Humanitarian identifications: heterogeneous responses to institutional complexity at Médecins Sans Frontières

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Abstract

Studies of institutional complexity have explored how multiple logics influence organizational practices. This article illustrates how a single logic is maintained through its heterogeneous enactments and practices, via strong identification, in this case, with the logic of humanitarianism. Using the case of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), we develop a theory around identity work and the heterogeneous enactment of institutional logic. We illustrate, via three historical examples, how MSF engaged in radically different practices across time and space, while adhering to a continuous yet polymorphous humanitarian logic. We explain this apparent paradox by referring to the internal contradictions within humanitarian logics, contradictions that do not lead to chaos because of the persistent cohesion effects of identity. We discuss implications for understanding organizational identity and institutional diversity.

Keywords: Humanitarian organizations. Organizational identity. Non-governmental organizations. Institutional complexity.

Identificações humanitárias: respostas heterogéneas à complexidade institucional do Médecins Sans Frontières

Resumo

Estudos de complexidade institucional exploraram como múltiplas lógicas influenciam as práticas organizacionais. No presente artigo, ilustramos como se mantém uma lógica única por meio de suas representações e práticas heterogêneas e de uma forte identificação, neste caso, com a lógica do humanitarismo. Usando o caso de Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), desenvolvemos uma teoria em torno do trabalho de identidade e da atuação heterogênea da lógica institucional. O artigo oferece três exemplos históricos de como o MSF se engajou em práticas radicalmente diferentes ao longo do tempo e do espaço, ao mesmo tempo que aderiu a uma lógica humanitária contínua, porém polimorfa. Esse aparente paradoxo é explicado a partir das contradições internas observadas na lógica humanitária, contradições que só não levam ao caos em virtude dos persistentes efeitos de coesão da identidade. Discutimos as implicações para a compreensão da identidade organizacional e da diversidade institucional.

Palavras-chave: Organizações humanitárias. Identidade organizacional. Organizações não-governamentais. Complexidade institucional.

Identificaciones humanitarias: respuestas heterogéneas a la complejidad institucional de Médecins Sans Frontières

Resumen

Los estudios de complejidad institucional exploraran cómo lógicas múltiples influencian las prácticas organizacionales. En el presente artículo, ilustramos cómo se mantiene una lógica única por medio de sus representaciones y prácticas heterogéneas y de una fuerte identificación, en este caso, con la lógica del humanitarismo. Usando el caso de Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), desarrollamos una teoría en torno al trabajo de identidad y de actuación heterogénea de la lógica institucional. El artículo ofrece tres ejemplos históricos de cómo el MSF se involucró en prácticas radicalmente diferentes a lo largo del tiempo y del espacio, a la vez que se adhirió a una lógica humanitaria continua, no obstante, polimorfa. Esa aparente paradoja se explica a partir de las contradicciones internas observadas en la lógica humanitaria, contradicciones que solo no conducen al caos debido a los persistentes efectos de cohesión identitaria. Discutimos las implicaciones para la comprensión de la identidad organizacional y de la diversidad institucional.

Palabras clave: Organizaciones humanitarias. Identidad organizacional. Organizaciones no gubernamentales. Complejidad institucional.

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INTRODUCTION

"Liberia is divided by an orange double fence. We built it to keep the sickness at bay. We built it to separate us (the healthy, the privileged) from them (the sick, the needy). We built it to feel less mortal. We built it for the noble purpose of barrier nursing". [1]

Humanitarian organizations are often faced with dilemmas resulting from tensions between their universalistic mandate and their concrete, situated operations (cf., BOLTANSKI, 2011). Such organizations typically embody universalistic logics, claiming validity over large segments of society, even all of humanity (NUSSBAUM, 1993). Yet, while drawing their legitimacy and mission from espousing universalistic logics, in their spaces of action, they are driven to make compromises when putting these normative ideals into practice (ISLAM, RÜLING and SCHÜßLER, 2020; BOLTANSKI, 2011) resulting in a diversity of institutional enactments on the ground. The tension within humanitarian organizations between their universalistic scope and the specific requirements of concrete situations can drive organizational adaptation and create institutional diversity across different contexts over time.

