2007). Cheah (2006) for example challenges the idea of a more global solidarity. He notes that while people may show solidarity towards distant others in case of conflicts or other disasters, "it is unlikely that this solidarity will be directed in a concerted manner towards ending economic inequality between countries because Northern civil societies derive their prodigious strength from this inequality" (p. 494). Besides, it is pointed out how current charity projects and aid organisations bear great likeness with modernizing and civilizing projects in history during the colonial period (Kothari 2005). Recent development projects which promote a discourse of bringing knowledge, economic development and other 'civilizing' projects can reassert the dichotomy of the 'modern' and the 'traditional' and can consequently impose the dichotomy of what is regularly called the 'west' versus the 'rest' (Goldsmith 1997; Hall 1992; Kothari 2005).

In short, advocates of cosmopolitanism argue that the increased awareness of globalizing processes can result in a more broad-scale solidarity and a more including set of social identities amongst individuals throughout society. Opponents are sceptical as to whether people and societies will ever be able to include *all* of humanity and consider that societies and individuals within society need Others in order to give meaning to their own being. Besides, a certain dependency of developing countries is considered to be necessary for the prosperity of the west. Thus, opponents consider that a dichotomous 'west' versus the 'rest' is reinforced, both by the socio-psychological process of 'othering' and through the constant articulation of 'underdeveloped' countries supposedly in need of help.

1.2. A cosmopolitan discourse

Up until now it is discussed that moral responsibility and moral behaviour is influenced by distance and a sense of agency. Also, globalization breaks through societal and cultural existing boundaries so that societies are brought closer together. Transnational media can make people aware of living in a global society making distances increasingly less relevant. Cosmopolitanism can be regarded as being a desirable result of globalizing processes. However, it has been argued that this cosmopolitan notion may be too optimistic. In this

section I will explore the different cosmopolitan and national discourses that have been used by media. I will also examine to greater extent how such discourses have been found to be perceived by the audience.

Before turning to this discussion however, it is important to gain more understanding of what role media play in our current society. For this study, Gerbner's (1969) notion of the role of the media in our society will be accepted. He argues that media should be regarded as an institution that is part of society. This is to such an extent that media simultaneously influence society and are influenced *by* society. Media play an important role in indicating how people in a given society act, feel and think. They give an impression of the dominant modes of thought and behaviour and, at the same time, are shaped by these indicators. Media can accept cultural indicators from society, (re)present them, reinforce them or question them. This is a dialectical process whereby media are both influenced by dominant modes of discourse and can reinforce them.

1.2.1. Cosmopolitanism discourses

Beck and Cronin (2006) argue that the current transnational media is of great influence in realizing a cosmopolitan society. They note that this does not mean that the nationalist way of living ceases to exist. Rather, the theory of a "frozen, separate nationally organized society" (Beck & Cronin 2006, p. 6) should now be replaced by a social theory of a more fluid and inclusively organized society. More fluid because individuals and groups identify themselves in more than one way, inclusive because of the increasing and expanding differentiation amongst and between different societies (Beck & Cronin 2006). Indeed, it is often argued that instead of people abandoning a national identity, the cosmopolitan identity is complementary to the nationalist identity (Beck & Cronin 2006; Szerszynski & Urry 2006). It is asserted that individuals and groups can, because of the transnational character of the current mass media, experience different worlds and cultures (Appadurai 1996; Beck & Cronin 2006; Bennett 2009). The result of these different experiences is that "cultural ties, loyalties and identities have expanded beyond national borders and systems of control" (Beck & Cronin 2006, p. 7).

Szerszynski and Urry (2002) also argue that the notion of a cosmopolitan citizenship is residing amongst people because of the transnational nature of media. They argue that "people can develop forms of quasi-interaction through the media, a kind of 'enforced proximity'" (2002, p. 465). The enforced proximity they talk of is the psychological proximity that results from the overall transnational character of transnational media that constantly show images of faraway people and places, thereby bringing those places into the living room.

They conducted research which confirmed to them that people are indeed becoming cosmopolitan; "there is an awareness of a 'shrinking world' of global transportation and communications, together with an ethics of care based upon various proximate groundings" (Szerszynski & Urry 2002, p. 477). They also found that most people felt they cared more about what happens far away when their awareness of being a global citizen was called upon (p. 476).

On the other hand, it has been argued that despite, or even *because of* globalizing trends, media are becoming more nationalist and a cosmopolitan discourse is not embraced, either by the media themselves or by their audience (Billig 1995; Karner 2011; Bishop and Jaworski 2003). Karner (2011) points to the revival of more nationalist discourses and explains these are a reaction to globalizing trends. Communities are becoming increasingly interdependent of each other and nations are conglomerating to supra-nations (e.g. the European Union) (Karner 2011, p. 15). The resulting identity crisis amongst citizens is often articulated by, for example, populist politicians, which can result in more xenophobic discourses throughout all media (Karner 2011, p. 95). Karner does note that this anxiety leading to more nationalist sentiments could be the result of the social transition of communities going from a nationalist to a more global interpretation of society. Karner argues that people's social identities are constantly subject to change and transformation. Fixed habits and resulting fear of major changes hampers the acceptation of new modes of discourses and different interpretations of social belonging (Karner 2011). This does not mean however that more global interpretation of global belonging is impossible but rather, as he writes, the upheaval of nationalist discourses is a reaction to signals of already existing processes that inevitably lead to a more globalized society (Karner 2011).

Yet, while it is argued that transnational media can merge distant cultures and societies, the meaning of 'transnational' can be regarded with scepticism. Much of the transnational media that is talked of is still confined to the western part of the world and pre-dominantly western orientated (Atton and Wickenden 2005; Kperogi 2010; Leung and Huang 2007; Saeed 2007). As Saeed (2007) points out, media still underrepresents distant other societies (such as the Middle-East), while over-representing the west. The 'we', used by transnational media still all too often automatically refers to a western society. Chouliaraki wrote about this that: ""This 'we', I assume, is the 'imagined' community of the West, which inhabits the transnational zone of safety and construes human life in the zone of suffering as the West's 'other'" (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 10). This way, the transnational construed and represented 'western' society can be seen as an extended version of Billig's banal nationalism

where the *national* 'we' is replaced by a *western* 'we'. Joye (2010) puts forward that transnational media still maintain discourses that set the Other apart from the west so that media take part in the "production and reproduction of global social inequality" (Joye 2010, p. 587). Indeed, developing countries are still often generalized and reduced to the stereotypical society of which the generalized and stereo typified 'Africa' may be the best example (Baker & Fitzgerald 2012; Fair 1993; Mahadeo & McKinney 2007). This way, any nuance or more in-depth knowledge about other societies, including developing societies, is blotted out. So, the process of 'othering' is still continuing and in this case, 'Africans' are still alienated from the western audience so that an unambiguous and hierarchical social divide of the 'west' versus the 'rest is reinforced.

It is too early to tell if individuals, groups of people and complete societies will become more cosmopolitan in the end. It does become clear though that the issues of globalization and the possibilities of cosmopolitan citizenship are still subject of discussion, both amongst scholars, in the media and amongst the audience.

1.2.2. Cosmopolitan discourse and distant suffering
Still, if images of distant suffering are presented in a cosmopolitan fashion this may lead the audience to become aware of a relationship between themselves and those who suffer. It is this argument that is taken up by Chouliaraki (2006, 2008a, 2008b) who argues that a cosmopolitan discourse by the media can lead to more solidarity, care and compassion of the audience towards distant sufferers.

Chouliaraki (2006) differentiates between three different kinds of news each inviting a different reaction to distant suffering; adventure news, ecstatic news and emergency news (2006, p 94). The first, adventure news, shows images of distant suffering as 'random and isolated events and, for this reason, they fail to make an ethical demand on spectators to respond to the suffering they report' (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 97). The second, ecstatic news is the 'extraordinary class of reports on suffering that manages to bring the globe together in acts of simultaneous watching' (2006, p. 94). Ecstatic news can 'bring the globe together' but is the kind of news that displays immediate and utter suffering of a *western* society, such as the live television images of the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11 (2006, p. 157). It is thus the western audience who are mostly addressed when perceiving such images instead of the entire global society. This kind of news is not apt for distant suffering in developing counties; developing countries are not self-evidently part of the audience in this kind of news. Indeed, both adventure news and ecstatic news imply an already steady and set western-

oriented audience (Chouliaraki 2008, p. 339). This can be viewed in line with Billig's argument about banal nationalism and, more broadly, in line with the process of 'othering' where an already set idea of the 'we' exists. In case of ecstatic news, and especially in case of adventure news, 'we' refers to the western society and the other is still presented with "a capital 'o'" (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 10). This way, the Other is still placed at a distance from the western audience.

Emergency news, unlike ecstatic news or adventure news, aims at bringing together spectators with the distant sufferer in a global society (Chouliaraki 2008a, p. 340). Emergency news brings sufferer and spectator together which results in a closer psychological proximity while also giving the impression that something can be done by both spectator and sufferer. Chouliaraki therefore identifies emergency news as being the most including, cosmopolitan way of showing distant suffering. Emergency news does this in two ways; by depicting those who suffer in such a personalized way so that spectators can relate and identify with that person (e.g. the portrayal of a women as a mother), and by facilitating a direct social cooperative relationship between sufferer and spectator (e.g. proposing to sign a petition in order to improve a situation or offering information on donating money to a humanitarian aid organisation) (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 130). The personalized portrayal of the sufferer connects spectator and sufferer by implying that this sufferer is not incompetent or helpless but rather a fellow human being who is part of the global society and therefore deserves everyone's attention. The victim, despite his or her own agency, is simply unable to stop his or her own suffering. This cosmopolitan identification combined with the proposition to help gives the audience what Chouliaraki (2006) calls 'conditional agency'; agency that will be only acted upon if the distant sufferer is lacking agency because of his or her circumstances. This conditional agency 'implies that the sufferer is only able to be active in a limited and ineffective way – hence the need for external intervention' (p. 119). Emergency news, by proposing solutions to the audience to alleviate the suffering, enforces this sense of conditional agency amongst the audience. The alleviation of suffering can be facilitated not only by the spectator, but needs the action and cooperation of everyone who is part of the global society; all global citizens living in both developing and developed countries need to cooperate.

The cosmopolitan discourse aims at creating a global sense of solidarity of different societies to one another. This cosmopolitan solidarity in its turn leads towards a sense of compassion amongst the audience towards distant suffering. One of Chouliaraki's (2006) main arguments is that 'compassion – that is, on-the-spot action on suffering – […] now needs to

be acted as pity that is action that incorporates the dimension of distance' (p. 2). By this, she means that the cosmopolitan discourse does not deny the geographical or cultural distance but creates a different kind of proximity by emphasizing the cosmopolitan relationship between spectator and sufferer.

While Chouliaraki argues that a cosmopolitan discourse can lead to a greater sense of care, compassion and solidarity, her arguments are not founded on empirically based observations of the audience. Kyriakidou (2008, 2009) has studied to greater extent how images of global suffering can appeal to the audience and found that the audience was not motivated by a *cosmopolitan* discourse. After carrying out focus groups she found that images of the global, 'does not in itself guarantee emotional engagement from the perspective of the audience' (2008, p. 160). She notes that distant suffering does elicit empathy and sympathy amongst the audience, but this empathy is not caused by the cosmopolitan discourse of the distant suffering. Indeed, despite a cosmopolitan discourse it was still the great distance between viewers and the suffering that made it difficult for the respondents to empathize (Kyriakidou 2008). In addition, while respondents were able to empathize with depiction of one victim, they could not 'feel the pain' of all the other distant sufferers that this one person represented. This, because the massive amount of victims rendered the sufferers to one generalized 'victim' with no agency or identity. The generalized victim becomes an icon and is stripped off his or her individual being (Kyriakidou 2008). Her conclusion is that cosmopolitan empathy brought by media in images of distant suffering does not necessarily lead to the cosmopolitan empathy amongst the audience. Instead, she finds that empathy is 'contingent on media representational practices, and on political and cultural prejudices and stereotypes' (2008, p. 166). So while Chouliaraki conveys that a cosmopolitan discourse and a personal representation of sufferers can increase a sense of solidarity and compassion, Kyriakidou shows that this assertion can be regarded with some doubt. The 'contingency' of reactions to images from the media that Kyriakidou describes can, to a certain extent, be clarified by the findings of Höijer (2004). Höijer (2004) found that audiences are selective in their emotional responses and that compassion is both dependent on the images of the victim and the type of audience. For example, compassion is more often showed by the audience after seeing images of an 'ideal victim' (i.e. little children and mothers instead of a man in the prime of his life) (Höijer 2004, p. 517). In addition, she finds that women are more likely to show an emotional response than men.

