

Taking spoofs seriously

The counter-narrative potential of spoofs as critical discourse

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Abstract

This article explores how the theoretical framework of “counter-narrative” can be a resource for the analysis of spoofing videos. Using spoofs deployed by activist organizations to critique Western aid appeals and “voluntourism,” we 1) investigate the intertextual mechanisms of spoof videos as counter-narrative and how spoofers borrow generic conventions and use them to create alternative narratives, and 2) discuss the consequences of their cultural depictions, for example for the discourse of volunteering, which we examine here, particularly in light of tendencies toward self-reflecting campaigns identified by Chouliaraki (2013). Through these understandings, we draw lessons about the counter-narrative potential of spoofs used as critique and edification and their ambivalent status as counter-narratives. As critiques, they may hold a mirror to viewers’ self-perceptions and motivations. Yet, this self-reflexive strategy carries the risk of self-congratulatory complicity with the genres they seek to critique and the discourses and power relations upon which they depend.

Introduction

As a form of parody, a spoof involves borrowing from and creatively revising the source which is its object of parody and, as a result, is at once both an imitation of the original and a reworking of it which offers a new, often critical, perception of its content and/or its form (Vanden Bergh et al., 2011). In this article, we examine the critical potential of video spoofs of humanitarian aid appeals, particularly their capacity to constitute counter-narratives to the master narratives in Western culture which undergird the genres of humanitarian communication.

Deployed by activist organizations and individuals to critique Western aid appeals and *voluntourism* in African countries, spoofs of humanitarian appeals offer alternative representations to discourses which rely on the *white savior complex* often realized through what has been referred to as *poverty porn* and oversimplified portrayals of receivers of humanitarian and charity aid. Spoofs constitute a means by which organizations and individuals can respond critically to these portrayals, calling attention to misrepresentations by employing—and, often, exaggerating—the same generic conventions which they critique, with humor as the (intended) result. For example, the spoof video produced by the Norwegian Students and Academics International Assistance Fund (SAIH), *Who Wants to Be a Volunteer?* (SAIH, 2014), uses the generic frame of the game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” combined with stereotypical representations from aid donation campaigns to tell the story of “Lilly,” a selfie-taking volunteer from a Western country who is convinced that Africa consists of only one country. This, and similar spoofs, as we will discuss, ridicule humanitarian *feel good* appeals designed to involve the emotions and the self-image of the viewer through a *What is in it for me?* communicative strategy, which Chouliaraki has shown tends to characterize contemporary appeals (2013, pp. 3-4). The spoof foregrounds volunteers’ self-serving motives and their lack of knowledge about the countries, cultures, and people they wish to help, and it problematizes oversimplified and homogenizing portrayals of Africans in need.

Our aim in the present article is to investigate the capacity of spoofs to provide narratives which counter dominant cultural narratives about the relationship between Western donors and African receivers of humanitarian aid. Through an analysis of the ways which spoofs imitate and simultaneously revise the conventions of humanitarian appeals, for example, by mixing them with genres from popular culture, we argue that spoofs have an ambivalent status as counter-narratives. As critiques, they hold a mirror to Western viewers, inviting them to see themselves, their self-perceptions, and their motivations. Yet, by adopting this self-reflexive strategy in appealing to these same viewers—inviting them to laugh along—both spoofers and viewers alike risk a self-congratulatory complicity with the genres they seek to critique and the discourses and power relations upon which they depend. In examining this ambivalence, we hope to add to an understanding of what Chouliaraki has described as a tendency toward strategies in humanitarian communication in which “solidarity is anchored [...] in the spectacle of others like us, inviting our

capacity for self-reflection” (p. 20). Not only is attention to this tendency necessary for a more holistic understanding of humanitarian communication, as Chouliaraki writes, but it takes on heightened relevance in light of recent critiques of voluntourism and volunteers and donors’ misconceptions of vulnerable others (for discussions of this see, e.g., Angod, 2015; Hall & Raymond, 2008; McGehee, 2012).

In order to understand spoof videos’ critical capacity toward dominant narratives, we analyze their imitations and revisions of the genre of humanitarian appeal and discuss these through the conceptual framework of counter-narratives, i.e., narratives whose meanings are dependent upon their relations with other narratives, and which engage in acts of critique or resistance to cultural master narratives which perpetuate the logic of the white savior and the dependent other.

The data for our analysis are based on spoof videos found through searches through the above-mentioned humanitarian organization, SAIH, for which spoofs are a primary mode of communication about stereotypes, and references from critical articles about volunteering (Kushner, 2016; Sullivan, 2017), as well as through YouTube searches. After a presentation of the phenomenon of humanitarian spoofs, the theoretical framework of the white savior narrative and concepts of master narratives, counter-narratives, and spoofing, we turn to the generic components and strategies of the videos’ construction. We analyze how verbal, visual, and audial modes are used to realize unexpected elements, reversals, and exaggerations of conventional generic elements.

In an in-depth analysis, we focus on one exemplary spoof of humanitarian appeal, *Let’s Save Africa! – Gone Wrong*, (SAIH, 2012), but we also refer to other examples and draw parallels to them. On the basis of our analysis, we discuss the ways which spoofs both counter the white savior master narrative and the self-promotion of volunteers and remain complicit with them, as they share conventions with the original videos upon which they draw. In light of this ambivalence, we suggest that, in spite of their intent, the counter-narrative spoofs in some ways remain so deeply embedded in the kinds of strategies they critique, they inadvertently reproduce them.