The current paper addresses tensions within an international humanitarian organization, arguing that these tensions give rise to diverse and even contradictory practices while maintaining an underlying humanitarian logic. Rather than imagining tensions as embodying the clash of different logics of organizing (cf. BATTILANA and DORADO, 2010), we examine opposing tendencies within a single institutional logic (cf. SGOUREV, 2011), in this case, the logic of humanitarianism. Actors are able to hold together intra-logic tensions due to a form of organizational identity that is both robust enough to retain a core mission in the face of this tension, and provisional enough to encompass wide variations. As Lok (2010) notes, *"identity is thought to form an important link between institutional logics and the behavior of actors in organizations".* Yet identity's role in both expressing and constraining organizational complexity is only beginning to be understood. Organizational identity acts as a prism through which a single multi-layered logic is refracted, across situations (spatial dimension) and time (temporal dimension), but also as an "elastic band" holding together diverse and seemingly contradictory organizational practices. While promoting stability, identities can be open and provisional enough to allow for organizational transformation (IBARRA, 2010). They achieve this by allowing logics to develop over diverse trajectories, depending on concrete action situations, while maintaining a core sense of coherence and continuity in the face of change.

We concur with past literature that "competing" logics (BATTILANA and DORADO, 2010) can be an opportunity for sustaining organizations and supporting continual change (JAY, 2013). Such perspectives hold that multidimensionality in practice principally results from tensions generated by hybrid or plural logics, promoting hybrid identities and practices. Building on this, we argue that, because logics themselves are heterogeneous and evolving (SGOUREV, 2011), enactment contexts can spur a multitude of different or even contradictory outcomes. We distinguish ourselves from a competing perspective in arguing that evolutionary change may arise from tensions in enacting *a single logic*; when the complexities of practice bring out the various and contradictory features of an institutional logic, the result can be change within, rather than transformation of, a unique, evolving logic.

Specifically, we use an identity lens to explain how a humanitarian logic maintains its unitary character while developing a progressively more complex notion of humanitarian work over time and across situations. On-going identity work by organizational actors maintains identity coherence and "deep commitment" in the face of multiple organizational adaptations.

We draw our ideas from an in-depth qualitative study of a leading international humanitarian medical aid organization "Médecins Sans Frontières" (Doctors without Borders, henceforth referred to as MSF). We show how MSF, strongly espousing a humanitarian logic, has nevertheless acted in progressively shifting ways, in response to emergent dilemmas brought about by previous enactments across diverse geographies and time scales. The heterogeneity of practice thus brought to light does not seem to be an outcome of competing logics, i.e. as when a "new" logic is introduced to an already established logic e.g. as in mergers and acquisitions. Rather, a type of hybridity-in-practice emerged out of the inevitable compromises MSF has had to construct in attempting to implement its universalistic mission.

Our contribution is threefold. First, we extend discussions of institutional complexity to explain hybridity from internal, rather than external heterogeneity, showing how institutional diversity can come about *within* a given logic. Second, we

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[1] Available at: <http://www.msf.org/article/ebola-my-friend-across-fence>. Accessed on: September 26, 2014.

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develop the links between identity and institutional development, moving beyond traditional views of identity as a bounded group category and highlighting the dynamic role of identity underlying both stability and change. Third, we contribute more specifically towards understanding how humanitarian organizations negotiate dilemmas between principle and practice in fulfilling their missions.

Institutional complexity, enactment and organizational identity

Institutional complexity refers to the diverse and conflicting expectations and pressures resulting from plurality (e.g., KODEIH and GREENWOOD, 2014; VORONOV, DECLERQ and HININGS, 2013; GREENWOOD, RAYNARD, KODEIH et al., 2011). Although usually defined as complexity with regards to two or more competing institutional logics (GREENWOOD, RAYNARD, KODEIH et al., 2011), other scholarship has recognized that complexity goes beyond reconciling opposing logics, and defines a wide array of institutional landscapes (RAYNARD and GREENWOOD, 2014). Acknowledging the diversity of complex institutional configurations, research continues to focus on complexity as a result of multiple logics; however, because abstract principles may become enacted in different ways in the everyday, situated practices of members (KARJALAINEN, ISLAM and HOLM, 2019; CLOUTIER and LANGLEY, 2013), such enactments are likely themselves to be sources of complexity, independently of the number of competing logics. Teasing apart multiple logics from enactment effects remains an important step in explaining the origins of institutional complexity.

Looking at institutional complexity as a consequence of enactment acknowledges that logics themselves can be multilayered and that actions often express the heterogeneity of a principle as it is put into practice (ISLAM, HOLM and KARJALAINEN, 2017). Diverse or even contradictory actions can 'hold together' because of their underlying expression of a common concept. Thus, logics allow diversity-in-practice to proliferate, each enactment providing competing yet multiple legitimacy criteria and exerting conformity pressures (e.g., SGOUREV, 2011).