1.2.3. Distant suffering, compassion fatigue and denial

Chouliaraki's argument could be interpreted as a rather optimistic view of people's ability to feel compassionate towards those who are shown to suffer in distant places. More pessimistic views of how audience could react to images of distant suffering also exist. Moeller (1999) for example, argues that the American audience is not capable of feeling compassionate anymore and is becoming fatigued by the constant flow of images of distant suffering. She asserts that audience can become numb to images of distant suffering because of the repetitive displaying of such suffering; "images are not new and are not provoking anymore and so they do not evoke any emotion" (Moeller 1999, p 13). In addition, she states that with the repetition of images, people gain a sense of powerlessness; people feel they can do nothing to prevent further distant suffering since it happens so often and helping does not seem to have any effect (Moeller 1999, p. 12). Besides compassion fatigue, the denial of distant suffering is another strategy that is argued to complicate audiences' response to distant suffering. Cohen in his book 'States of Denial' (2001) argues that because of the repetitive images of distant suffering, audience can become, as he writes, "tired of the truth" (Cohen 2001, p. 187). Overload of images and numbers of death lead, according to this theory, to "*selective* oblivion" (Cohen 2001, p. 187). The distant suffering is, according to this idea, not literally denied, but is selectively processed by the audience to such an extent that the images do not lead to action anymore. This leads people to think; "get real, wise up and toughen up; the lesson is that nothing, nothing after all can be done about problems like these or people like these" (Cohen 2001, p. 195).

Building further on Cohen's assertions, Seu (2010) demonstrates how audiences often deny distant suffering by focussing not so much on the images or the victims of distant suffering, but more on the humanitarian agencies that send these images. Humanitarian agencies are dismissed by the audiences as being non-productive and manipulative; images of distant suffering are considered to be deceivable and possible help is dismissed as being fruitless. These assertions by the audience can be regarded, according to Seu, as strategies of denial in order to justify their passive attitude towards images of distant suffering. These strategies, she explains, often consist of rational and deliberate reasons made by the audience that can either neutralize the severity of the suffering or dismiss any relation between spectator and the people in the image (Seu 2010, p. 453).

1.2.4 The dichotomy of the compassion paradigm

It is difficult to imagine that the cosmopolitan discourse that Chouliaraki proposes might indeed result in a more global solidarity, care and compassion. On the other hand, Moeller's thesis of compassion fatigue and Seu's demonstrated strategies of denial hardly leave any room to argue for a more compassionate or committed public. Much of the debate about images of distant suffering, and the audience's responses, seems to have focused either on a more emotional level such as compassion, care, solidarity or compassion fatigue or on the more rational strategies of denial. One of Chouliaraki's (2006) main arguments for example is that with a more cosmopolitan discourse, audience will feel a greater sense of connectedness which results in an increased solidarity and more compassion towards victims (p. 195). Kyriakidou and Höijer too have focussed mainly on the level of compassion and care that audiences showed. Moeller (1999), points mainly to the compassion fatigue of audiences. Cohen (2001) and Seu (2010) focused their research on the denial of distant suffering.

The emphasis on either emotional responses such as compassion or on more rational but negative reactions of the public, such as denial and fatigue, implies that without any emotional response people in the audience will stay passive and indifferent when they are confronted with images of distant suffering. This, in its turn renders the question of response by the audience to images of distant suffering to a dichotomous distant-suffering-audience paradigm; it is either very much about an emotional connection (a cosmopolitan sense of citizenship results in solidarity and compassion) or it focuses on denial or compassion fatigue. This would infer that without a compassionate emotion, people will not feel concerned about the suffering, nor feel involved into the solutions that could help the suffering. Audiences would be either compassionate and inclined to do something, or remain almost entirely passive. It is in this thesis that I propose the possibility that *despite* a lack of emotional response towards images of distant suffering, people in the audience can still act and react to distant suffering albeit more out of rationally and morally deliberated motivations.

1.3. Cosmopolitanism, moral responsibility and the audience

It must be stressed that attribution of moral responsibility is not strictly rational, nor is a sense of compassion towards others strictly emotional. Indeed, compassion can be based on reasoned grounds and moral responsibility can originate from intuitive thoughts and feelings (cf. Haidt 2007; Shepherd 2003). Yet, on a continuum of emotion to reason, moral responsibility is situated more on the rational side of that continuum and compassion more on the emotional side (Shepherd 2003; Haidt 2007). The difference between compassion and

moral responsibility can be found in the *consequences* of these two kinds of contemplation. That is, especially the voluntary consequences that come with feelings of compassion can lead people to only *feel* compassionate and then do nothing about it. Compassion thus 'allows us to peek outside the window of our enclosed tower, to imagine what might be experienced by those below, and to do nothing' (Shepherd 2003, p. 445). Moral responsibility on the other hand, once attributed, results to moral obligation to act (Shepherd 2003, p. 451). Moral responsibility 'means that we are obligated to respond to the suffering and needs of others [….]' (Shepherd 2003, p. 492). Thus, in contrast to compassion, moral responsibility leads to moral obligations which would ideally result in appropriate moral behaviour. Consequently, *despite* not feeling any compassion towards anyone suffering, a person could still act, if he or she considers him or herself morally responsible.

Another often argued difference between moral responsibility and more emotional responses such as care or compassion lies in people's (in)ability to feel emotionally attached to more distant people and places. Smith (1998) discusses the difference between emotional sense of care and a more reasoned idea of justice. While he stresses that there should not be made a too rigid distinction between emotion and reason, he does point out that the more emotionally based sense of 'care' is difficult to feel towards distant suffering and is more often (and more easily) reserved for the people closest to us, such as family and friends (Smith 1998, p. 30). Yet, a *reasoned* sense of care, not necessarily felt, can broaden the scope of care, even emotionally in the long run, towards the suffering (Smith 1998, p. 25). His line of argumentation that a rationalized sense of care can be more easily facilitated also counts for the more rationally contemplated sense of moral responsibility. Attributing moral responsibility does not have to come from emotional affection or identification.

Still, while moral responsibility may lead people to do something about suffering despite feeling any compassion, there is still the problem of distance. Earlier it has already been explained that distance, that is, a lengthened chain of events, problematizes attribution of moral responsibility and diminishes the severity of dismissing moral obligations. This problem also applies to audiences who watch images of distant suffering. Indeed, Boltanski (1999) asserts, in his book 'Distant suffering, morality media and politics'; "one effect of distance is surely that moral responsibility […] becomes more uncertain and therefore difficult to establish when the causal chain is lengthened" (1999, p. 16). Distance and the resulting lengthened chain of events can make it easier for people to diffuse moral responsibility. Especially in case of watching images of distant suffering the appeal to do something is aimed at everyone so that the moral responsibility is placed on everyone who watches. Consequently,

as Boltanski (1999) notes; "a spectator does not know whether others, and how many, will respond to the appeal" (p. 16). Since everyone *could* do something, the significance of *not* doing something becomes minimal. So, the diffusion and distribution of moral responsibility to such a great number of people leads to the idea that any individual's moral responsibility in the audience is minimally substantial. In addition, the great distance between spectator and sufferer significantly decreases any perceived agency. After all, with so many intermediate agents between a spectator and his or her actions decreases any sense of being able to influence the outcome. Thus, people who donate money to a charity agency do not know who else gives money neither do they know if the donation they would give will indeed go where help is most needed.

Possibly, Chouliaraki's (2006) proposition of showing distant suffering in a more cosmopolitan way, as does the emergency news, could diminish the problem of distance and the lack of agency that problematize people's moral contemplations. As discussed earlier, emergency news can decrease the psychological distance and can create a sense of agency (albeit conditional) amongst the audience (Chouliaraki 2006). By introducing a cooperative relationship between spectator and victim, a more direct relationship is created between the two which could result in a higher sense of agency. Linklater (2007) argues similarly and states that the process of globalization and the increasing visibility of distant suffering could present moral agents to a new, cosmopolitan ethic that he describes as "an ethic which holds that all interests deserve equal consideration" (p. 44). By this, he means that the scope of moral consideration is broadened to a global, cosmopolitan magnitude, including both spectator and sufferer in the causal chain of events. According to Linklater, this could result in a new cosmopolitan moral obligation to act.

It needs to be noted here that whether in fact media and people *act* upon the cosmopolitan view is still questionable. Dobson for example differentiates between 'thin' and 'thick' cosmopolitanism. Thin cosmopolitanism meaning that the *principles* of the concept are accepted which 'gets us to 'be' cosmopolitans'. This could lead to 'thick' cosmopolitanism where one also *acts* upon the principles (Dobson 2006, p. 169). Thick cosmopolitanism comes from the idea of everyone being part of a common humanity with a shared citizenship and this, according to Dobson (2006), implicates certain (political) moral obligations towards all humanity, including the reduction of inequalities and asymmetries of power (p. 169). From this, 'thick cosmopolitan moral responsibility' could be explained as the recognition of moral responsibility towards the distant suffering followed by the moral enactment to the moral call so as to prevent further suffering from happening.

1.4. Introducing the main question

So far it has been discussed that moral behaviour is influenced by both agency and distance. In case of closer proximity between an occurrence and a person, more agency is experienced which results in increased attributed moral responsibilities and obligations. In the globalizing society, different societies could be brought closer together which can result in a more inclusive cosmopolitan attitude and identity. Cosmopolitan discourse advertises an increased awareness of a shared global citizenship, and interconnectedness which can broaden the scope of solidarity. Since moral responsibilities are attributed more easily in closer proximity, images of distant suffering through a cosmopolitan discourse could, by connecting formerly distant societies, appeal more easily to people's moral consciousness. It is this reasoning that has led to the main question of this study:

How do people in the audience process images of distant suffering in a cosmopolitan discourse on the news and how will such cosmopolitan images of distant suffering make an appeal to their sense of moral responsibility?

In the next chapter, I will expand this question with some sub-questions in order to carry out specific investigations. I will also explain more about the methodology that will be used to find an answer to this question.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

In order to find how people in the audience process images of distant suffering, focus group sessions were held where participants were asked to discuss a video clip about the drought and famine in the Horn of Africa in 2011 that was shown at the beginning of the focus group session. The use of focus groups has proven to be an effective tool for finding more in depth information about a certain topic of interest (cf. Höijer 2004; Morgan 1996; Seu 2010; Szerszynski & Urry 2002). In order to define moral responsibility during the focus group sessions, two important indications that suggest a higher sense of moral responsibility will be examined: a willingness to take action and feelings of guilt. The first two sub-questions of this research design are based on these premises. Since I focus mainly on the way that a cosmopolitan discourse can appeal to someone's moral responsibility the third question will addresses participants' social identity and attitude in a globalizing society.

2.1.1. Sub-question 1

With a sense of moral responsibility comes the moral obligation to act (Basil et al. 2006; Shepherd 2003; Burnett & Lunsford 1994). If participants take up responsibility for the alleviation of distant suffering, this is likely manifested in the form of their willingness to take action. Yet, this is only the case if participants feel they *can* do something to help the suffering (i.e. having agency) (Alicke 2000; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Paharia et al. 2009). Wanting to take action can also arise from feelings of compassion and empathy instead of a sense of moral obligation. So, in order to find more clarity into the ways that people in the audience are motivated into taking action the first sub-question is:

1. How will participants, after being confronted with the images of distant suffering, talk about taking action to do something about the suffering?
   - How do participants talk about the different actions that can be executed to alleviate the suffering?
   - What roles do participants give to themselves in the courses of actions that can prevent further suffering?
   - If participants are motivated to undertake something, what are their motivations for taking action?