In our theoretical and analytical focus, we find the concept of counter-narrative particularly useful in the case of spoofs because spoofs exhibit a stance-taking and intertextual relation to the original material which, as we will explain, is similar to the relation between a master and a counter-narrative. Both spoofs and counter-narratives have critical potential, and both raise the question of how critique is manifested in texts and films through conventions of representation. Because our analytical focus is on representation, we touch less here on the role of digital platforms and social media in their production and distribution. Yet, we do address users’ possible motivations for using spoofing as a form of self-realization enabled by the affordances and availability of media because these, in some ways, reproduce the self-promoting strategies which spoofs seek to critique.

All in all, our intent is to shed light on the ambivalence inherent in spoofs between their critical, counter-narrative potential and their dependence on the same generic elements which they critique. In the case of humanitarian communication, this furthers an understanding of the tendency toward appeals to viewers' feelings about themselves. With respect to spoofs more generally, we show how an examination of the ways that generic elements are parodied, through verbal, visual, and audial cues which create surprise, reversals, and exaggerations, can help us understand spoofers' representational strategies. These strategies, coupled with the concept of counter-narrative, can provide a framework for the analysis of spoofs, particularly those which address problematic social issues and/or are designed to edify viewers.

Master and counter-narratives

The white savior complex has a history as a master narrative for how the relations between receivers and givers of aid are understood, practiced, and represented. As explained by Acevedo, Ordner, and Thompson (2010), the term master narrative has been used by postmodern and critical race theorists "to denote an all-encompassing and authoritative account of some aspect of social reality that is widely accepted and endorsed by the larger society" (p. 125). Explorations of counter-narratives include how they influence understandings of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004), class and education (Piekut, 2017), and organizations (Frandsen, Lundholt, & Kuhn, 2017). Halverson et al. (2011) explain that a master narrative is "a trans-historical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture" (p. 14), where culture is understood as "an interrelated set of shared characteristics or qualities claimed by an ethnic, social, or religious group to which human beings collectively identify" (ibid.). Master narratives are discourses which gain cultural authority through mechanisms of social, political, and institutional structures of power. Their power depends upon cultural acceptance at the same time that they are constitutive of the culture upon which that acceptance depends. Thus, cultures provide the specific context for power to be designated, carried out, and contested.

The term *master* reflects power to dominate, repress, or even silence alternative narratives. Accordingly, a master narrative has the potential to serve as a script for the ways which social processes and relations are carried out (Stanley, 2007). They tend to "normalize" and "naturalize" events (Stanley, p. 360), and, thus, constrain the range of actions and interpretations available to individuals. While they are culturally endorsed and perpetuated, the scripts of master narratives serve the function of framing self-perceptions and identity, as well as behavior. As Bamberg and Andrews assert, "[t]he power of master narratives derives from their internalisation [...] we become the stories we know, and the master narrative is reproduced" (p. 11).

The scripts of cultural master narratives therefore serve to constrain the generic expectations toward form and content which, in turn, constrain individual narrative representations. As Bamberg (2004) argues, a master narrative provides a storyline which serves as a blueprint, or what has been termed a “masterplot” by Abbott (2008), which may be fleshed out in different, particular narrative instances (p. 47). That is to say that narratives dominant within a culture serve as blueprints for representational genres which then provide conventions for the realization of narratives in particular works of, say, film or text.

In humanitarian communication, the master narrative of the white savior provides a masterplot that is made visible in individual instances of a genre, such as the appeal to donate or volunteer. This can be seen, for example, in depersonalizing and deindividualizing images of suffering and vulnerable others. Hunger has been visualized through images of emaciated children, impoverished living conditions, villages with makeshift houses, and the adverse effects on the environment in areas ravaged by drought or natural disaster. These were superseded, as Chouliaraki has shown, by a tendency toward personalizing strategies, which portray individual people with names and personal stories, in an effort to awaken the viewer’s solidarity through a sense of shared humanity (Chouliaraki, 2013). Increasingly, these have given way to a focus on Western donors, including volunteers who *make a difference*, and celebrities, as in songs by the charity musical group Band Aid (Chouliaraki, 2013; Lundholt, 2017). Across these shifts of strategy, however, the images reproduce common notions of the disempowered receivers of aid and those empowered to help. These notions remain uncontested.

In view of the pervasiveness of master narratives, developing narratives to counter them may seem an impossible task, a point which is reflected in discussions of the concept of counter-narrative. As Bamberg (2004) asserts, one view on master narratives is that they form an all-encompassing grand narrative whose terms are impossible to exit (pp. 359-360), and, therefore, even attempts at resistance are complicit with them. This makes the concept of counter-narrative useful in the context of spoofing, since spoofs both imitate and undertake a revision of the models which they borrow.

As a conceptual term, counter-narrative has been defined in various ways, but generally refers to narratives which are understood through their stance-taking toward one or more other narratives (Andrews, 2004; Gabriel, 2016; Johansen, 2016; Lundholt, Maagaard, & Piekut, forthcoming, 2018). The specific aspect of stance, or positioning, distinguishes them from other forms of intertextuality (Lundholt et al., forthcoming, 2018). This positionality has been seen as a means of opposing or resisting socially and culturally informed master narratives (about, for example, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and profession), which are normative or oppressive, or exclude perspectives or experiences which diverge from those conveyed through the master narratives. In this sense, counter-narratives play a role in storytellers’ positioning themselves against, or critiquing, the themes and ideologies of master narratives. Accordingly, counter-narratives refer to “the

stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews, 2004, p. 1).

Studies of the counter-narrative investigate how an individual’s story constitutes a reaction to such scripts and “an attempt to regain moral agency and humanity” (Acevedo, Ordner, & Thompson, 2010, p. 61). In counter-narratives, the singular experiences of individuals provide evidence of exceptions to the rule of the master narrative. In studies of the counter-narrative, an individual is typically regarded within the context of larger groups with identity markers such as membership in a specific social class, profession, ethnic or racial group, gender, sexuality, or religion—or a combination of these.