We argue that logics themselves are multilayered and consist of a plurality of heterogeneous possibilities. Organizational actors recognize and grapple with this heterogeneity (cf., AZAMBUJA and ISLAM, 2019), engaging in on-going identity work, which mediates the effects of logics on organizational practices (LOK, 2010). This identity work allows organizations to enact diverse practices across a variety of contexts, adapting them to new circumstances without losing their coherence and legitimacy. This is possible because actors' identity work enables and maintains identity coherence across diverse practices. In other words, identity work is a dynamic expression of identity, which acts as an elastic band, (e.g., KRATZ and BLOCK, 2008) holding together an array of diverse practices reflecting a single and multifaceted logic. Exploring the mechanisms by which identity creates cohesion within heterogeneous logics across action contexts contributes to research in cross-institutional levels integrating the importance of enactment and practice to the logic-identity relation. Basic to our argument is that the diverse forms of institutionalized policies cannot be established a priori, but must be developed in action in diverse situations, e.g. as suggested in the extensive internal mission evaluation reports of MSF that outline difficulties in learning from diverse natural disaster scenarios.

METHOD

Research setting

MSF is an international, independent, medical humanitarian organization that was founded in 1971. It delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflicts and war, epidemics, natural disasters and lack of healthcare. The organization offers assistance to people based on need, irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation. Its actions are framed around medical ethical codes, e.g. the reporting of medical malpractices and the principles of humanitarianism as outlined in the Geneva Conventions, in particular neutrality and impartiality. On their website MSF describe themselves as "a worldwide movement of 23 associations, bound together as MSF International, based in Switzerland".[2] The organization engages thousands of health professionals, logistical experts and administrative staff. Most of these are hired locally. They work in collaboration with expatriated volunteers. The organizations' operations are coordinated from six operational centers located

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[2] Available at: <www.msf.org>. Accessed on: Sempteber 14, 2014.

in Europe. Our interviews sampled from one of these operational centers, which was founded in 1981 and now compromises of approximately 200 staff members.

Data collection and analysis

We chose to study MSF because of the organizations' evolution in its activities, which are demonstrably heterogeneous i.e. in that the organization does not only perform medical emergency intervention but also a number of other medical related activities, in programs varying greatly across time and setting. Yet MSF avowedly continues to maintain a single logic that is defined as a "humanitarian" logic based on the principles of the Geneva Convention; an interviewee (J) describes MSF as one of the "*gardiens du temple*". Further, the organizational mission has not changed since its foundation and organizational publications clearly locate the organization as based in a humanitarian logic, the interpretation of which is explained in the MSF Charter[3].

Further, past research on MSF (e.g., REDFIELD, 2013) suggests both the diversity of practices and its persistent humanitarian identity. The temporal dimension is important in understanding the link between logic, identity and the diversification of practice. This is because, despite an increase or change of internal and external environmental demands over time, hybrid logics have not developed such that specific activities are linked to specific logics. Rather, facets of humanitarianism continue to evolve while the humanitarian logic remains dominant within the organization.

Our dataset includes both interviews and archival material. We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews, each ranging from 25-90 minutes, and kept field notes. For the interviews we sought out key informants, i.e., experts and managers, as identified by our contact person. We also made use of snowball sampling by asking our interviewees if they would like to suggest further informants, and contacting these for further interviews. In this way we progressively built a sample around informants seen as experts within the organization. The interviews were mostly conducted on the telephone and were transcribed verbatim (with one exception due to translation into English). Our archival material included approximately 200 pages of internal reports, as well as several hundred pages of public documents from the organizations' website.

Our analytic approach is exploratory and uses an iterative case study methodology, aiming to build testable theoretical propositions and draw on the strength of the single case study to richly describe the existence of a phenomenon (SIGGELKOW, 2007). The data collection was terminated when a point of saturation was reached, with central themes becoming repetitive. As a first step in analysis, the material was screened manually and with the help of key word search functions categorized into broadly defined text sections. Next the sections were tagged - they could also have several tags -describing the content in them. Finally, it was possible to look for emerging themes on a more abstract level. The coding and labeling of the data was an iterative process and was repeated with small adjustments continually made.

In addition, an overall timeline of MSF activities, which included the establishment of its operational centers and offices, using the archival material, was mapped. This mapping, which is shown in figures 4-6 below, allowed us to represent the diversity of practices over time, to sustain the argument that heterogeneous logics give rise to evolving and diverse forms of practice over the life of an organization.