2.1.2. Sub-question 2

If an individual would act upon all calls upon his moral responsibility the 'phone would be ringing off the hook' (Shepherd 2003, p. 497). It is indeed impossible to constantly feel responsible for all the suffering in the entire world. As Cohen (2010) already wrote, at some point individuals will become selective in their responses to images of distant suffering. However, instead of completely denying moral responsibility, I argue that moral responsibility can still be acknowledged by people without them acting upon the moral obligations only this results in feelings of guilt. As discussed, feelings of guilt rise when a person does not call upon his or her moral obligations. It follows that people who see images of distant suffering and consider themselves to be morally responsible, therefore obliged to act, will feel guilty if they do not undertake action. This is another indication of showing moral responsibility which results in the second sub-question:

2. In what ways will feelings of guilt be expressed by the participants during the sessions?

2.1.3. Sub-question 3

As has been explained, cosmopolitanism is about a willingness to engage with the Other while also identifying with a global community. If images of distant suffering are framed in a cosmopolitan discourse, it could result in a sense of closer proximity and agency amongst the audience. Such a heightened bond between sufferer and spectator could, in its turn, result in a cosmopolitan moral sense of responsibility (Chouliaraki 2006; Linklater 2007). To find out how the cosmopolitan discourse calls upon the audiences' sense of cosmopolitan citizenship and resulting moral obligations the last sub-question will be:

3. How will participants identify themselves in their surroundings after having seen the cosmopolitan images of distant suffering?
   - Do people see themselves, at least partly, as a 'global citizen'?
   - How 'open' are the participants towards the idea of engaging with distant 'Others'?
   - How connected do people feel towards distant Others?
   - How do people in the audience identify with distant Others?

2.2. Doing focus groups

For this study all data have been obtained by conducting focus groups. The last two decades there has been an increase in the use of focus group as a qualitative method in the field of social science (McLafferty 2004; Morgan 1996). Focus groups can be explained as "a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data" (Kitzinger 1994, p. 299). The method distinguishes itself from other qualitative methods such as person-to-person interviews and surveys because of its interactive nature (Morgan 1996; Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson 1998). A focus group usually consists of six to eight people and lasts between one and two hours (Kitzinger 1994; Lunt & Livingstone 1996). During a session, discussion is encouraged and people are asked their different opinions on a chosen subject of discussion. This results is an elaborate conversation between the different participants which can provide the researcher valuable information (Kitzinger 1994; Lunt & Livingstone 1996; Morgan 1996).

The advantages of using focus group for obtaining data are extensive but the method has also been under much subject of discussion (Kidd and Parshall 2000; Kitzinger 1994; Morgan 1996; Parker and Tritter 2006; Smithson 2000; Wilkinson 1998). Proponents of the method emphasize the interactive nature of focus groups (cf. Kitzinger 1994; Morgan 1996). During the discussion, participants are encouraged both by the moderator and by fellow participants to explain their opinions on the subject of discussion. This inspires participants to consciously think and evaluate how they feel, react and think about a certain subject of discussion. As a result participants have to evaluate and explain more extensively why they think in a certain way which, in this case, gives valuable insights into the thoughts of the audience in response to images of distant suffering (Morgan 1996). In addition, because of the interpersonal communication, more insight can be obtained about the level of diversity in opinion amongst the participants (Kitzinger 1994; Lunt & Livingstone 1996; McLafferty 2004). However, the diversity of opinions and the sharing of these opinions can also be interpreted as disadvantage of focus groups. More dominant individuals within a group can possibly be a determining factor in the direction that a discussion advances. Not only can this shout down other, less dominant participants, it can also leave valuable information neglected (Smithson 2000). Still, previous research has proven that focus groups do not necessarily prevent people from being honest. Indeed, Kitzinger found that focus groups can "actively facilitate the discussion of otherwise 'taboo' topics because the less inhibited members of the group 'break the ice' for shyer participants or one person's revelation of discrediting information encourages others to disclose" (Kitzinger 1994, p. 111). Another objection that

can be made is that participants might have a tendency to give politically correct answers to questions (Smithson 2000). Much of this can be prevented if honest discussion is encouraged by the moderator. Nevertheless, even if political correctness is evident, this is yet other data-value that provides information about the processing of images and the responses to such images (Morgan 1996; Kitzinger 1994).

Focus groups can provide, as Morgan (1996) put it, "insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations of people" (p. 139). It is the deliberate and evaluated thoughts and shared knowledge by the participants that can give greater insight into the processes that play a role in the processing of images of distant suffering. Because of the explorative nature of this study, the goal during the research has been to find more information about people's thoughts and behaviour in order to generate new concepts and hypotheses (Boeije 2010; Kitzinger 1994). An objection that might arise is that the use of students for finding more information might lead to biased results and cannot be generalized towards other societies. While it is true that results cannot be generalized to a greater audience, the use of students as sample can be useful in explorative research, as is the case with this study (Morgan, 1996; Basil 1996).

2.3. Execution of focus group

2.3.1. Sample selection

Students from the Erasmus University were invited to take part in a half an hour talking session about 'bad news from distant countries shown by television'. Students were recruited on the grounds of the campus of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. In two weeks (six days) a total of six focus group sessions have been held. More information about how participants were recruited and how exactly the focus groups sessions were held can be found in attachment 1. A total of 27 people participated in the focus group sessions and the focus groups consisted on average of about four participants and lasted for about thirty minutes. Only Dutch speaking students were recruited for the simple reason that the video clip was from a Dutch national news broadcaster. More information about the participants in the focus groups can be found in attachment 2.

2.3.2. The focus group session

After a short introduction and an explanation about the subject of discussion ('bad news from distant countries') a short video clip was presented. I told them that the aim of the focus group session was that they could discuss their own thoughts about the video clip while I

mostly observed their conversations. By emphasizing that their opinions would be processed anonymously I hoped to create a more confidential and trusting environment. The discussions were held in a comfortable setting and followed the natural flow of conversation as much as possible. This way, group interaction and dynamics would be more easy and natural which encourages open and honest talk (Lund and Livingstone 1996, p. 82). The point of focus during the sessions was the rational and deliberated thoughts of participants regarding their moral responsibilities. Inspired by the method used by Seu (2010), I planned to 'follow an interview schedule loosely designed around the principle research questions' (2010, p. 444). As such, there were some subjects that were asked about by the moderator if they were not mentioned by the participants themselves. These questions were not asked in a strict sequence but at appropriate moments during the discussions. Participants can, as discussed, be encouraged to reveal their honest opinion during focus groups, or can be hampered by more dominant opinionated participants (Kitzinger 1994). Therefore, while leading the discussion I saw to it that all participants felt comfortable and had their chance to give their input in the discussion.

2.3.3. The video clip

During the search for a suitable video clip several considerations were made. The aim was to find a video clip that best fitted Chouliaraki's (2006) description of emergency news as emergency news is described as the most cosmopolitan way of showing images of distant suffering. There was no emergent distant crisis or disaster at the moment during the execution of the study (fortunately), so some compromises had to be made. It was a consideration of whether the video clip would be about something recent but less 'emergent', or something from longer ago but more in line with the described 'emergency news'. Finally the choice was between a video about the humanitarian disaster in Syria (which was on the news very frequently at the time of this study) or about the draught and famine in 2011 in the Horn of Africa. The Syrian war was considered to be too political; in most news items about Syria, the political actors that were involved (e.g. the Russian government, the European Union, the Syrian government) were often predicted as being the most responsible for the war, and so for the possible resolutions. Most likely, participants would feel less responsible themselves and blame political actors for not doing enough. This left the video about the draught and famine in the Horn of Africa that happened during the summer of 2011. While this video is rather out-dated, (there is no real 'emergency' now anymore), it was believed that participants would be able discuss their thoughts, attitude and actions about these events in 2011 in retrospect. I

asked participants to attempt to remember how they felt during the crisis in 2011. In addition I asked them if they could not remember the crisis, to pretend as if the crisis was happening right at that moment. Practically all participants had no difficulty in cooperating in this way.

The title of the news item is 'Draught in the Horn of Africa'[2]. In this video it is told that the human suffering because of the draught in the Horn of Africa has become 'unfathomable' according to Ban Ki-Moon, the secretary-general of the United Nations and he states that 'the whole world needs to do something' to prevent further suffering. It further shows a farmer and his wife in the city Dadaab in Kenya who lost their child because of the draught. In the video clip, the farmer tells that he has walked long and wide to find food. He tells how difficult it had been to get to the refugee camp where he is at now. It is mentioned that all aid organisations and the United Nations are stressing the dire need for help. It is then told that the extreme draught is partly due to the global environmental issues and partly because fundamentalist Muslims restrain help-organisations from entering problematic areas in Somalia. The overall narrative of this item is that the international communication needs to act and initiate broad-scaled aid to stop the human suffering and prevent this humanitarian disaster from deteriorating. The video clip concludes with a last remark made by the news-anchor telling the audience that Giro 555 (the Dutch national collaboration of multiple charity organisations in order to most effectively help in disaster areas) was open for donations to help the suffering.

As Chouliaraki (2006) mentions, quintessential of emergency news is that it stresses the importance to take action, and implies that all parties involved, both the suffering *and* the audience (in this case, the 'global community'), can do something. In addition, emergency news does not show passive suffering but humanizes the victim and shows them to have agency. The inclusion of both the spectator and the victim in the narrative, (both are able to take action) creates the cosmopolitan discourse because the sufferers are linked with the spectator. Lastly emergency news not only shows distant suffering but offers different solutions to improve the situation. The above described video clip fits to Chouliaraki's description like a glove. The global community is repetitively mentioned (both by the news anchor and by Ban Ki-Moon); the farmer and his wife from Kenya can be viewed as the 'representative' of the distant, but human and articulate suffering; and solutions are offered that can help prevent the disaster from further escalating.

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[2] 'Droogte in de Hoorn van Afrika', 13-07-2011. http://www.uitzending.net/gemist/55087/Nederland-1/NOS_Journaal_2000.html

2.3.4. Gathering of data

As the moderator, it is important to be aware of the dynamics of the focus group and the possible ways that audience perceive images on television. Höijer (1992) explains the dialectic process of audience and television discourse as follows:

"The meeting between television discourse and the audience can be seen as a dynamic interaction between the world of the programs, that is, their content, structure and presentation, and the realms of social experience of the viewers, more precisely, the mental representations in viewers' cognitive structures" (Höijer 1992, p. 599).

The ways that images are perceived is dependent on both the message sent by the medium itself and on the distinct traits of each viewer. Gender, age, culture, ethnicity are but a few examples that influence the ways that images are perceived (Höijer 1992). In order to maximize validity of the data, I have taken such differences in background into account during the observations and the analysis. To increase the reliability of the method, I have recorded all sessions on tape which were transcribed immediately afterwards. More extended analysis of data has been done after having performed all focus groups.

2.4. Data analysis

All sessions have been transcribed, coded and analysed. Since all data is qualitatively gained the choice of method for processing data was to code all obtained data as described by Boeije (2010). First all data have been coded 'openly' (i.e. finding common threads, subjects, issues in all different transcripts), then all coded data were coded axially (i.e. the description and delineation of different categories that have emerged with open coding). Concurrently, all categories will be selectively coded; making connections and find links between different categories and link these with the earlier described theoretical framework (Boeije 2010). This way of analysis has been executed with the help of a computer program named NVivo (v. 10) which is especially made for this kind of research. With the help of this program all transcriptions were first openly coded so that recurring topics could be found. Subsequently, the different codes of the transcripts were axially subdivided in accordance with the sub-questions. For example, all codes in the transcript that mentioned 'helping' were coded as 'helping' and were placed under the axial code of 'taking action', thereby referring to the first sub-question. With help of Nvivo (v.10) I was able to also visualize the different recurring topics and issues with graphics and tables that showed the frequency of the different open

and axial codes and sub-codes. Some examples of the visualized codes of the transcript can be found in attachment 3. Through this, I was able to find dominant issues that I could connect to the posed sub-questions of this thesis. The results of this analysis will be presented in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3 Findings

During the execution and analysis of the focus group sessions, it became apparent how appropriate the first two proposed sub-questions actually were. How to help and feelings of guilt were two of the most prevalent topics of discussion. It shows that most participants felt inclined to help and felt guilty in case they did not do anything. For an entirely different reason, the third question also proved to be vital. More cosmopolitan attitude or identities were hardly shown by the participants. If the third sub-questions would not have been formulated, the subject of cosmopolitanism would most likely not have been brought forward during the sessions.