Humanitarian communication and spoofs

Spoof videos have in recent years become a form of expression which incorporates humor to engage critically with forms of humanitarian communication. The Norwegian organization SAIH, for example, uses spoof videos and their annual Radi-Aid award as part of a campaign to educate the public about the potentially damaging consequences of stereotypes and lack of knowledge about the societies, cultures, and people who receive humanitarian aid. Spoofing of humanitarian communication is one of the many critical perspectives on cultural issues produced by the comedians Tripp and Tyler (see Tripp & Tyler, 2013). Similarly, spoofs are a vehicle for the *Campaign to End Humanitarian Douchery* on Twitter, as well as in their video *If Voluntourists Talked about North America* (2015) and on the Instagram *Barbie Savior* site, both of which call attention to the self-serving motives of volunteers.

Such spoofs can be seen as part of a wider, critical concern with the problems associated with humanitarian aid and voluntourism, particularly cases of volunteers doing more harm than good for receivers of aid, and with humanitarian appeals, in general, in which recruitment or advertisements for donations involve appeals to adventure, the bolstering of one’s CV, self-fulfillment, and the good feelings of the donor which come from helping others. These appeals are characteristic of shifts in the representation of solidarity with vulnerable others which Chouliaraki has argued have occurred in the decades since the 1960s. In exploring the ways solidarity is communicated and stimulated, Chouliaraki traces historical developments in humanitarian communication. As she shows, representations of the 1960s and 70s focused on the suffering other, inviting pity and compelling the viewer’s desire to help others without expectation of a return. Appeals of the 1980s and 90s shifted toward depicting receivers of aid as singular individuals with whom viewers may identify and be urged to support through humanitarian assistance. Where these forms of appeal move viewers to solidarity through a focus on the other, later appeals demonstrate a turn toward strategies prompting viewers’ self-reflection. Chouliaraki describes these shifts as departures from those in which “doing good to others is about our common humanity and asks nothing back” toward what follows as:

the emergence of a self-oriented morality, where doing good to others is about “how I feel” and must, therefore, be rewarded by minor gratifications to the self—the new emotionality of the quiz, the confessions of our favorite celebrity, the thrill of the rock concert and Twitter journalism being only some of its manifestations (pp. 3-4).

This preoccupation with the self and the emotional reward for helping others is, at times, sustained by representations of the role of the Western volunteer as the answer to the problems of the Global South. This conception of the white savior, famously dubbed the “White Savior Industrial Complex” by novelist Teju Cole (2012), has historical roots in colonialism and continues today. As Cole writes:

One song we hear too often is the one in which Africa serves as a backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism [...] Africa has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected [...] A nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional need satisfied. Many have done it under the banner of “making a difference” (2012, p. 2).

With the increase in international volunteering and the emergence of voluntourism (McGehee & Santos, 2005), the white savior has been an assumption underlying volunteer work. According to Straubhaar, “For those Western oppressor-class folk that seek out employment in development, this privilege often exhibits itself as a sense that we as Westerners have the unique power to uplift, edify and strengthen: what I here refer to as the White Savior complex” (2014, p. 384).

Also noted by Straubhaar (*ibid.*), the ideology on which the white savior complex rests is pervasive in the West and can be traced to other genres, such as literature (Cornett, 2010) and film (Hughey, 2010; Vera & Gordon, 2003). Recently a growing critique of projects of white saviors takes place on social media platforms where people can beam out or *like* examples of the complex under the hashtag #WhiteSaviorComplex.

Spoofing and the double-voiced discourse

The gap between, on the one hand, representations of the capabilities and good intentions of the West and the need of the receiving populations, and, on the other, the realities of motivations and outcomes makes the white savior master narrative, and the representations which perpetuate it, ripe for comment and critique. Aware of the problematic representations used by humanitarian programs, organizations such as SAIH and the #endhumanitariandouchery site active on Twitter include spoofs to instruct and educate. Before moving on to an analysis of their counter-narrative potential, we will first elaborate on the concept of spoofing and then briefly touch on the role of media in its effects.

Spoof videos have been used by organizations to critique the logic of the white savior complex, engaging with the master narrative by means of humor and exposing the oversimplified plot and character representations which effectively disempower citizens

of developing countries. As we will show in the analysis, the spoofs draw on Western genres, including commercials for aid donations and *the making of* documentaries, parodying volunteers and donors who unquestioningly buy into the white savior master narrative. The prime target of spoofs is the self-congratulatory *savior*.

Defined as “lighthearted satire or good-natured parody” by Saunders (2014, p. 731), the spoof has evolved from, and still carries the subversive connotations of, its earlier meanings of “hoax” and “trickery” (Saunders, 2014, p. 731), which hark further back to its first association with card tricks. As a type of parody—a term with which it is sometimes used interchangeably (see, e.g., Berthon & Pitt, 2012)—a spoof is constructed through the imitation of another work and, thus, engages intertextually with it by misrepresenting or exaggerating its features for humorous effect in order to “make light of or ridicule a person or thing” (2014, p. 731). As Saunders explains:

Like many forms of humor, spoofing relies on the gap between reality and representation (or more often, misrepresentation) to produce mirth. Similar to parody, spoofing reproduces stylistic peculiarities of an external subject to achieve humor; however, spoofs typically target a distinct work or genre for mockery, thus requiring a higher level of parasitism than is necessary for parody (2014, p. 731).

Thus, spoofing, like parody, reproduces generic conventions recognizable from other works, but may, to a greater degree than parody, resemble the original work.