Our analysis suggested that the core identity attributes were a dynamic reflection of the humanitarian logic by organizational actors and that a variety in the interpretation of these allowed for a multiplicity of enacted practices, simultaneously suggesting heterogeneity in enactments and a single institutional logic (see Figure 1).

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[3] Available at: <http://www.msf.org/msf-charter-and-principles>. Acessed on: Sempteber 14, 2014.

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Figure 1
Relations between humanitarian logic, organizational features, and heterogeneous practices
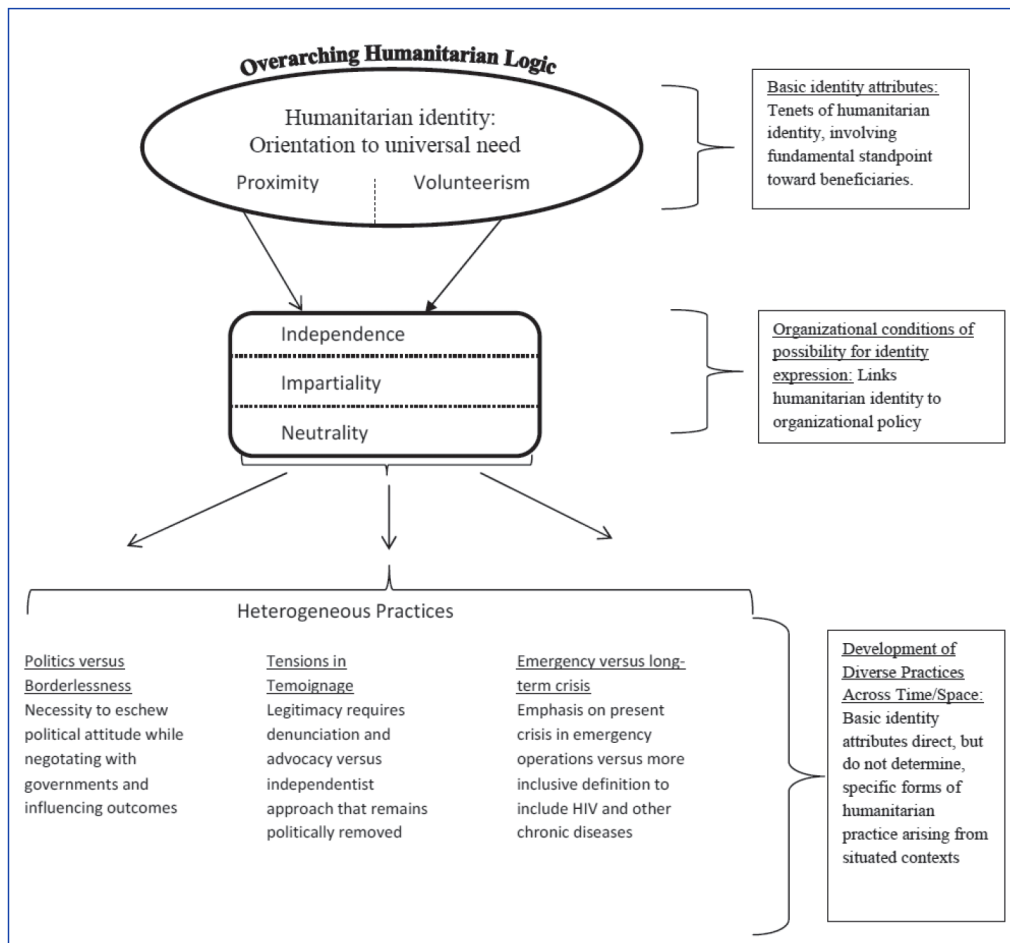
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Identities in Practice: Putting Humanitarianism into Practice

Our understanding of organizational identity is drawn from identity claims made by organizational actors during the interviews and triangulated with information on the organizations' websites and in historical documents (see Figure 2). We find that these are aligned in framing MSF's identity within a broader frame of humanitarianism that includes the identity attributes of proximity and volunteerism.

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Figure 2
Overview of Data Analysis- Forms of Heterogeneity