All discussions followed more or less the same kind of pattern. In the first part of the session (where I asked participants what their first impressions were after seeing the video clip) it was mostly conceded amongst participants that the video clip clearly presented a serious problematic situation in the Horn of Africa. This was usually followed by a discussion amongst the participants about what the problem entailed, how they felt about the problems themselves and how things could be resolved. The discussion that followed was about the different ways participants themselves could help and how governments and national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could structurally resolve the problems. This discussion took most time during the sessions. An important reason for wanting to help was a feeling that they could, and therefore should, do something to alleviate the suffering. In the final part of the session it was discussed how the participants placed themselves in a global society. However, this was only discussed after I asked them about it since most participants made no mention of this of themselves. In addition, hardly any mention was made about the farmer and his wife in the video clip.

Since the sub-questions proved to be so appropriate, the findings of the discussions will be presented in the same order as the earlier proposed sub-questions. The first section of this chapter will focus on ways that people talked about taking action after seeing the video clip. Then I will show how feelings of guilt manifested amongst the audience. In the last section I will discuss the different ways that participants identified themselves in context of a global society and how this resonated with their attitude towards those who were shown to suffer in distant places. All sessions were held in Dutch but since this thesis is written in English all presented reactions of the participants have been translated. The original reactions of the participants will be quoted as footnotes at the bottom of the page. Also, all the names have been changed in order to protect the participants' privacy.

3.1. Taking action

The first sub-question of this research focused on the ways that the audience would feel inclined to take action after seeing the images of distant suffering. This question was posed in order to find out whether and how people are motivated to take action out of moral deliberations. It was interesting to find that most participants were indeed motivated to take action after seeing the images. Moreover, whilst many participants showed to have trouble to be emotionally moved by the images, most time of the group sessions was spent on discussing the many ways that the crisis in the Horn of Africa could be resolved and how they could contribute to resolutions themselves. Typical of these discussions was that they in fact seemed an ethical deliberation of who ought to help and why.

3.1.1. A problem

The very first reaction to the images of the video clip was practically the same in each focus group. It was found to be shocking and it was soon established that this video clip presented a serious and problematic situation in the Horn of Africa. Robin (20) who participated in the third focus group said immediately after having seen the video clip: "Yes. It really is rather shocking to see these images. It is really rather a lot of people who are actually dying on such a great scale[3]." Tim (22) was the first to react in the sixth focus group and said: "This problem is of course continuing for a long time and now it actually becomes clear that help is an issue[4]." One question that was often asked after this initial conclusion was; 'can anything be done?'

With only three exceptions, an overwhelming majority thought that the political situation in Somalia was an important root of the problem at hand. For example, Perry (22, focus group 2) pointed out that it is especially the rebels in Somalia that caused the severity of the problem in Somalia since the rebels did not allow any aid to come across the borders. This caused for many to feel less concerned about it since the problem was also, at least partly, their own fault. As Edwin explained: "the focus on the political situation makes it for me less urgent and less tangible[5]."

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[3] "Ja. Toch wel behoorlijk schokkend om die beelden te zien. Het zijn toch wel redelijk veel mensen die wel gewoon sterven op grote schaal." Robin (20), focus group 3.

[4] "Dit probleem speelt natuurlijk al heel lang en het wordt nu eigenlijk wel duidelijk dat er van hulp wordt gesproken." Tim (22), focus group 6.

[5] "Dat de focus daar op gelegd wordt maakt de boodschap voor mij veel minder urgent, minder tastbaar." Edwin (26) focus group 2.

What Edwin's remark also shows is the difficulty to truly comprehend the severity of the situation. Two major causes were often expressed for this sense of intangibleness towards the severity of the situation. First, many expressed that the vast distance between the events and themselves made it difficult to really grasp the severity. Second, it was articulated that they felt numb towards the images of the suffering since they already had seen so many images of distant suffering on television. As Sjimmie (24) said: "It's truly tragic what is happening there, but these are images that you have seen for so many times. Those starving children. You know it's like that and while it is terrible, my emotions are indeed weakened[6]." It was often added to this that Africa was always poor so that it seemed as if there was hardly anything that could be done to truly resolve the problem. It was interesting to find that these remarks were often made at the very beginning of the focus group and were only shortly discussed. Usually, the discussion soon moved forward to discussing how the crisis in the Horn of Africa could be resolved. In fact, if I would not have interrupted this latter discussion, they would most likely have discussed this topic for the rest of the whole session. The discussion about the different ways that the disaster could be resolved consisted of two major issues: collective help and individual help.

3.1.2. Individual help, individual responsibility

"Yeah, I don't know how much you *could* do you know. You could… You should do at least something I guess. You really... You should have to do something I think... Now there is not enough help. And there are a lot of help organisations, for example giro 555. They say 'send you money here'. But, a lot of money that goes there doesn't arrive at the place. That is really a shame[7]." Kadhima (23)

"The difference between for example giro 555 and other NGO's is that we would give money to the other civil organisations and not giro 555 as a bigger

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[6] "Het is wel heel tragisch wat er daar gebeurt, maar het zijn beelden die je zo vaak hebt gezien. Die hongerende kinderen. Je weet dat dat zo is, en hoe erg het is, maar mijn emoties zijn wel verder afgezwakt." Sjimmie (24), focus group 3.

[7] "Ja, ik weet niet hoeveel je zou kúnnen doen zeg maar. Dat je toch wel… Je zou toch wel iets moeten kunnen doen denk ik. Er is nu te weinig hulp. En er zijn heel veel hulporganisaties, bijvoorbeeld giro 555, die zeggen 'stuur hier geld naartoe'. Maar, heel veel van het geld dat daar heen gaat komt niet aan. Dat is heel erg jammer." Khadima (23) focus group 5

organisation. I think that is because then we know better where the money goes to because they are smaller[8]." Ally (18)

The above quotes of Kadhima and Ally are exemplary for how the majority of the participants in the focus groups felt about helping and giving money. Many felt they really wanted to help but that giving money to greater organisations was not much of an option. Most argued that aid organisations such as Giro 555 or other (inter)national charity organisations were so large that they would never know where their money would go to. They were sceptical as to whether the money would actually help those who needed it.

Despite this sense scepticism towards bigger aid organisations, most did assert they would help. The overall tone of most participants was that they were willing to donate but certain pre-conditions had to be met. First, they wanted to know where their donated money would end up and second, they wanted to know how their donated money would be spent. Thence, most participants only wanted to donate money to smaller charity organisations so they would have more information of the whereabouts of their donation and would be more involved in the aid that was given in those countries. Participants clearly wanted to have influence on the outcome of their donation. As Giselle (19) noted: "I give money, it's the only thing I *can* do. But I would rather give money to a smaller organisation because then I know which persons I am reaching out to and know which persons go there. [….] Then I know exactly where that money goes to, because it's a smaller organisation[9]."

Yet, while most said they wanted to help, most saw themselves responsible only for short-term alleviation of suffering.

3.1.3. Collective help, collective responsibility
A third often stipulated pre-condition for helping others expressed by participants that I have not mentioned yet was that help had to be done collectively. There was a dominant opinion amongst the participant that help could only be effective if done properly, structurally and *collectively*. Yvonne (22, focus group 1) for example noted that she would be more inclined to

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[8] "Het verschil tussen bijvoorbeeld giro 555 en andere NGO's is dat we bij andere, civiele organisaties wel geld zouden geven en giro 555 als grote organisatie niet. Dat komt denk ik doordat we dan beter weten, doordat ze kleiner zijn, waar het geld vandaan komt." Ally (18) focus group 1.

[9] "Ik geeft zelf wel geld, dat is het enige wát ik kan doen. Maar ik zou wel liever geld willen geven aan een kleinere organisatie omdat ik dan beter weet welke personen ik bereik en mensen ken zie die daar zelf naartoe gaan enzo. [….] Dan weet ik precies waar dat geld naartoe gaat. Doordat het een kleinschaligere organisatie is." Giselle (19) focus group 3.

help and donate if she knew that everyone in the Netherlands would do more about it. This is in line with what Evelien (23) argued: "Eventually, giving food or money is only treatment of the symptoms. It is for example the UN that should send troops to Somalia to really tackle the turmoil in Somalia. But letting people starve in the meantime is also of no use. Then resolving the unrest in the country would only result in a peaceful country where all people are dead[10]." Evelien felt obliged to help, to at least prevent more people from starving to death, but also thought that real, structural help was needed. This help, according to her and many other participants, could not come from themselves but would have to come from more far-reaching organisations.

This stands in contrast with much of their previous statements about wanting to give money to small-scale organisations. After all, it is doubtful as to whether small-scale organisations are fit for real structural broad-scaled changes. Nonetheless, they felt that only if citizens and governments all helped, something could really be done. It was often thought that since political issues lied at the root of the problems, political solutions should be able to solve many problems as well. The responsibility for long-term solutions was thus considered to be fall onto bigger, national or international executive administrations and political organs such as governments, the United Nations and the European Union[11]. As Thomas (24) put it; "In the end it all revolves around the governments I think[12]." And Robert (22) said "I find it important that something should be done but the UN for example should do something about it[13]." It was proposed that governments should work together, (both the African and the western) to fix current problems. In addition, it was suggested that Europe as a whole could do more to give aid, or promote economic investments in developing countries. There were also those who emphasized that economic investments could really make a difference and truly change conditions in African countries. Richard (20, focus group 3) for instance proposed that it was up to rich people and companies who were able to make investments in poorer countries that could strengthen the economic situation so that the countries could cope with future drought periods by themselves.

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[10] "Uiteindelijk is voedselhulp alleen symptoombestrijding. Eigenlijk zou de VN troepen naar Somalië moeten sturen om de onrust aan te pakken. Maar zolang je in de tussentijd mensen laat sterven heeft dat ook geen zin. Dan wordt er rust in een land gebracht waar dan alle mensen dood zijn gegaan." Evelien (23) focus group 2.

[11] For the remainder of this chapter, these kind of socio-structural agents will called (non-)governmental organisations.

[12] "Uiteindelijk draait het bij de overheden denk ik." Thomas (24) focus group 4.

[13] "Ik vind het wel belangrijk dat er iets aan gedaan wordt maar dat de VN daar bijvoorbeeld iets aan doet." Robert (22) focus group 5.

An often heard reason for the delegation of help towards other (non-)governmental organisations was that many thought that individuals such as themselves could not do enough to prevent another crisis such as in the Horn of Africa from happening. Roy (18) for example said: "I think that I don't really, actually can change anything about the world. At least not individually. In fact, you're rather powerless. Maybe that's the reason that you can contribute, but you can only do so one on one. I mean, if you can only safe one person, that is also quite enough I guess[14]." Many uttered the rhetorical question 'what can you really do about it?' This implies that most felt there was not much they could do. Yet, although many expressed this lack of agency, there was still the idea, as Roy also exemplifies, that the little things you *can* do, should be done. A major conclusion from this is expressed by what Yvonne (22) remarked: "As an individual you can make a difference in the collective. So that way I think we are responsible. So, not necessarily as an individual on its own. I don't think that I as a person can cause much change[15]." In other words, participants experienced they could only do change things at a small scale which had little to no structural, long-term impact.

There was only one person, Steven (24), who explicitly expressed his indifference towards the suffering. He participated in the fourth focus group and thought that the whole situation would never be solved and that the lion's share of the problem was caused by, in his words, 'the African people'. He questioned the effectiveness of aid organisations and asked: "But is it of any *use* to send help? I mean, it's nice to give food and medicines and stuff, but it is incredibly overpopulated there. In overall Africa it's very extreme. [….] I mean, not that you should go finish people off or something but if they would reproduce more slowly, there would eventually be less people to feed, so they would be in a better situation[16]." His remarks about the situation were received with much protest by his fellow-participants. Indeed, most agreed that his opinion was too extreme and lacked any nuance. In response to his commends they emphasized even more how they felt that African people could *not* help their suffering

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[14] "Ik denk dat ik zelf niet echt, eigenlijk iets kan veranderen aan de wereld. Individueel op dit moment sowieso niet. Dat je eigenlijk vrij machteloos staat. Misschien is dat ook wel waarom je wel zou bijdragen, maar alleen één op één. Ik bedoel, als je één persoon zou kunnen redden is dat ook wel genoeg denk ik." Roy (18) focus group 1.

[15] "Als een individu kan je wel verschil maken binnen het collectief. Dus, op die manier denk ik dat we wel verantwoordelijk zijn. Maar, niet echt als een individu zelf. Ik denk niet dat ik als persoon veel verandering kan maken." Yvonne (22) focus group 1.