The fact that spoofs appropriate generic conventions of other texts means that they are distinguished by their function, rather than purely by their form. Nevertheless, in order for a spoof to perform that function, it must be recognized *as* a spoof whose form closely resembles the spoofed. As Saunders points out, “In order to mitigate the inherent tension between playful misrepresentation and actual deception, a spoof must be understood by its audience as a hoax” (2014, p. 731). While the spoof may poke fun at a text in order to perform a *good-natured* critique, receivers must, as Georgakopoulou shows, manage what Rabinowitz (1976) has termed a double-consciousness (Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 70). That is, the viewer must be familiar with the form and function of the original material, as well as able to decode the spoof’s parody of these as an intended comment on the original. Consequently, the text which functions parodically exemplifies the *double-voicedness* of language itself, which, according to Bakhtin, is exhibited through discourse which “serves two speakers at the same time but expresses simultaneously two different intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324). In the expression of an intention which differs from the original, spoofs have counter-narrative potential; through them, the spoofer may challenge or resist dominant cultural master narratives. Nevertheless, because parodic texts reproduce the conventions of the parodied, they rely on, and are embedded within, the same narrative patterns. This raises questions of whether, and how, they can function as critique.

The good-naturedness of the spoof, which distinguishes it as a sub-genre of parody, suggests that the spoofer’s intent is characterized by more than derision. In their study

of spoofs on advertisements (2012) and political cartoons (2009), Berthon and Pitt (2012) identify three necessary characteristics for a person or object to be a plausible target of a spoof: empathy, differentiation, and gap. Empathy concerns the audience's ability to relate to someone or something or to understand them/it cognitively, as well as emotionally. If a receiver is able to relate to the person or object of caricature, "the joke will not fall flat. The key is to have an affective bond with the object, whether the affect is love, hate, derision, etc." (Berthon & Pitt, 2012, p. 91).

The second necessary condition is differentiation: "The object of caricature must have some sort of unique attribute(s) that differentiates the object from other objects in a given context" (ibid., p. 91). That differentiation may rest in physical characteristics or less overt, intangible ideologies. If there is no differentiation, there is nothing to spoof, Berthon and Pitt assert (2012, p. 91), citing Coupe's (1969) observations on features of caricature. The final condition is the gap, which is of particular interest when seen from a counter-narrative perspective. The gap is a perceived disparity between image and reality, that is, a misrepresentation of some perceived reality. The spoofer, according to Berthon and Pitt (2012), may "highlight" or "magnify" known disparities or may draw attention to overlooked gaps "between reality and that which the object espouses the case to be" (p. 91). Yet, as Berthon and Pitt point out, while gaps are a matter of perception, there must be some truth (or, as they put it, "facts") in support of the contention, if it is to function as intended (p. 91).

Video spoofing and media

To carry through the intent to parody, the video spoofs rely on affordances of media for their form and content, as well as for their dissemination and the potential to reach and engage with the public.

With respect to form and content, video spoofs take humanitarian appeals as their object of parody, drawing on the generic conventions of those original video forms. These provide templates for the selection and representation of receivers of aid, their physical states, their living conditions, the selection and representation of volunteers and donors, the narratives which unfold, the degree to which they unfold in adherence to cultural master narratives, and how the appeal to viewers' support is made. We return to the specifics of this in our analysis. These conventions are often combined with elements from other genres of marketing and popular culture. For example, in *Who Wants to Be a Volunteer* (SAIH, 2014), the game show format is combined with the humanitarian appeal which frames the volunteer/celebrity as a savior, as a way to call attention to the self-promotion which motivates the choice to help. Similarly, in the *Let's Save Africa! – Gone Wrong* (SAIH, 2012) spoof, the humanitarian appeal for assistance is combined with the making of a genre—itself a meta-commentary on cinematic films—which has the implied effect to elevate its subject to deserving such an elaborate commentary (Maier,

2015). Here, the *making of* is part of the spoof, and is itself spoofed and becomes its own commentary on the commentary genre.

While advertisement-based spoofs have a history with professional media outlets in satirical magazines and variety shows, the technologization of societies has given impetus to the production and distribution of humanitarian communication, as well as their spoofs, by amateurs as well as organizations (Vanden Bergh, 2011). Similarly, as Lessig (2008) discusses, the *remixing* of content from popular culture is not new, but the techniques and the ease with which users can share it are (Lessig, 2008, p. 83). Chouliaraki has argued that technologization is a factor in the tendency toward self-reflective strategies in contemporary humanitarian appeals, as the affordances of digital platforms and social media enable the interactive appeal of online quizzes, the capacity to view, distribute, and comment on images, and the one-click donation or support, all of which target viewers' feelings about themselves.

Furthermore, although this self-focus in donors, volunteers, and celebrities is precisely what spoofs parody, as we will discuss below, the spoof itself can be a self-serving act, designed to put the prowess of the spoofer—as well as the astute viewer who “gets” the spoof—on display. As the affordances of digital and social media, such as YouTube and Vimeo, have become available to users, the spoof has become what Ortega (2014) calls “one of the primary manners through which Internet users inscribe their own creativity on the Web [...] and re-contextualize audiovisual content to challenge the distinction between those who produce and those who consume culture” (p. 150). Similarly, a study on ad parodies by Vanden Bergh et al. (2011) found a multiplicity of purposes for creating and uploading them on social media, including “sharing entertainment, debunking brand identities and advertising techniques, satirising the institution of advertising, engaging in cultural criticism, and showing off personal skills” (p. 109). Thus, a potentially ambivalent set of spoofers' motivations for, and viewers' reactions to, spoofs may affect the critical function and reception of them. With this in mind, we turn to an analysis of an exemplary video spoof before drawing conclusions.