Open coding	Axial coding	Theoretical Dimensions
- volunteers also acted as 'human rights observers' - humanitarianism means being on the side of the forces of progress . . . a crucible of a new citizenship - humanitarians, see themselves as filling voids and acting as temporary substitutes for local institutions in disarray and for uncaring, reluctant or incapacitated authorities, - at MSF you can never say that you have achieved something & that it is good enough we struggle with reality - . it is about solidarity, a reflection of accountability towards beneficiary is a fundamental part of solidarity acts	**Spatial:** interpretation of humanitarian principles **Temporal:** evolving legitimacy	**Politics versus Borderlessness**
- MSF volunteers witnessed violence against refugees - The problem can be seen from various angles: breaking off with one side means taking the other's side - international public sector arena NGOs have a role to play: we do not have to all become the same - we are independent have "the capacity to shake the" and tree remain vocal	**Spatial:** interpretation of humanitarian role **Temporal:** developing distinctive identity attributes	**Tensions in Temoignage**
- Only 22 percent of MSF's interventions in 2009 were emergency/short-term interventions, which shows that MSF has is a provider of longer-term medical assistance - By emergency we mean situations demanding rapid medical/sanitary action aimed at reducing the number of deaths (or preventing its imminent increase) within a given population - launched an international campaign to promote increased use of ready-to-use food not only to treat but also to prevent malnutrition in endemic areas.	**Spatial:** interpretation of mission in evolving context/ **Temporal:** forward looking	**Emergency versus Long-term Response**

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As MSF's organizational identity is rooted in its identification with a humanitarian mission, grounding distinctive organizational identities, setting organization-specific ways of dealing with the environment that become reflected in sets of policies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Coding of Identity Attributes

FIRST ORDER (paraphrase of original text)	SECOND ORDER (identity categories)
International public sector arena NGOs have a role to play; we do not have to all become the same	
Guardian of Geneva Conventions	distinctiveness
Humanitarian principles	
MSF has refused to collaborate with other actors or use the infrastructures and resources used by other humanitarian or international organizations in the field	neutrality
We are 90% privately funded	independence
We are financially independent, we decide when to move	
The problem can be seen from various angles: breaking off with one side means taking the other's side	impartiality
We have "the capacity to shake the tree" and remain vocal	
The opportunities for advocacy are not always exploited	témoignage
Témoignage cannot be reduced to a mechanical application of rules and procedures	advocacy
Promoting medical innovation is a cornerstone of MSF humanitarian action aid	
MSF volunteers witnessed violence against refugees	proximity/witnessing
First you have to go to the field to enter MSF	volunteerism
Keep a sense of reality and go to the field 3-4 times a year	
Proximity and witnessing are understood distinctly at MSF	
Automatic refreshment of people, energy, high motivation	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Humanitarian identifications

Identification with a basic mission, embodied by yet surpassing the boundaries of the organization, has been particularly attributed to humanitarian organizations such as MSF (REDFIELD, 2013; FASSIN, 2012). The humanitarian understanding underlying each mission is described by participants as the driving force in their work. As one interviewee (A) stated: "*It corresponds to my philosophy of life, the humanitarian position, commitment*"; another (H) added "*MSF is a way of positioning in life, one of the greatest things in my life*". A MSF publication described this mission, borrowing a model from the International Committee of the Red Cross (also see THURER, 2007), as a pyramid, with "humanity" at the tip, followed by the institutional principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality. This triple set of interrelated principles, with humanity as driving foundation, was repeated across many internal documents, such that independence, impartiality and neutrality become critical mechanisms by which basic human needs can be met by the organization. The drive to meet a need itself, however, was related to two key elements of humanitarian identity, which we name *volunteerism* and *proximity*.

Volunteerism. Volunteerism involves a self-conscious desire to proactively meet others' needs, whether in the form of socially coordinated action or individual altruism. One interviewee (A)[4] refers to this as "*a focus on saving lives*". Another interviewee (B) stresses that, despite the many disputes and complications of humanitarian action, the basic mission falls back on identification with volunteerism. "*A lot of what we do remains the same- looking at what do people need and how do we provide that*".

The volunteerist aspects of identity at MSF members leads the organization to frame its role as supplemental to, and not substituting for, state-based social services. In a survey conducted within MSF:

> "*A minority of respondents expressed concerns about the possible establishment of dependencies on humanitarian aid, which is perceived as taking responsibility away from the state and reducing the endogenous resources of the local populations*".

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[4] In order to protect the anonymity of interviewees, we replaced real names with alphabetic letters.

At the same time, from an internally produced video, participants expressed that:

> *"some informants considered the standards too high to enable them to be taken over by national authorities. Others, particularly within the organization, think that MSF should always strive for excellence in its standards".*

Thus, volunteers dealt with potentially contradictory positions as providers of fundamental services, retaining a vision of their work as peripheral to local government yet wary of the state and protective of their "expert" standards. This not only caused tension in terms of the extent, type, and temporality of volunteering but also as we will see below, with regard to the centrality of volunteer identities, when put into practice, confronts a myriad of operational dilemmas, in terms of the extent, type, and temporality of volunteering.