[16] "Maar heeft het zín om hulp te sturen? Ik bedoel, het is wel heel leuk om eten en medicijnen te brengen enzo, maar het is daar wel ontzettend overbevolkt. In heel Afrika is het heel extreem. [….] Ik bedoel niet dat je mensen moet gaan afmaken ofzo, maar als ze zich iets minder snel gaan reproduceren dan zijn er uiteindelijk wel minder mensen die eten nodig hebben dus die hebben het dan wel beter." Steven (20) focus group 4.

and that deterioration of the disaster could only be prevented if they and (non-)governmental organisations would do more. Steven's provocation on the subject only further established the overall dominant opinion that they had to do something.

To summarize, initially there was a sense of powerlessness and numbness after seeing the images which made it more difficult to grasp the severity of the situation. Yet, most participants were motivated to help after seeing the images though they also thought that (non-)governmental organisations ought to do something. Their discussions strongly remind of the question that is asked in considering moral responsibility according to Fisscher et al. (2003); 'who ought to do something about this?' Surely, this question was the main topic of discussion amongst the participants. Though the term 'responsibility' was not often literally mentioned during most discussions, it can be considered to be the main issue that was at stake. A major part of this discussion was about the extent that participants were actually able to do something. They wanted to be involved in the outcomes of their actions, very much like Alicke's (2000) description of a sense of agency. It demonstrates how most participants were looking for a charity organisation that gave them the highest possible sense of agency so they could take full responsibility for their actions.

3.2. Guilt

When I asked those who donated or wanted to donate why they gave money or wanted to give money to organisations in the first place there many expressed that feelings of guilt motivated their actions to give money or help otherwise. Most thought they ought to help simply because they *could* and if they did not, they would feel guilty. Some who expressed this latter argument said to feel guilty because they did not donate any money. In other words, obligations to act and feelings of guilt proved to be an important issue for most.

3.2.1. Guilt as motivator

Many expressed that when they saw the images, they became painfully aware of how well-off they were here in the Netherlands and thought they just *had* to help: "I find it awful that I'm so well-off and then to see those children, […]. That's just so terrible. Yes, the parents will have to do everything to give their children food and we in the Netherlands are living in luxury you know? We go out on vacation three times a year. That really troubles me. They don't deserve that[17]" (Denise (25) focus group 5).

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[17] "Ik vind het vreselijk dat ik het goed heb en dan die kinderen te zien. Dat vind ik dan zo erg. Ja, die ouders die alles zullen doen om die kinderen eten te geven en dat wij in Nederland leven in luxe weet je wel? En wij gaat

It made them feel that the unlucky people in the Horn of Africa were victims of a cruel fate, to be born in a poor society while they were born in the Netherlands. Many expressed their indignation and their discomfort to such cruel injustice and felt that people in these countries deserved a chance to life just as much as they did. As Thomas (24) said: "For me it's really difficult and painful because we are so well-off. Any worries or trouble I have, loses its significance when you see this. I mean, if I am not able to go out one night, whatever, right? It's really unsettling. You'll feel really guilty about having such worries[18]."

Many feelings of guilt originated from such conscientious thoughts; it was often expressed that because they were in this well-off position they *could* do something and therefore *should* do something. As Maarten (23, focus group 4) asserted; "when I see this video clip, I think to myself… Yes, I still *can* do something about it[19]." Interestingly, while these kinds of remarks were often expressed, only half of the participants actually donated money or helped in another way (e.g. volunteering). Participants who did not donate regularly expressed feeling guilty for not doing anything. Feline (19, focus group 4) admitted wholeheartedly that she did not donate any money and felt really guilty about this, especially because she smokes and lives in her own place while she could also quit smoking and move back to her parents place.

What is shown from Maarten's remark, (i.e. becoming more aware of his ability to help after having seen the video clip), is that the idea they could and therefore should help was further strengthened because of the video clip. After I asked Evelien (23) whether she would make a gift to a charity organisation she said: "Well, I'd say yes, because we have taken note of what is happening there so we cannot wash our hands off the matter and let things get out of control[20]." Her assertion, i.e. that she now knows about the suffering since she saw the images on the video clip, shows that the video clip made her aware of what was happening and she could thus ignore the suffering which compelled her to do something about it. Many

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drie keer per jaar op vakantie. Ik heb daar echt wel moeite mee. Dat hebben ze niet verdiend" Denise (25) focus group 5.

[18] "Voor mij is het in ieder geval heel moeilijk en pijnlijk omdat we het zo goed hebben. Alle zorgen en problemen die we hebben lijken te verdwijnen als je dit ziet. Ik bedoel, als ik een keer niet een avondje uit kan, wat voor een probleem is dat nou? Dat doet je heel ongemakkelijk voelen. Dan voel ik me wel schuldig over zulke zorgen." Thomas (24) focus group 4.

[19] "En als ik zo'n filmpje zie dan denk ik wel bij mezelf zoiets van… Ja, je kúnt er nog iets aan doen." Maarten (23) focus group 4.

[20] "Dan zeg ik ja, want we hebben kennis genomen van wat er daar gebeurt dus we kunnen niet onze handen eraf trekken en het aan de hand laten lopen." Evelien (23) focus group 2.

felt that since they now had seen the images on television they could not deny the suffering of the people anymore. Because they were shown the images they were forced to acknowledge that the suffering was happening. This was a major reason for the participants to feel responsible to ease the suffering. There were also those who, even though they thought that giving money would not really help to alleviate the suffering, would still give money to 'buy off' their sense of guilt. They explained that giving money could alleviate their sense of guilt so they could move on and stop thinking about the suffering. What the above motivations show, is that an overall sense of discomfort and resulting pricks of participant's conscious was a strong motivator to help. Indeed, those who did not help, but still thought they should, affirmed this by explicitly expressing their guilt for complaining about their own lives while other lives were much worse.

3.2.2. Guilt mitigated

Despite expressions of feeling guilty, many also attenuated their guilt. The feelings of guilt were downplayed the same way as their extent to which they should take action; emphasis was placed on the flaws of other parties involved in the problem.

Many participants lightened their own burden by emphasizing that governments did not take enough action. Blaming the other organisations and emphasizing how little they could influence these big socio-structural organs enabled them, to a certain extent, to wash their hands off the matter. Robert (22, focus group 5) for example pointed out that blame fell especially on Europe, NATO and the UN since they failed to stop the on-going conflict in Somalia for over twenty years. In addition, the Somali government and the rebels were blamed for causing the scale of the disaster since they put a stop to any help coming from NGO's at the Somali border. Florian (24) explained: "You could always doubt the government of Somalia and the rebels in the country. It is so corrupt. Even if money would go there you will never know for certain that the money ends up in the right place. Their corruption makes it impossible to really do something[21]." What Florian's comment also shows is that the conflict situation in Somalia caused feelings of desperation and hopelessness about the whole situation which resulted in a diminished sense of guilt since there was, after all, nothing they could do.

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[21] "Je kunt je altijd afvragen hoe het zit met de overhead en die rebellen in Somalië. Het is daar hartstikke corrupt. Zelfs als er geld heen zou gaan dan zou je nooit zeker kunnen weten dat het geld echt komt waar het nodig is. Die corruptie maakt het echt onmogelijk om wat aan de situatie te doen." Florian (24) focus group 6.

A whole different way of reducing their feeling of guilt I noticed was by diminishing the severity of the problem by emphasizing that the suffering should be put into a relative perspective. It was for example asserted that African people were probably used to the kind of hardship they endured at that time. Some even alleged that people were probably not grieving too much about the loss of a child since the African people so often lost their children that they would probably expect such things to happen. A good example of this is Pieter's (22) comment: "You can see how calm the farmer talks of his son. While he says that he regrets his son is dead, you can see that he is even smiling. I think that is because his whole life is characteristic of these kinds of events. I think his perspective onto the famine is very different. Especially because he is used to experience these kinds of things[22]." Such remarks were not made very often and if they were made, they were often followed by protest from fellow-participants. However, there was often a discussion about how the famine would be experienced by the African people. Some admitted it was beyond their comprehension but still thought it would be terrible for the African people. Others argued that cultural and historical differences made the experience of hunger and famine relatively less severe for the people who lived there. As Cor (19) put forward: "I have the idea that they have been born and raised that way so they don't know any better in Africa. Just as it always rains here, so it is also constantly hunger and famine there. That is, as far as I know, going on for twenty years[23]."

Guilt, as has been explained is a consequence of not acting upon one's moral obligations (Burnett and Lunsforth 1994; Basil et al. 2006). The participant's expressions about feeling painfully aware of their own luxurious life in the Netherlands reminds of the guilt that Burnett and Lunsforth (1994) describe as a result of violating one's moral standard. That most participants acknowledged to feel obligated to help shows a certain degree of responsibility towards the distant suffering shown on the video clip. Yet, these acknowledgements of moral obligation and guilt were, just as their feelings about taking action, confined to short-term non-structural ways of helping.

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[22] "Je ziet ook dat die man heel rustig praat over zijn zoontje. Hoewel hij zegt dat hij het jammer vind dat die dood is zie je dat hij wel zelfs glimlacht. Dat komt ook denk ik omdat zijn hele leven gekenmerkt wordt door dat soort gebeurtenissen. Zijn blik op die hongersnood is denk ik heel anders. Vooral omdat hij het gewend is om zulke dingen mee te maken." Pieter (22) focus group 2.

[23] "Ik heb het idee dat het zo met de paplepel wordt ingegoten daar zodat ze niet beter weten daar in Afrika. Net zoals het hier regent, is het daar constant hongersnood. Dat is, naar mijn weten in ieder geval, al twintig jaar het geval." Cor (19) focus group 6.

3.3. Cosmopolitanism

It may have already been noticed that Cor speaks in rather generic terms. Indeed, 'they', 'Africa' and 'we' were regularly used terms during all focus group sessions. In this section, I will show that many of the people in the audience still distinguished themselves and the 'west' from other people, the 'rest' in 'Africa'. One result of this was that the audience hardly related with the people shown in the video clip, often had trouble to feel emotionally moved by the images and could not easily identify with the suffering. Yet, some did express feelings of compassion and empathy towards the suffering and at least made an effort to relate or identify with the distant suffering.

While 'the world' was sometimes mentioned by the participants, there was made no reference about how they saw themselves into this global society. Earlier, it has been argued that a cosmopolitan discourse of distant suffering can make call on the audience's cosmopolitan citizenship which could result in increased compassion and solidarity amongst the audience towards the distant suffering (Chouliaraki 2006). In order to find how a cosmopolitan discourse appeals to the audience, the third sub-question concerned how 'cosmopolitan' the audience in fact would be.

3.3.1. 'Us'

The discussion about collective helping and resolving was mostly concentrated on the different ways that governments, non-governmental organisations and rich companies could give aid and help to fundamentally change things. However, part of this discussion also seemed to involve the participants themselves. It was often proposed at the end of the discussion about helping that 'the whole world should help'. As Florian (24) noted: "What you really want to do is to solve the problem structurally. Money is a way of doing that but, well, more things should be tackled as well. I mean, the Somali government there that just simply cannot be this way you know[24]?" And Roy (18) put forward: "You really have to go towards it with the entire world, to fundamentally solve such a problem[25]." What their comments show is the dominantly expressed opinion that only collaboration between individuals within a society (who can donate money) and the coordinating political and economic organs (who can

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[24] "Je wil eigenlijk gewoon het probleem structureel kunnen oplossen. Daar is geld wel een middel voor maar, ja, dan moeten er meer dingen worden aangepakt. Ik bedoel, die Somalische regering daar zit, dat kan gewoon niet op deze manier zeg maar." Florian (24) focus group 6.

[25] "Je moet daar met de héle wereld op af. Om zo, zoiets op te lossen. Fundamenteel." Roy (18) focus group 1

help more structurally) could be effective. Roy's remark about the 'entire world' was an often heard phrase to express this opinion.

However, when I asked the participants how they felt part of this entire world and whether they felt addressed by Ban Ki-Moon when he mentioned that 'the whole world needed to take action', I received less cosmopolitan responses. Some said they felt that they were part of a global society. Like Pieter who said that "we are all part of the earth and are all citizens of this world[26]." However, this kind of articulation was rare. Many considered that Ban Ki-Moon's call for help was meant for a western audience. Jaap (19) said the following about this: "Well, if you talk about 'the entire world', it really comes down to the west[27]."