Analysis: SAIH's *Let's Save Africa! – Gone Wrong*

In November 2013, the spoof video *Let's Save Africa! – Gone Wrong* (SAIH, 2012) was launched on YouTube and became a viral hit; so far it has received almost 9,000 likes and has been shown nearly 1.5 million times (October, 2016). The organization behind the spoof is the Norwegian SAIH established in 1961. With the motto, “Education for Liberation,” the fund aims at educating young people, in order to contribute to the creation of “a more just and inclusive society” (SAIH, 2018).

The video was launched as the beginning of a campaign addressing the theme “Our image of the [G]lobal South,” which was finalized by the announcement of two awards: “The Golden Radiator Award” (awarded to the best fundraising video using creativity

and creating engagement) and the “Rusty Radiator Award” (awarded to the fundraising video with the worst use of stereotypes). The aim of the campaign, according to SAIH, was to illustrate that charity campaigns run the risk of being counterproductive to their own goals if they obscure the actual causes of poverty and that portraying poor people as passive recipients of help generates a distinction between “us” and “them” (SAIH, 2016). The web-based non-profit for Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) crowned *Let’s Save Africa! – Gone Wrong* one of the world’s ten best videos in 2013, and, according to SAIH (2016), the video has been covered by TV2, NRK, Aftenposten, Dagbladet, Al-Jazeera, BBC, NPR, Radio France Internationale, and Süddeutsche Zeitung.

Let’s Save Africa! is a short video which spoofs the single story and classic stereotypes which often appear in international aid fundraising campaign videos. The typical campaign is constructed not only around classic stereotypes, but on conventions of the charity appeal, which can be characterized according to their verbal, visual, and auidial modes.

In the verbal mode, the spokesperson appeals to the viewer with the intent to persuade the viewer to donate. The appeal may include a description of the fate of an individual person as a representative of the whole, for example, a child who is ill, parentless, and suffering from poverty, including lack of access to health care and/or education. The price of a donation is stated in terms which emphasize how small an amount it is for the donor, but how large a difference it can make in the lives of the receivers of aid. The appeal employs inclusive and operative discourse, including use of the second-person “you” to address the viewer.

In the visual mode, the spokesperson is shown in interaction with members of the population in the setting in which donations are needed (housing, schools, and medical centers). Moreover, visual depictions of before/after situations are applied to illustrate the transformation which the donator can facilitate (shift from a hungry child to a well-nourished child), thereby positioning the donor as savior.

In the auidial mode, the sound of voices and the cries and laughter of spokespersons and members of the population are combined with music which creates pathos and underscores direness and/or gratitude (instrumental, strings, and piano). The suffering child often seems to be depicted as helpless in the sense that he or she is not even given a voice. Often, the voice-over narrates the story for the child, retaining the child as helpless.

In addition to the charity appeal, *Let’s Save Africa!* spoofs conventions from the making-of a genre, a film about the making of a film. This is also evoked through verbal, visual, and auidial modes. The verbal mode conveys the personal biographical information of actors, directors, and others involved in the production of the film, which may convey inspiration for the film, challenges of making the film, and what the film and/or its subject matter means to the creators and actors personally and professionally.

The visual style uses the realism characteristics of documentaries (Maier, 2015): an actor seated in the director’s chair; actors preparing for scenes (e.g., make-up, rehearsal, and talking with the director) or acting, sometimes under direction; the film crew

engaged in setting up, filming, editing, and the like; and directors directing actors and starting and stopping filming by yelling “Action” and “Cut!” The genre is further established within the audial mode through actors, directors, and others’ voices in dialogue or voice-over, sounds from the scenes themselves, and music which emphasizes the dramatic elements of the filming process.

According to Maier (2015), the making-of film in organizational settings exists in a tension between documentary sobriety and realism on the one hand, and promotional discourse on the other. In the case of *Let’s Save Africa!* the documentary realism is actually a fiction about a fictional charity appeal. According to Maier, the making-of film elevates the status of the original film, by suggesting it is important enough to deserve its own making-of film. Moreover, it addresses the viewers as connoisseurs, able to recognize and appreciate the elements of the original film (Maier, 2015).

Let’s save Africa! shifts repeatedly between the two generic frames, with sequences of the earnest and pathos-based charity appeal interrupted by sequences of the making-of a genre, which include apparent outtakes. The young African child star, Michael, is the protagonist, and it soon becomes apparent that he is typecast: This is a role he has played several times before. As he says in one of the making of sequences from his director’s chair under an umbrella in the hot sun, “Each time these overseas filmmakers come to Africa, I’m the first person they call. I’ve got mad skills.” Michael’s knowledge of the routine enables him, on one hand, to maintain a cool distance from the filming situation, but, on the other, to feel sympathy for the new actor playing a charity worker, who breaks down crying upon hearing that Michael’s father left the family to search for work when Michael was just two years old. Michael comforts her by taking her hand and asking sympathetically, “Is this your first charity appeal?” before the director steps in and shouts “Cut!” Table 1 (previous page) presents a breakdown of the video into genres and scenes:

Table 1. Genre and scene shifts in *Let’s Save Africa – Gone Wrong*

Scene	Genre	Scene: plot and characters
1	Charity appeal	African child about 9 years old of medium build, dressed in white tank t-shirt and worn cargo shorts and young African woman in a long, patterned dress with a plastic water jug on her head, walking together along a dry, dusty road. Quiet piano notes and the subtitle “Somewhere in Africa...” (0:00-0:14).
2	Making of	The woman trips and falls, the child doubles over with laughter and a director shouts “Cut!” The child replies, “You can’t tell me that wasn’t funny.” (0:15-0:26).
3	Making of	Scene opens with the arrival of a white car on a dusty road accompanied by male African voice singing. Michael gets out of the car dressed in Western cap, jeans and jacket, and stretches (0:27 - 0:36).