Proximity. Beyond the drive to reduce suffering is the notion of action *on the ground*, in proximity to those whose needs are being met. MSF emphasizes conceptual and even philosophical reflection on humanitarian issues (cf. BRAUMAN, 2012[5]), even going so far as to create a "reflection/research unit" for further discussion and debate. As a member of one (B) describes this unit, it "*is the luxury of MSF as a mature organization; we produce reports and books. It is about MSF on the ground e.g. cholera epidemics in prisons/ detention centers, where we have little experience. The organization MSF is our client but we extend part of our work to the world, to the collegium, the humanitarian community*".

Most members stressed that it is the practical action and proximity to those in need that gives the organization its driving impetus. As (B) states:

> *"I think people are very much about what are we doing next, what do we need to do next I think it is more forward looking than looking back. And I think the excitement is with certain issues like difficult security context, political hotspots and so on".*

The importance of geographical access is central to the 'without borders' trope in which specifically political borders are downplayed in order to access locally situated communities. Thus, far from eschewing locality, the 'without borders' theme works to increase local focus by attempting to unify universal conceptions of principles with situated action. As might be expected, this combination results in a myriad of *on the ground* dilemmas, a selection of which are illustrated below.

Organizational Conditions facilitating Humanitarian Identification

While the basic attributes of humanitarian identities include identification with volunteerism and an urge to put humanitarian ideals into practice within situated locales, MSF also frames humanitarian ideals according to its specific vision of humanitarianism, which gives a secular, oppositional, and expert cast on humanitarian relief (REDFIELD, 2013). From interviews and internal documents, we coded three interrelated aspects of humanitarianism-within-MSF: independence, impartiality, and neutrality, which provided the organizational conditions of possibility for humanitarian identity expression. These conditions were so central that, within one MSF publication, they were simply labeled as "humanitarian principles", although agreement on this point has not been universal. For example, over the history of MSF, (e.g. Max Recamier after the Biafran conflict in the early 1970's, and Fiona Terry in a position paper in 2001)[6], admitting the political importance of MSF has led actors to question neutrality as an operating principle. Nevertheless, these three elements, together with their contested definitions, scopes and operationalization, have remained central to MSF's interpretation of the humanitarian logic and are reflected in its organizational identity.

Independence. As stated in one of MSF's publicly available reports, "*MSF aims to highlight its total independence from political and other external influence*". Independence is considered a key legitimating factor in the application of humanitarian aid, and instrumental in differentiating MSF in the eyes of its members from public health or governmental services. Independence is seen as a way to allow mission effectiveness on MSF's own terms; as (C) remarks: "*We are financially independent, we decide when to move*".

Suggested in the above quote, as a donor-driven non-governmental organization (NGO), the principle of independence is largely framed through discussions of funding strategy. The organizations' financial independence is a fundamental identity

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[5] Available at: <http://www.msf-crash.org/en/publications/2012>. Accessed on: August 08, 2014.
[6] Available at: <http://www.msf-crash.org/en/publications/2009/06/04/276/condemned-to-repeat/>. Accessed on: August 08, 2014.

attribute at MSF as it supports the responsiveness of operations and enables the organization to make independent decisions and act them out. As one public report summarizes:

> "For MSF, the need for independence includes both financial independence and independence in assessing the needs of a given population and the need for action. Consequently, MSF endeavors to obtain as much of its funding as possible from private sources and to diversify its institutional donors, refusing any financing that could compromise its freedom of action".

Our data suggest that the independence aspect of MSF's identity is closely related to its self-image as distinct, both from traditional political actors (e.g. states) and from within the NGO and humanitarian world. MSF's internally and externally circulated narratives emphasize criticism of the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) lack of advocacy, for example. Members claim, on the one hand, that their proximity distinguishes them from larger institutions such as the United Nations (UN) or the German development agency Gesellschaft für international Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) etc. As one actor (A) explains,

> "We are an emergency organisation, if we do not provide support the people will just die. It is about solidarity [….]. It makes a difference. I could not work for the UN, in the way of the spirit. They are not directly implementing only subcontracting. They are a big organisation more structured, but they do not implement to the end".

Another (D) adds provocatively: "*We are not putting peas in a can, we provide medical services to people who need them*".

While the organization sees advocacy as one of its main features, members maintain that they are distinct from advocacy groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, by keeping keep medical treatment central to their operations and clearly linking advocacy to this as an expression of solidarity with its beneficiaries.