What his comment shows is that most participants did not feel addressed as a cosmopolitan citizen by the images. Rather, they identified and felt part of a western or Dutch society. Chouliaraki's (2006) assertion that a cosmopolitan discourse can call upon a cosmopolitan 'togetherness' or 'connectedness' was hardly found to be experienced by the audience during the focus group sessions. Indeed, throughout the sessions I noticed that the 'we' that some participants articulated usually did not include any different societies but the west. Though it occasionally was meant as an expression that showed their identification with the entire world, the term 'we' more often referred to a western and economically well-of community that ought to help, whether by giving money, do volunteering or help through political collaboration. In addition, many participants identified with a western *Dutch* society. Gert (22) for example noted: "Well, I interpreted it in a Dutch perspective. We live in the Netherlands and the Netherlands should do something about it[28]." Other times, not only the western society was included but some other better-to-do countries were named. Brazil, the South American continent, the Middle-East and Asia were all considered once or more often to be part of the 'entire world' that should help.

So, Ban Ki-Moon's call to the 'whole world' was most often interpreted as that he addressed that part of the world consisting of rich well-educated and mainly western societies. This way the other, underdeveloped, poor under-educated African societies were excluded. In other words, there seemed to be a stark dichotomy between one part of the world that should

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[26] "We zijn deel van de aarde en allemaal staatsburgers van deze wereld." Pieter (22) focus group 2.

[27] "Nou, als je het over 'de hele wereld ' hebt, komt dat over het algemeen toch wel weer te liggen op het Westen." Jaap (19) focus group 2.

[28] "Nou, ik zie het meer in perspectief van Nederlands. We wonen in Nederland en Nederland moet er iets aan doen." Gert (22) focus group 4.

help, the western world and another 'world' which included other countries and societies which are not capable of doing something to resolve the problems.

3.3.3. 'Them'

This dichotomous mentality clearly resonated in the participants' attitudes towards the distant suffering. The trouble most participants had to relate and identify with the farmer and his wife was most emblematic of this. Keep in mind that the video clip portrays a farmer and his wife who are shown to grief over their son who had deceased because of the drought. This part of the video clip is quintessential for 'emergency news' as Chouliaraki (2006) described. Their portrayal was expected to ignite a discussion about the humanity of the suffering. Interestingly, the subject of the farmer and his wife, a major part of the video clip, was hardly mentioned by the participants themselves. Indeed, most of the times I had to specifically ask them whether they could relate or identify in any way with the people from Kenya that were shown on the images.

Most participants stated that the farmer and his wife lived in an entirely different world than themselves. During the discussions it was usually concluded that the suffering was still terrible, but the discussion was held in terms of 'us' versus 'them'. 'They' are used to it, 'they live in an entirely different world' and 'we' will never know how it is since we are western and live in our comfortable western society'. Florian (24) explained this accurately when he said: "Well, I think it's just so far away and if it would have been about another western country, it would be much more relatable than somewhere in Africa. Especially since African is known for the tropical heat. [….] There just isn't a reference point of what is normal there. It's really hard to feel connected to it then[29]."

This sense of being different became even more apparent because of the one exception. Denise (25) told her fellow participants that she felt very sorry for the farmer and his wife because they lost their child. She told that she was a mother herself and could therefore relate to the grieving parents and really sympathized with them. Her being a mother and therefore better able to relate to the sufferers seems to underline the impossibility of the other participants, independent students with no great obligations or responsibilities, to really feel connected or related to the distant suffering. Indeed, the depiction of the farmer and his

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[29] "Ja, ik denk dan, het is z over weg en als het een ander westers land zou zijn geweest had ik me er beter bij kunnen inleven dan ergens in Afrika. Afrika staat er toch wel bekend om, het is er tropisch en warm. [….] Je hebt niet echt referentie of het echt normaal is of niet. Dat maakt het echt moeilijk om je ermee verbonden te voelen." Florian (24) focus group 6.

wife, struggling to find food, mourning their lost child was something that seemed to amplify rather than diminish any difference between themselves and the sufferers. As Robert (22) noted: "Maybe it is because we are in another period of our lives. We are all studying and we're just really preoccupied with ourselves. About the future and other stuff. Maybe later, in a different period of my life when I'm more satisfied I will be able to feel more connected with people like that[30]."

3.3.4. 'Everyone'

Yet, even though most said to have trouble identifying or relate with the distant suffering, it did not stop them from at least *trying* to 'feel' the suffering of the sufferers. Josje (22) expressed her feelings after I asked her if she could relate with the farmer and his wife: 'I just, I cannot imagine how it would be. But yes, these parents have to abandon their children and stuff. That seems… Horrible! But to really feel connected with those people. Yes, that I find difficult[31].' While she expressed her difficulty to really feel connected with them, she did try to empathize with the farmer and his wife by noting how terrible it seemed to be in that position. Rob (20) said "When you see it happening you do start to think like 'what if?' And then you start to think about it a little bit. And then I start to feel a little bit connected with them[32]." As his reaction shows, he too, though slightly grudgingly, admitted to feel connected with the suffering. The vast majority said they felt they could relate with the suffering farmer as a 'human being' but more profound feelings towards the suffering or a more personal connection was not experienced. Most could not stress often enough that they would never be able to feel with the suffering since they would never know how it *really* was, but they tried nonetheless. In addition, some participants articulated their eager willingness to once go there in order to experience the effects of such a disaster more fully. That is to say; it was thought that going there would broaden their horizon and enable them to better understand the severity and scale of these kinds of disasters. As Giselle (19) put it: "I think that we have the resources to do something. And as an individual with those resources you should go there.

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[30] "Misschien dat dat ook wel met levensfasen te maken heeft. We zijn nu allemaal aan het studeren en dan ben je gewoon heel erg veel bezig met jezelf. Over de toekomst en later enzo. Misschien dat ik later, als ik wat meer verzadigt bent dat ik me dan meer verbonden voel met dat soort mensen." Robert (22).

[31] "Ik zie het gewoon meer, dat ik me niet kan voorstellen hoe het zou zijn. Maar ja die ouders die hun kinderen dan achter moeten laten enzo. Dat lijkt me echt.. Verschrikkelijk! Maar om nou echt te zeggen dat ik me verbonden met die mensen voel. Ja, dat vind ik moeilijk." Josje (22) focus group 5.

[32] "Je ziet het wel gebeuren en dan denk je wel van 'goh, wat als?' En dan ga je je toch wel een beetje nadenken. En dan ga ik me wel een klein beetje verbonden met ze voelen." Rob (20) focus group 3.

Even though you may not know where to go, or where *not* to go, you would do something, you could give something back and learn from them as well. Only when you go *there* and do volunteering, you would find gratification I think[33]."

[33] "Ik denk dan, we hebben de middelen om wat te doen. Ik bedoel, wat kun je als individu nou doen? Maar we kunnen er wel heen gaan. Ook al weet je niet waarheen je moet gaan of waarheen je niet moet gaan, je dóét in ieder geval iets, je kan wel wat teruggeven en meteen van hun leren. Alleen als je dáárheen gaat en vrijwilligerswerk gaat doen vind je pas voldoening denk ik." Giselle (19) focus group 3.

Chapter 4. Conclusion and discussion

At the beginning of this thesis it was argued that previous research has focussed too little on more rational moral responses to images of distant suffering and too little empirical research has been carried out. This study has aimed to begin to fill these scientific gaps by empirically studying how audiences think about their moral responsibilities towards people who are suffering in distant places. The idea of this is that maybe *despite* a lack of emotional response to images, people can still be involved and concerned about the distant suffering. In this chapter I will discuss the findings and make some conclusions in context of earlier discussed theories. Before doing this, I will give a short summary of the theoretical discussion and a reminder of the main question of this study.

It has been discussed that agency and distance, two interrelated concepts, influence the different ways that people attribute moral responsibility to themselves (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Jones 1991; Paharia et al. 2009). This, in its turn, can be of influence on people's moral behaviour by either acting upon the moral obligations or by feeling guilty (Alicke 2000; Basil et al. 2006; Burnett and Lunsforth 1994; Fincham & Roberts 1985). Globalization could lead to an increasing togetherness and interconnectedness which may lead to a more cosmopolitan identity and attitude (Beck 2002; Linklater 2007; Ong 2009). Especially media play an important role in increasing people's awareness of a shared global citizenship and cosmopolitan identity (Chouliaraki 2006; Linklater 2007). On the other hand, these assumptions have been placed under scrutiny. Critics have pointed out to the process of 'othering' and the banal nationalism so that people will still have the tendency to identify mainly with their own in-group, excluding others and maintaining unequal relationship between the 'Self' and the 'Other' (Beck & Levy 2013; Billig 1995; Cheah 2006; Kothari 2005). These arguments question people's ability towards a more cosmopolitan attitude and set of identities and argue that the distinction between the 'west' and the 'rest' will always remain.

Still, globalizing processes and stories put into a cosmopolitan discourse may lead people in the audience to feel more close to the people who are shown to suffer on television (Chouliaraki 2006; Linklater 2007). With decreased distances and a higher perceived agency of spectators, there is a chance that audiences will feel morally responsible for the alleviation of the suffering in distant places. This led to the following research question:

How do people in the audience process images of distant suffering in a cosmopolitan discourse on the news and how will such cosmopolitan images of distant suffering make an appeal to their sense of moral responsibility?

By observing the discussions between participants after watching a video clip of the Dutch news broadcaster NOS, more light has been shed on the different issues that rise amongst audiences when being confronted with news of an emergent disaster and massive suffering of people in distant places. It has become apparent that many participants extensively discussed the different solutions that were needed to alleviate the suffering and resolve or prevent further humanitarian disasters. Many also gave themselves a role in the execution of the different solutions. In addition, many expressed that structural solutions had to be organized by governments and (inter-)national (non-)governmental organisations. It became evident that most participants did not naturally assume a more cosmopolitan position during the discussions. Indeed, most participants still strongly identified with their western and/or Dutch background. The more global and cosmopolitan position was only discussed after I asked about it.

4.1. Individual moral responsibilities

Is there a sense of moral responsibility towards distant suffering amongst the participants? The short answer is yes, but only to a certain extent. The long answer begins with reaching back to the theoretical framework where it has been explained how 'moral responsibility' is attributed to others and how this influences people's moral behaviour.

Causal responsibility implies a causal relationship between someone's actions and an occurrence (Alicke 2000; Basil et al. 2006; Fincham & Roberts 1985; Fisscher et al. 2003). *Moral* responsibility also implies an attributive concept by asking "who ought to take care of this?" (Fisscher et al. 2003, p. 210). This is much in line with the question 'who ought to do something about this?' which was one of the most widely discussed topics during the focus group sessions. Though the term 'moral responsibility' was not often literary talked about during the focus group sessions it can be argued that the lion's share of the discussions during sessions was an inquiry to point out people's moral responsibility towards the distant suffering. They discussed extensively what their own role would have to be in carrying out solutions to prevent further suffering, such as donating money or do volunteering work. This shows how important it was for most participants to establish who is responsible for the alleviation of the suffering and what they could do themselves.

While this proves that moral responsibility was considered to be important, it does not tell how the images made an appeal to the participants' *own* moral responsibility. Two important factors influence people's decision of who is morally responsible; agency and distance (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Jones 1991; Paharia et al. 2009). These two

issues proved to be of great importance to the participants. This became especially apparent in their choice of charity organisations. Most participants said they would only give money to small organisations so they would know where their money would go to and feel more involved in the charity activities. Earlier it was asserted that in case of closer proximity (i.e. a smaller chain of events) and a higher perceived agency, moral responsibility will more likely be attributed and will be followed by morally responsible behaviour (Alicke 2000; Paharia et al. 2009). Such closed proximity and increased agency is optimized in the case of small organisations. There is a close proximity between the participant (who donates) and the results of his/her contribution to the charity organisation. So, participants optimized the chain of events to be as short as possible, and therefore more opportunity was created by the participants to influence the outcome of their donation. As a result, their actions showed immediate outcome which increased the perceived agency of the participants. Given that most participants were willing to make a contribution and also thought that this was something everyone is supposed to do, indicate that most felt, to a certain extent, morally responsible for the distant suffering. After all, most thought that everyone *ought* to do something. By choosing small charity organisations, they could take full responsibility for their actions and the outcome of these actions.