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4	Making of	Intro and title sequence of the "Making of" film. Music shifts to upbeat instrumental music of TV series. Title appears: "MICHAEL The Fundraising Actor" in white letters on a black screen. Shots from film prep and filming, ends with Michael sitting in a director's chair under a parasol (0:37-0:48).
5	Making of	Begins with long shots of rural setting, shifts to interview with Michael: "Each time these overseas filmmakers come to Africa, I'm the first person they call. I've got mad skills." Then Michael does the "sad African" face. Shifts to billboard with Michael's face and Michael's voice: "That's a sad African" (0:49-1:03).
6	Charity appeal	A female charity worker enters Michael's home, a shack with walls of corrugated tin. She breaks down as Michael explains that his father left the family to look for work when Michael was two (1:04-1:26).
7	Making of	Michael comforts the charity worker by taking her hand and asking, "Is this your first charity appeal?" Director shouts "Cut!" and instructs Michael to stick to the script (1:27-1:29).
8	Charity appeal	They try again. The charity worker asks Michael where his father is, breaks down (1:33-1:43).
9	Making of	Michael turns his head and looks incredulously toward the camera (1:43-1:44).
10	Making of	Scene shifts to Michael in director's chair. Music is replaced with silence and the sound of a cricket. Michael faces camera with same incredulous expression (1:44-1:45).
11	Charity appeal	Outside tin hut, the charity worker approaches Michael. Soft instrumental music with piano and strings. Voiceover: "The gifts we bring don't mean anything to us. But their faces light up like nothing I've ever seen before." She offers Michael a Danish pastry, places it in his hands as he gratefully says "Thank you" (1:46-2:08).
12	Making of	Michael spits out the pastry and says "It tastes like shit!" (2:09-2:10).
13	Making of	Michael in director's chair says "Celebrities always give me these crappy presents." (2:10-2:13).
14	Charity appeal	Charity worker in the foreground faces camera, sitting at the back of a makeshift classroom with African children. Charity theme music continues. She explains earnestly, "They have so little. Yet they smile." Moves in to close-up of charity worker's smiling bright face and shiny eyes (2:14-2:18).
15	Charity appeal	Children running, smiling, waving at the camera, pulls out to longer shot where we see children running beside the white car. The sound of children's laughter (2:19-2:27).
16	Making of	Michael lags behind, can't keep up with the others. He is slightly chubby, doubles over out of breath, hands on his knees. Sound of panting. Then voiceover with Michael saying that "It's a tough business. Sometimes I think of quitting..." (2:28-2:39).
17	Making of	Michael in director's chair, continues sentence, shrugging, "But then again, it's for a good cause." Looks resigned. Fades to charity appeal (2:40).

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18	Charity appeal	In a field, the charity worker is surrounded by children and begins appeal, "For only \$9 you can make a difference in these poor little angels' lives. So please reach into your hearts and dig into your pockets, and together, we can save Africa!" Crescendoing instrumental music as the camera pulls back to a long shot (2:41-2:53).
19	Making of	Clip to Michael in director's chair facing camera with incredulous expression. Silence but for the sound of a cricket (2:53).
20	Closing titles	As Michael dances a Western-style rap dance. STEREOTYPES HARM DIGNITY. CHALLENGE THE PERCEPTIONS. REACH INTO YOUR HEARTS. DIG INTO YOUR POCKETS. DONATE YOUR STEREOTYPES AT RUSTYRADIATOR.COM. Then organization' name: SAIH Norwegian Students' and Academics International Assistance Fund (2:55).

As seen in Table 1, elements of each genre remain intact within the specific genre sequence, but with the shifts between genres, each interpretive frame is broken through effects of surprise or exaggeration, and an alternate one must be mobilized by the viewer. These shifts help to indicate to the viewer that conventional genre scripts are not being followed and that something is awry. Within each genre sequence, verbal, visual, and audial signals cue the viewer that the video is a spoof.

In the making-of sequences, the expected frame is broken verbally by the unexpected dialogue and responses of Michael, for example, his response that Danish pastry "Tastes like shit," his statement that "Celebrities always give me these crappy presents," and his revelation mentioned above about his "mad skills." Similarly, visual techniques signal the spoofing function. Visual elements help to realize the breaks in generic frames through the use of the unexpected. First, and foremost, Michael, who appears well-fed, defies the convention of the undernourished child who appears in aids appeals. Additionally, many of his responses are expressed as unexpected physical actions, as in the opening sequence when the woman falls and Michael laughs as if it is slapstick (Scene 2) and Michael's concerned expression and body language, when he takes the charity worker's hand and asks sympathetically, "Is this your first charity appeal?" (Scene 7). Importantly, Michael's incredulity at the charity worker is communicated to the viewer twice (Scenes 9 and 10) through powerful interpersonal appeals to viewers, as he breaks out of the *deigesis*, turns to face the camera, looks silently at it, and lets the charity worker's condescending words speak for themselves. Finally, throughout the making-of sequences, the music is upbeat, quick-tempoed, and loud, creating a strong contrast to the charity appeal, which alternates between a soft and slow pathos-based instrumental score and African vocal music.

In the charity appeal sequences, the use of verbal and visual clichés, with just enough exaggeration to be visible to the viewer familiar with the genre, is the primary technique by which the spoof is signaled. The charity worker conforms precisely to expected scripts, playing the *straight man* to the comedy of the world-weary Michael. Yet, her emotional

reactions—her tears over the story of Michael's father, her effusiveness over the gratitude of the "little angels" whom she has helped—are overdramatized and underscored by the patronizing tone of her voice, her dewy face, and shiny eyes, all of which signify a wholesomeness so exaggerated as to be unreal.