Impartiality. As stated in an MSF community report in Kenya, impartiality is perceived as an organization that "*helps people that are most in need, without favoritism*", and aid that "*does not lie on one side*". Given MSF's centrality during crises related to conflict situations, the need not to take sides has been both central to gaining legitimacy and problematic in gaining access to what some parties consider enemy territory. Thus, independence is closely related to impartiality, a sign of the non-aligned nature of MSF, also adding to its distinctiveness and unique identity vis-a-vis its stakeholders.

The sense of impartiality also links closely with MSF's view of itself as reflexive, able to weigh different sides of issues, and promoting of a culture of debate. Central to its identity is the idea that important humanitarian issues, while demanding immediate attention, remain conceptually unresolved. As one interviewee (E), states, "*My added-value is to question things, to look at things from different perspectives and also to put different things together*". This focus on different perspectives was seen as crucial for the seemingly contradictory practices needed on the ground, all justified in terms of the same overarching identity. The notion of impartiality was also related to the notion of witnessing or *témoignage*, an activity of denunciation that simultaneously requires objectivity, and will be discussed in further detail below.

Neutrality. The presence of MSF in conflict situations, along with the avoidance of helping one side over another, characterizes the principle of neutrality, derived from earlier humanitarian organizations in the 19th century operating amidst the great-powers conflicts of the period (REDFIELD, 2013). The principle of neutrality is often traced to a statement by Junod (1989, p. 8), who worked for the ICRC, that every battle contains a "third combatant", besides the two on the battlefield, and that humanitarianism was the third combatant, fighting for neither side, yet not passive. This same trope was repeated in Redfield's (2013, p. 235) interview with MSF Paris office communication director, who described the principle as a "third party in the battlefield". However, as Dr James Orbinski, then President of the MSF International Council, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of MSF in 1999 explains, "*Silence has long been confused with neutrality, and has been presented as a necessary condition for humanitarian action. From its beginning, MSF was created in opposition to this assumption. We are not sure that words can always save lives, but we know that silence can certainly kill*".[7]

MSF asserts its neutrality both in discourse and in its symbolic actions, for example, displaying "no arms" signs on its vehicles, and emphasizing its medical functions as a mark of neutrality (REDFIELD, 2013). At the same time, the principle of neutrality has been described as coming into tension with MSF's principle of advocacy or *temoignage* and leading to the somewhat paradoxical notion of "active neutrality" in advocating for victims (e.g., REDFIELD, 2013). This apparent tension was also cited

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[7] Available at: <http://www.msf.org.uk/our-history>. Accessed on: September 14, 2014.

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internally, as mentioned above, questioning whether the principle of neutrality is possible in practice. As cited in one MSF document on perceptions of the organization:

> "*MSF is said to be neutral, apolitical, but I'm not sure, because, after all, they're human beings. Everyone has their own ideas; not everyone can be unbiased like a church. But, nonetheless I do think they try. In any case, I've never seen MSF get mixed up in any funny business*".

Thus, despite the somewhat fraught nature of neutrality, MSF has continued in its internal and external documents to affirm the principle as central to its own and to humanitarian work in general.

The three humanitarian organizational principles underlie other institutional claims that become contested issues in practice. For instance, the notion of speaking out publicly on pertinent and/or neglected medical issues and drawing attention to looming humanitarian disasters is one such recurring theme at MSF. Speaking out highlights the independence of MSF –they speak out because they are able to. Not only because they claim independence but also because they claim impartiality, they can say what they see. However, in some cases, the organization chooses not to speak out or has delayed doing so in order to be able to continue operations. Témoignage, or witnesses, similarly links to the basic humanitarian principle of proximity. Several interviewees expressed concern that the lack of proximity in the field would reflect negatively on the organization and criticized that an increasing number of staff are not visiting the field regularly. The proximity of MSF staff and volunteers in the field distinguishes MSF from other players who outsource their operations. At the same time, MSF also develops programs in regions of high security risk with staff locally recruited, at least temporarily, to secure their operations.

In the following section, we show how the dynamics of logic, identity and enactment play out against the backdrop of an evolving and increasingly complex humanitarian aid environment. Although multiple and seemingly chaotic, these enactments formed the basis for evolving MSF activities, and were taken very seriously and closely monitored by MSF members. As one member (A) noted:

> "*The humanitarian relationship is not the same as a customer relationship, it is related to the type of works. Its misuse is a reflection of accountability towards beneficiary and a fundamental part of solidarity acts*".

The following three illustrations show logic enactments as organizational responses from temporal and spatial perspectives.