That most felt morally responsible for the alleviation of suffering was furthermore confirmed by their often expressed feelings of guilt. As Basil et al. (2006) have pointed out, guilt is 'an emotional state in which the individual holds the belief or knowledge that he or she has violated some social custom, ethical or moral principle, or legal regulation' (Heidenreich 1968, in Basil et al. 2006, p. 1036). Burnett and Lunsforth further describe that guilt is a result of having violated one's internal standards and results in a lower individual self-esteem (1994, p. 35). The discomfort and guilt that many of the participants expressed after seeing the images of the distant suffering reminds of Basil et al.'s described emotional state, and the feelings of guilt that Burnett and Lunsforth (1994) explained. Those who did not donate money or do anything else often showed feelings of guilt for not doing anything. Their explanation for feeling guilty, i.e. not having done anything to relieve the suffering, is the 'violation of moral standards' that is so eloquently put by Basil et al. (2006). They could give money, so they ought to give money, but they did not give money. This shows a classic moral deliberation where the conclusion was reached that not acting upon their moral obligation was a violation of their moral standards. So, feelings of guilt can be interpreted as another way of expressing their sense of moral responsibility towards the distant suffering.

Yet, the feelings of guilt were also mitigated by emphasizing other factors and agents that contributed to the problem. In addition, feelings of guilt were diminished and even denied by some people in the audience, by putting the suffering in perspective. That is, the hunger and famine were by some explained as being rather 'relative' so that the people who lived in the Horn of Africa were likely to be used to these kinds of disasters and perceived the hunger differently than we would do. There was even one person who said he thought it might even be better to just leave the people alone and have them sort out their own problems, saying that not doing anything could perhaps really resolve the structural problem of overpopulation. Such remarks remind strongly of Seu's (2010) and Cohen's (2001) description of denying the suffering and denial of responsibilities. These strategies of denial, i.e. denying the effectiveness of helping and especially the denying of the suffering, were applied during the discussion of who was responsible, who should help and why they should, or shouldn't feel guilty about the suffering. Yet, while such strategies were executed by some of the people during the sessions, throughout most focus groups these strategies were also frowned upon. This shows how the participants took the role of being each other's moral conscience and often resulted in a discussion of how they should morally behave.

So only in case of the shortest possible chain of events between their contribution and the effect which results into a higher sense of agency would participants donate. The mentioning and discussing the option of giving money to a small charity organisation resulted in a conclusion that taking action was something that could (and should) be done. This resulted in either the willingness to act (by giving donations or volunteering) or resulted in feelings of guilt (when participants disobeyed their inner moral standards). From this, it follows that most participants considered themselves to be morally responsible for the alleviation of the suffering. Yet, moral responsibility was reserved to the most direct and short term alleviating of the suffering since they agreed that their help (thus their agency) was limited.

4.2. Collective moral responsibilities

During the discussion of who ought to help it was very often stressed that there was only so much they could do themselves. Most of the structural, long-term solutions were considered to be the responsibility of bigger (inter-)national organisations such as the United Nations, governments and NGO's. Why did participants emphasize these collective responsibilities so much? Why were bigger organisations so often stressed as being morally responsible for the structural and long-term solutions? I argue that there are two important reasons for the

participants to diffuse and distribute moral responsibilities for helping. First of all, by doing this, participants could limit the scope of their own moral responsibilities. The chains of events and amount of intermediates between participant and the distant suffering are countless. This great distance at the global and socio-structural level resulted in a minimally perceived sense of agency. This in its turn resulted in less attributed moral responsibility (Alicke 2000; Paharia et al. 2009). The reasoning was much like earlier described; if there is nothing that can be done, if there is no control of the outcome of someone's actions, someone cannot be held morally responsible (Alicke 2000; Doris & Murphy 2007; Paharia et al. 2009). It is precisely this reasoning that many participants also used to limit their own scope of moral responsibility towards the suffering.

Second, the moral obligations they *did* appoint to themselves could more easily be dis-obeyed. Besides *limiting* moral responsibilities, the stressing of the collective moral responsibilities was an effective way for participants to cope with their feelings of guilt by attenuating the severity of not answering calls of moral responsibility. Moral responsibilities were distributed and diffused over many different agents in the global community. Boltanski (1999) noted that, in case of collective moral responsibility, an individual's responsibility and his or her actions become much less significant. By emphasizing the collective moral obligations, the importance of the *individual* moral obligations become less significant so that the act of disobeying to imposed moral obligation becomes less severe as well (Boltanski 1999; Paharia 2009). By emphasizing their collective responsibilities towards the suffering, their individual moral obligations were mitigated because their own moral obligations became less significant. The severity of the consequences by not acting became less for the participants since they were not the only ones being responsible for the (alleviation of) suffering.

Until now, it has become apparent that most participants do see themselves to be morally responsible for the alleviation of the distant suffering albeit only to a certain extent. The awareness of being morally responsible did not always lead to people's willingness to act. It sometimes led to feelings of guilt. These feelings of guilt were often dismissed or attenuated by emphasizing the collective moral responsibilities towards the distant suffering. In addition, the scope of moral responsibilities could be limited so that only short-term moral responsibilities remained.

4.3. Cosmopolitan identities?

Still, the participants' asserted pre-condition that they would only help if others would help too, does remind of the conditional agency that Chouliaraki (2006) proposed. Put in this context, their emphasis of collective responsibility can be explained as a cosmopolitan contemplation of moral responsibility. After all, Chouliaraki wrote that spectators could be more inclined to do something when everyone who is involved (that is, those who are watching and those who are put on display) cooperate with each other. In other words, in line with a more cosmopolitan attitude the pre-conditioned global cooperation expressed by the participants implies a cosmopolitan stance of the participants. As some noted, 'the whole world needs to do something'. Yet, the pre-conditions that participants set, were not directed at the 'personalized victim' that Chouliaraki pictured. Instead their pre-conditions were aimed at organisations and governments, not at the people that live in the Horn of Africa. Seeing that preconditions were not aimed at the victims implies that the people in the Horn of Africa were still viewed as a generalized 'African' victim with no agency. So, instead of a 'global' cooperation, most participants asked for a 'western' cooperation to do something about the disaster in the Horn of Africa.

An important focus of this study has been how audience react to the *cosmopolitan* discourse of distant suffering in the news and how this can appeal to their moral responsibility. During the sessions it became clear that while there is a sense of moral responsibility, this was not necessarily a result from the cosmopolitan discourse. Moreover, the cosmopolitan message of the video clip hardly came across amongst the audience. It is safe to say that the cosmopolitan discourse, which promotes togetherness and interconnectedness and a global solidarity (Chouliaraki 2006; Linklater 2009; Ong 2009), was not experienced by most participants. Indeed, most still preferably and automatically identified with their Dutch or western background, not with a global community and the people in the Horn of Africa were still all too often generalized as 'Africans'. The thinking in terms of the west and the rest, or in 'us' versus 'them', as many participants did, only seemed to reiterate differences and re-establish a distance between the suffering and the audience. By the repetitive naming of the differences between the suffering in 'Africa' and the citizens in western and organisations in 'western countries', the 'western' identity was established (being rich, prosperous and educated) opposed to the distant Other (poor, African, undereducated). This opposing of the western people to the 'Africans' is very much in line with the process of 'othering' as described earlier (Brown 2000; Fair 1993; Kothari 2005; Mahadeo & McKinney 2007; Tajfel 1982). 'Othering' is the process whereby the identity of the 'self' is construed by

comparing to the Other (Brown 2000). Such comparing creates and reinforces a hierarchical and unequal relationship between the Other and the Self (Joye 2010; Kothari 2005; Brown 2000). The Other in this case, is the suffering, undereducated, poor and underdeveloped 'African' who was compared with themselves, being western, rich, well-educated and prosperous. Not only does this reinforce the unequal relationship between the west and the rest, it also reinforces the sort of 'banal' nationalism that Billig (1995) described. Billig noted that the expression of 'us' or 'we' in discourses is often naturally and automatically interpreted as a reference to the nation that a person lives in. Since this happens so unnoticed, banal nationalism is an obstinate social phenomenon that is not easily overcome (Billig 1995). Indeed, during the sessions, most people automatically assumed that the 'we' in the video clip indicated a western audience and this is similar with Billig's (1995) notion of a 'banal nationalism'. In this case, the banal nationalism did not only consist of a Dutch identity but seemed to be extended to a 'western' kind of (supra-)nationalism. That so many did not include the people in the Horn of Africa and still automatically thought in terms of a Dutch or a western society shows how difficult it is to overcome the hierarchical and distinctive relationship between the Other, in this case the 'Africans' and the Self, in this case the 'westerners'.

Yet, despite this apparent continuing process of 'othering' there are also silver linings on the horizon. First of all, most participants were willing to engage with distant Others either by making efforts to relate or feel connected with them, or by a willingness to someday go to Africa and volunteer in a charity organisation. The *attempts* to relate and feel compassionate towards the victims might lead to a more truly felt connection with the displayed people. Smith (1998) has argued that an *emotional* sense of care or compassion towards victims in remote places is extremely difficult. He argues that a more reasoned sense of care is more realistic and might, eventually, even lead to a more emotionally based sense of care. Caring about a person, whether emotional or rational implies that there is a connection, or can at least result in that people are more able to relate with the victim albeit not on an emotional level (Smith 1998). Bearing in mind Smith's argument, the attempts of the audience to empathize, relate and identify with the victims can be seen as the beginning of a process that can result in more care towards distant suffering and a closer relationship between themselves and the distant Others. The attempts to relate with the sufferers and their willingness to go there, implicates a certain willingness to engage with Others. A major part of cosmopolitanism, as has been mentioned, is this willingness to engage with Others (Ong 2009). Yet, while the principle of engaging with others was adopted, the participants still did

not truly engage with Others. Dobson's (2006) made the distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' cosmopolitanism. Thin cosmopolitanism being about *accepting* the principles, while thick cosmopolitanism is also about *acting out* of these principles. The attitudes of the participants can be interpreted in that way; while some cosmopolitan principles were acknowledged and expressed, participants did not (yet) act upon these principles.

A second, more broad conclusion from the observations is that participants had both a national and, say, supranational identity. Beck and Cronin (2006) argued how transnational media can result in more fluid and inclusive organized society. That it is possible that societies and individuals may be able to identify in more than one way, so that there is a more flexible notion of belonging which holds that people can belong to more than one group (Beck & Cronin 2006). Participants identified with being Dutch but also identified with a western society which includes many other countries. This shows that the participants shifted and expanded the boundaries within which they construed and expressed their identities. The social boundaries are expanded from a nationalist to a 'supra-nationalist' identity. From this, it can be concluded that their idea of belonging is indeed crossing borders and boundaries are becoming more flexible, expanding to include more people and more communities. It remains the question whether the western identity is only an expansion of an 'us-them' divide, or whether people will be able to someday also identify with *all* of humanity in a cosmopolitan society. From the more pessimistic stance, based on the social identity theory, it could be concluded that there will always be a divide between different peoples, as that is the only way that the identity of the 'self' can be construed. As Chouliaraki noted, the broadening of the national identity to a western transnational identity could be the re-definition of an already existing hierarchical unequal relationship between different societies (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 10). On the other hand, from a more optimistic view, based on the cosmopolitan ideologies, it could be argued that it is possible that people will learn to think in more fluid and inclusive terms towards distant other societies so that differences are not criticized but celebrated. This way, the broadening of people's scope of identity could eventually lead to a way of identifying that includes the distant 'other' as much as the nearby 'self'.

4.4. Final conclusion

It is important to remind ourselves of the ethics that media can show, represent and shape, and to stay focused not only on how media represent these ethics, but to look at how such ethics are received, processed and contemplated by the audience. The current discussion about audiences' responses to images of distant suffering focuses too much on how audiences

respond at a more emotional level. With this study, the aim was to expand the discussion about audiences' responses on distant suffering by incorporating empirical evidence of audiences' responses at a more rational level.

Many of the participants did express feelings of numbness about the distant suffering. Indeed, Moeller's (1999) argument that the repetitive images of distant suffering results in a numbing and desperate attitude amongst people in the audience was also found during the focus group sessions. Moeller argues that from these feelings of helplessness, people are suffering from 'compassion fatigue' (Moeller 1999). Her arguments have been criticized by other scholars who have pointed out that spectators can still feel compassionate about distant suffering. It has been pointed out that people are not entirely indifferent and can feel compassionate towards distant suffering, though these feelings are often reserved for specialized circumstances, such as when an 'ideal victim' is displayed (Höijer 2004). During this study it has become apparent that instead of completely staying indifferent and passive about the distant suffering, the participants did feel inclined to do *something*. Not necessarily out of compassion or care, but out of a sense of moral plight. From this, it could be stated that some participants were inclined to help *despite* a lack of feelings towards the distant suffering.