A final use of the unexpected within a conventional generic frame occurs at the end of the video, with the call to action in the verbal text, "donate your stereotypes." Here, the video, on one hand, retains the critical stance of a spoof, as the referral to "stereotypes" rather than "money" or "support," is a jarring substitution which compels the response, "You can't be serious." On the other hand, the call to action is serious. Breaking the diegesis with the action convention which concludes many advertisements means that viewers must be able to identify stereotypes. The ironic call thus functions as an invitation to the viewers' critical reflection about where stereotypes are found, what they look like, and how viewers may act to do away with them. In this move, self-reflection has the potential to become *critical* self-reflection.

Discussion: Positioning of narrators and their subjects in counter-narrative spoofs

Through its use of characters, dialogue, and visual and auidial effects, the spoof plays on differences between the genre conventions which the viewer expects and those which the viewer encounters. The *expected* genre conventions, which have evolved into clichés through repeated use, play a role in perpetuating the master narrative of the white savior complex and the stereotypes upon which it relies. In the *encountered* conventions of the spoof, those conventions are realized with a difference—through, for example, exaggerations or spoken lines which seem out of character. By means of this double-voiced discourse, the spoof provides a counter-narrative to the white savior complex.

To understand the stance of the spoof as a discourse of critique, we can analyze the video through its positioning on three levels, following the analysis procedure of Bamberg (1997): within the story itself (the diegesis: the characters and events that take place), in the communicative situation of sending and receiving, including how the narrative is used in the relation between producers and viewers, and in relation to the larger contextual framework of master narratives. Tracing these levels of the spoof reveals the complexity of meanings which constitute its ambivalence in the process of countering the master narrative.

On the first level within the story told, the characters are positioned through characterization and the depictions of interaction between them. In the spoof, Michael is the clear-eyed guide to understanding the routine of the making of the charity appeal. He has the resources to show compassion for the charity worker who is new to the role and overwhelmed by her own emotions, despite her patronizing attitude toward Michael and the others. Far from being disempowered, he sees through the act and exposes it

as an act, just as he understands how to navigate through it. He tolerates the ignorance and condescension of the charity worker, but does not let it go without comment, and he perseveres despite his thoughts about quitting, because it is “for a good cause.” The positioning on this level of the story is, thus, a reversal of the roles of who helps whom, an empowerment of the African child, and an exposure of the foibles of the charity worker. On this level, that of the story itself, the roles are reversed, and while the African child is released from his stereotype, the charity worker remains in hers.

On the second level, that of the communicative situation of the sending and receiving of the video, the narrative positions the narrator and the viewer. Positioning on this level involves the issues of who has narrative power, who speaks to and for whom, and how. Here, the *narrator* is the organization, SAIH, which has produced the spoof, and the receiver is the viewer. This narrator positions itself as critical of the stories, representations, and stereotypes usually conveyed by humanitarian organizations. This narrator takes the word from someone else, infuses it with its own intents and meanings, and makes it its own, to paraphrase Bakhtin (1981, p. 294), by appropriating genres, but using them with different effects to achieve different purposes. This narrator challenges stereotypes but, in doing so, also employs the stereotype of the charity worker.

Within the second level, the receiver is, in effect, designed by the spoof as a viewer sufficiently familiar with the conventions of Western genres to recognize that these conventions are being spoofed. In this sense, and on this level, the narrator is in a dialogue *about* African stereotypes *with* the initiated, that is, others with the same cultural knowledge and capital, and not with Africans. This is reflected in the directive given in verbal text at the end of the film to the viewer: “Donate your stereotypes.” In sum, the narrator retains narrative authority by speaking on behalf of Africans, but Africans do not speak for themselves here. In this sense, the spoof is the West addressing itself, engaging in the same self-reflective appeal which is the object of parody in the spoof. While, on one hand, it invites the viewer into a critical examination of volunteers’ self-interested motives and emotional responses to doing good, on the other, its appeal functions as the means to speak to viewers who are in on the joke. The spoof demonstrates how, as Angod (2015) argues, citing Jefferess (2013), “development discourse [...] serves to center the feelings of the Western-situated subject,” rather than “engaging with the complex condition of inequality” (Jefferess, 2013, p. 78).

The first two levels naturally contribute to the positioning on the third level, which is how the narrator is positioned in relation to dominant discourses and master narratives. The spoof positions the narrator, SAIH, in contradictory ways, as both countering the master narrative and complying with it. First, it is critical of the master narrative of the white savior, as it reverses the positions of power among characters representing the West and Africans. Yet, while it challenges stereotypes of impoverished and disempowered Africans, it employs a stereotype of the charity worker, appropriating this mode in order to inform and instruct. Thus, while the spoof admonishes Western audiences for

complying with the master narrative, in pursuing this aim, it adopts similar structures of discourse.

Second, in the dominant discourses which globally constitute and sustain structures of power, it is Western organizations like SAIH which have access to the means to produce and promote the video and, thereby, gain coverage and exposure in the news and social media. Ultimately, although spoofing may instruct Western audiences about representations and motivations for volunteering, they stop short of deconstructing the master narrative. As Angod (2015) persuasively argues, one effect of educational campaigns is that “we can stop feeling bad about interventions such as voluntourism and instead recuperate volunteering abroad as a mechanism for feeling good about ourselves” even though “the local impact of voluntourism is widely challenged.”

Conclusion: The complexity and limits of countering through spoofs

To return to the prerequisites for spoofing— gap, empathy, and differentiation (Berthon & Pitt, 2012)—the changed version of reality represented in the spoof suggests its own origin in the spoofer’s perceived gap between the oversimplified and clichéd representations and a more complex reality. As we show in the analysis, the African child has agency and mobilizes personal and material resources “for a good cause.” The second prerequisite, some degree of empathy (or at least understanding) for the object of spoofing, is dramatized in the video through Michael, who patiently tolerates the charity worker, responds to her tears, and takes her hand to comfort her. He acknowledges her humanity. Moreover, although the spoof critiques her condescension, it recognizes, through Michael’s response, her good intentions. Because of this, the spoof maintains a “good-natured” humor (cf. Saunders, 2014). Finally, the prerequisite of differentiation, distinctive qualities of the object spoofed, includes multiple aspects that can be summed up as the genre conventions and rhetorical strategies which characterize the charity aid appeal. They must be recognizable both to the spoofer, who appropriates and changes them, and to the viewer, who must decode the spoof *as* spoof. Thus, spoofs define and limit their audience.

The prerequisites for spoofs, like the levels of positioning, are mechanisms which, in general, characterize spoofs of the white savior complex by Western spoofers concerned with criticizing the master narrative assumptions and offering alternative representations. Double-voicedness enables spoofers to take hold of problematic verbal and visual elements and shape them into different versions of reality. This is done in a number of related spoofs. SAIH, for example, makes use of reversals in *Radi-Aid* (SAIH, 2012), a spoof of charity songs similar to those of Band Aid, which appropriates the generic depictions of Western celebrity singers, but portrays Africans singing to encourage Africans to donate radiators to cold Norwegians. In another video, SAIH combines generic elements of reality shows and the game show *Who Wants to Be a Volunteer* (SAIH, 2014) in the story of Lilly,

a volunteer who wants to help Africans. Although Lilly's answer to the decisive question of how many countries there are in Africa ("One," she says) is wrong, she still gets her prize, a chance to save Africa, and her win is celebrated on stage by Africans dancing in costume. The video engages stereotypes of both Westerners and Africans, to make its point that, even though misinformation can be harmful, it does not stop volunteers. A similar strategy is seen in a spoof by the American comic duo Tripp and Tyler of the *one for one*-style campaign concept in their video, *A Revolutionary New One for One Campaign* (2013). In a video which combines the charity appeal and the volunteer story, two hipsters earnestly explain the campaign for \$600 smoothie machines for Africans, to point out the self-serving motivations of humanitarian organizations which are heedless of the needs of the population they profess to help. "They lit up when they saw this smoothie machine" says one volunteer, and a white-coated scientific expert says in all seriousness, "All we need to do now is find a way to give them milk, ice, and fresh fruit." In a move similar to one employed in SAIH's story of Michael, the critique of the well-meant campaign is manifested in the incredulous expressions of African children.

These and other spoofs¹ share purpose and strategies with the examples we have analyzed in detail above. They employ conventions of Western genres to address audiences familiar with those same genres, with the express intent to counter misrepresentations of and misinformation about receivers of aid and volunteerism. To achieve their aim, they navigate between critiquing and affirming stereotypes, and, thus, the *countering* takes place in complex and contradictory ways, some of which undermine the aims which they have set.

As we show in our analysis, on one level, that of the story depicted in the spoof, the narrative reverses the positions of Africans and Westerners in a clever and humorous way which may create awareness among viewers of the danger of misrepresentations. Nevertheless, like the well-meaning volunteer of their spoof, the organizations themselves adopt a discourse which remains within the structures of the master narrative. They speak to themselves and to others who possess the same cultural capital and knowledge. The spoofs themselves may end up as misrepresentations, lulling viewers into thinking that, as long as one *critiques* misrepresentations, one is above them.

Angod (2015) argues that spoofs and the educational campaigns about volunteering in which they are embedded do not go far enough in addressing the injustices resulting from colonialism. As she writes, the idea of development campaigns is that "through better education, training, and 'self-awareness,' volunteers can improve themselves and the work that they're doing. But are we really 'saving the world' by doing voluntourism better?"

Spoofs offer a way to call attention to misrepresentations. Yet, by the very nature of their double-voicedness, they are unable to deconstruct the master narrative conventions they are designed to counter. As they maintain their own authority over the narrative, they may become as self-congratulatory and self-focused as the volunteers whom they

depict, while the larger global structures which perpetuate the master narrative assert themselves through the imbalances of financial, human, and material resources necessary to the production, distribution, and, ultimately, exposure of their messages. This is relevant not only for spoofs of humanitarian appeals, but generally for spoofs which function as serious social commentary with an edifying purpose. Examples include spoofs about environmental awareness, such as Greenpeace's campaign against LEGO's cooperation with Shell (2014); spoofs which educate about racism, such as a developing genre of spoof videos of airlines who forcibly remove passengers (RollBizTV, 2017); and spoofs of political policy, such as President Trump's "America First" agenda, which take the form of tourist videos promoting countries such as Switzerland (Deville Late Night, 2017), the Netherlands (Zondag met Lubach, 2017), Austria, and Denmark (Natholdet, 2017) as "second."

The task of organizations and individuals who employ spoofs remains not only that of "inviting our capacity for self-reflection," as is characteristic of humanitarian appeals today (Chouliaraki, p. 20), but inviting self-reflection that is critical of the narratives and structures within which this self-reflection occurs. An analysis of the ways generic elements are parodied through verbal, visual, and audial cues, which create surprise, reversals, and exaggerations, shed light on the representational strategies by which the spoofers' intent is both fulfilled and potentially subverted. This is relevant not only for understanding the role of spoofs in the tendency to appeal to viewers' feelings about themselves, but also for exposing the ambivalence inherent in spoofs, between their critical counter-narrative potential and their dependence on the same generic elements which they critique.

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Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, the *Guardian's* Global Development Professionals Network 2014 coverage at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/dec/19/11-of-the-best-aid-parodies>.

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