Still, the scope of their moral obligations was limited. It can be asked how far our scope of concern and moral responsibilities *should* reach. After all, in a globalizing society it can be argued that our agency is as limited as the participants believed. Following from this, it can be argued that our scope of responsibilities lie as far as our agency lies since we cannot be held responsible for something that we had no control over. This is an ethical discussion that has been held for decades. Singer (1972) has argued that our moral responsibilities does reach as far as the global society and asserted that we are as much responsible for the distant suffering in distant places as for the suffering nearby. Abelson (2005) on the other hand wrote that Singer may be too ideological and unrealistic. Abelson (2005) takes the position that moral responsibilities are reserved to where we can influence the outcomes of our actions and in case of more distance there are too many external factors that influence the outcome of any action. This study has not focused on the ethical debate of the reach of moral responsibilities but has focused on how people in the audience carry out this discussion. From this, it has become clear that most participants assumed Abelson's position and saw themselves morally responsible only for the most direct, close-by occurrences. According to most, more long-term structural events are under too much influence of other agents so that the individual has

little control over the outcome. In this case, the conclusion was reached that one cannot be held responsible for the long term alleviation of distant suffering.

The moral responsibilities that participants *did* attribute to themselves were not, as has been argued, a result of a global, cosmopolitan contemplation. Indeed, the moral responsibilities seemed come from their being Dutch or western. Their western prosperity, their capability of doing something to help were strong motivations to donate money while more cosmopolitan reasoning, i.e. that they would be morally responsible because of a shared human citizenship and increased solidarity, was hardly expressed during the sessions. This way, the differences between the 'rest' and the 'west' were only reiterated.

4.5. Final remarks, limitations and recommended further research

It must be noted that the conclusions made in this study cannot be generalized to a greater population. For this study, students were asked to take part in focus groups and while this can elicit some important issues and thoughts that are important for people in the audience, it does not tell how other people (i.e. *non*-students) would react to images. Indeed, the exception during this study, the student who was also a mother, was one of the few people in the audience who did not have as much trouble to relate and identify with the suffering people on screen. She did say that she could relate more with the people because she was a parent, just as the people on television. Thus, it may be possible that people who are in a different phase of their lives, e.g. working adults with or without children, may react differently. In addition, the dominant opinion amongst the students was one that rather naturally assumed and accepted to be morally responsible though not necessarily because of a cosmopolitan citizenship. Amongst a more diverse audience there will likely be more diverse dominant opinions. There is a chance that non-students will feel more addressed by the cosmopolitan discourse. That is to say, non-students may more likely identify with the distant Other as a fellow human being in a shared global community. Or non-students may be more indifferent to the distant suffering not feel so morally responsible as naturally as many of the students did. In addition, ironically this study has found its disadvantage because there was no real, emergent and recent disaster that could be shown to the participants. The images shown to the participants were from a year and a half back. This may have compromised the outcome of this study.

This study has aimed to open up the discussion about responses to images of distant suffering by doing empirical research and focus more on the moral consciousness of people instead of their emotional reactions. In this study it has become apparent that most people in

the audience do feel morally responsible for the alleviation of suffering although the scope of their moral responsibility is still limited. Yet, though more light has been shed on people's moral deliberations, this thesis has only started to initiate this discussion; further research is needed to expand the discussion even further. It would be recommendable to carry out a similar study as this one, but include a more diverse group of participants. This way more can be said about the reactions of all kinds of people, not just students. It would also be recommendable to carry out an *ad hoc* study similar to this one, during a time of a real and emergent disaster. This kind of knowledge can be employed by media in the future to optimise messages about distant suffering towards the audience. Eventually people's awareness of living in a global society could thus be increased so that distant others will be included by the audience and broaden their scope of moral responsibility.

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Attachment 1: Mode of operation for focus group

Recruitment

Recruitment of people has been done by asking if students would like to participate in a research for the finalization of a master thesis. During the recruiting of people possible candidates are told that the research is about 'how people react to bad news from distant places'. If people show interest it is then told that candidates who will participate will be shown a short video clip from the national Dutch news broadcaster (what kind of video-clip is not clarified) after which a short discussion with other fellow-participants will be held.

Introduction of the focus group session

At the beginning of the focus group session I have introduced myself and explained the topic of the discussion for the remainder of the session:

"Good afternoon everyone, and thank you all for willing to participate in this focus group for this research. In the next hour, first a short movie clip will be shown that introduces you to the main topic of conversation. This movie is about the draught in the Horn of Africa that happened mid-2011. Although this is already some time ago, I would like you to think how you felt when this was happening and think about what you would do if this message were sent today.

On the basis of this video clip we will have a discussion about how this video clip affects you. We will start with some overall first impressions that you may have had when seeing the images. Everyone is different and will have a personal reaction to the clip. It is these different reactions that I'm interested in. Hopefully, the different reactions will lead to a discussion about the ways that you can react and respond to these images. I will act as the moderator of the discussion and see to it that everyone can express themselves equally."

The video clip

After this, the video clip about the draught and famine in the Horn of Africa entitled "Draught in the Horn of Africa" was shown.

'Droogte in de Hoorn van Afrika', 13-07-2011.

http://www.uitzending.net/gemist/55087/Nederland-1/NOS_Journaal_2000.html

First impressions

After showing the video clip, if participants would not start the discussion by themselves I would ask:

"What is your first thought after seeing this video clip?"

Possible questions during the focus group

During the remainder of the sessions I have asked, if this was not brought up by the participants, the following questions:

"In the video-clip, the UN secretary-general Ban-Ki Moon is presented and he states that help from all over the world is needed to prevent further escalation of this disaster. Do you feel addresses when he speaks of this 'whole world'? Why? Why not?"

"Do you feel, in any way, connected with the people on the video? And who do you feel connected with?"

"Would you also help the distant suffering? Why? Why not?"

"Do you feel guilty when you see these images? Why? Why not?"

Attachment 2: Participants

Focus group 1 (09-04-2013):

1	Ally	18	Female	Wijsbegeerte
2	Roy	18	Male	Econometrie
3	Yvonne	22	Female	Gezondheidswetenschappen

Focus group 2 (10-04-2013):

4	Edwin	26	Male	Geschiedenis
5	Evelien	23	Female	Econometrie
6	Jaap	19	Male	Economie en Bedrijfskunde
7	Pieter	22	Male	Geschiedenis

Focus group 3 (11-04-2013):

8	Giselle	19	Female	Geschiedenis
9	Maartje	25	Female	Premaster Bedrijfskunde
10	Richard	20	Male	Geschiedenis
11	Rob	20	Male	Economie en Bedrijfseconomie
12	Sjimmie	24	Male	Geschiedenis

Focus group 4 (15-04-2013):

13	Feline	19	Female	International Business and Administration (IBA)
14	Gert	22	Male	Master Economie
15	Maarten	23	Male	Premaster IBA
16	Steven	20	Male	Econometrie
17	Thomas	24	Male	IBA

Focus group 5 (16-04-2013):

18	Bert	26	Male	Arbeid en Organisatie psychologie
19	Denise	25	Female	Psychologie

20	Josje	22	Female	Fiscale Economie
21	Khadima	23	Female	Afgestudeerd Beleid en Politiek
22	Robert	22	Male	Commerciële Economie
23	Soraya	20	Female	Psychologie

Focus group 6 (17-04-2013):

24	Cor	19	Male	Bedrijfskunde
25	Florian	24	Male	Premaster Bedrijfskunde
26	Martin	19	Male	Bachelor Economie
27	Thijs	22	Male	Bedrijfskunde

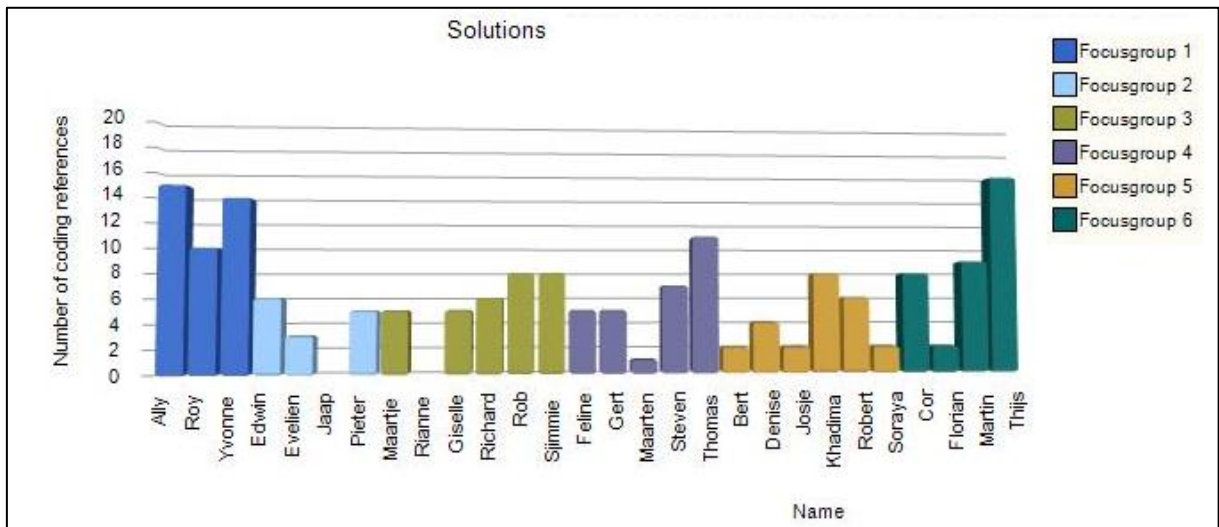## Attachment 3: Visualisation of codes of transcript

Figure 1: Number of times that participants discussed solutions (average: 6,18 times)

The figure above (figure 1) shows a chart that depicts the number of times that each participant at any point during a session discussed how the problems shown in the video clip could be resolved.

The figure (figure 2) below shows which participants mentioned that political solutions executed by political organisations were needed to really and more fundamentally solve this problem.
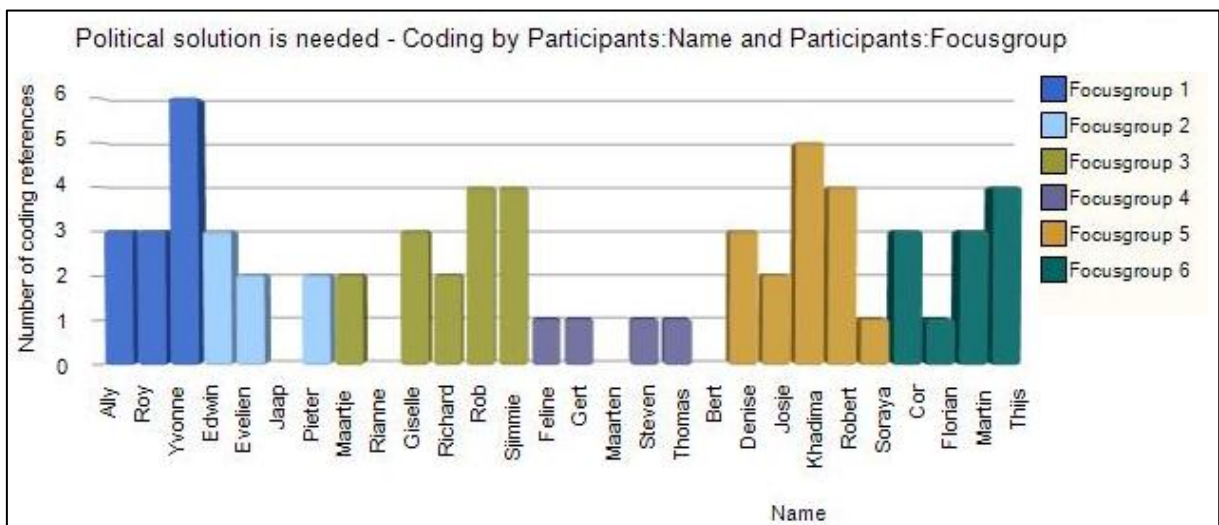

Figure 2: Number of times participants mentioned political solutions are needed (average: 2.29)