Heterogeneity in Practice: Illustrations from the field

> "*Judging from its self-conception, MSF remains singularly untroubled by contradiction...a "non-ideological ideology" loosely based on the French legacy of the Rights of Man but directed against both abstract idealism and the existing order*" (REDFIELD, 2009, p. 23).

To demonstrate the heterogeneity of practices and policies in the field, we chose three conceptual-practical arenas in which members have debated what the organization should do, where practices have in fact differed between contexts, and which are controversially central to MSF's operations, as described both by internal documents and key academic surveys (e.g., REDFIELD, 2013). We collected different practices and approaches across these contexts, focusing on both temporal and spatial contexts. In terms of time, some forms of heterogeneity develop as complex responses to persistent issues faced by the organization, such as the evolving approaches to treating long-term chronic disease (see illustration 3 below). Others develop as compromise formations in which stalwart principled stands (e.g. avoiding "politics") give way to nuanced interpretations as the organization learns to navigate its environment. In terms of space, distinct practices have developed in response to different geographical sites with distinct epidemiological, political and military situations. These diverse environments have led in practice to diverse approaches across geographies, and sometimes but not necessarily because of responses to earlier approaches. Rather diverse teams are formulating solutions somewhat independently across units and geographies, held together primarily by a fundamental attachment to humanitarianism, but otherwise subject to myriad contingencies that generate heterogeneous practices.

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Illustration 1: – From political boundaries to borderlessness

In this illustration (Figure 4) we show how the organization interprets humanitarian principles in terms of a heterogeneous but single humanitarian logic on the spatial dimension on the one hand; and on the other hand, on the temporal dimension, how the diversity of actions undertaken to enact this heterogeneity serves to maintain its legitimacy. We focus on the enactment of impartiality and neutrality, two fundamental features of the humanitarian logic i.e. the organization's struggle to enact a role of political advocacy for victims of conflicts with a more neutral stance of impartiality. It is largely based on a critique of politics as promoting particularistic ends under the guise of a common good.

The humanitarian logic invoked by MSF stands from its inception as a counterweight to the failure of state-based "political" projects to guarantee humanitarian welfare (REDFIELD, 2013; FASSIN, 2012; BOLTANSKI and CHIAPELLO, 2005). Whereas state-based structures had gained legitimacy as protectors of fundamental humanitarian rights, the experience of failures of modern state structures in this regard led, not to a rejection of these rights, but to a rethinking of their protection from political battles within the state to the formulation of non-state solutions for humanitarian issues. MSF self-consciously placed itself in the wake of the failures of states to embody humanitarian logics.

In particular, a paradox of modern states, that they claim legitimacy from universal humanitarian rights while truncating those rights based on inclusion/exclusion from a given polity (cf., ANDERSON, 2002), meant that the failure of states was based on their emphasis on "borders". Thus, the formulation of alternative required an emphasis on the ability of humanitarian logics to operate without respect to such borders. To quote from the MSF Nobel Prize acceptance speech (1999):

> "*Humanitarianism is not a tool to end war or create peace. It is a citizen's response to political failure. It is an immediate, short-term act that can not erase the necessity for long-term political responsibility... humanitarianism occurs where the political state has failed or is in crisis".*

The label "Doctors without Borders" therefore directly referenced the lacuna between the stated legitimacy of states as humanitarian institutions and the impossibility of this in practice. At the same time as affirming distance from politics, in the final sentence, it affirms a certain substitutability of the tasks of politics and humanitarian organizations. In the words of one of its founders Bernard Kouchner:

> "*It's simple really: go where the patients are. It seems obvious, but at the time it was a revolutionary concept because borders got in the way. It's no coincidence that we called it 'Médecins Sans Frontières*".[8]

The break-up of the organization in 1979 into two separate organizations, MSF and Médecins du Monde, founded by Bernard Kouchner, reflected a debate regarding the role of humanitarian organizations at the time. In principle, two ideologies were emerging (BOLTANSKI and CHIAPELLO, 2005). First, a *legitimist* approach to humanitarianism i.e. that humanitarian actors must assume the role of "denunciators of breaches in humanitarian law and advocates of the victims of humanitarian disasters". Second, an *independentist* approach which empowers these "as the most legitimate actors to take impartial action in often politically charged situations" (PACHE and SANTOS, 2010, p. 468). MSF is seen to have followed the *independentist* path.

A close analysis of MSF activities (Figure 4) suggests that both approaches have been followed in practice. MSF has proactively engaged in campaigns in a neutral and distanced stance, assuming the proactive role of an authority on humanitarian action as shown in the upper part of the figure, while simultaneously taking a stronger and direct advocacy role by speaking on behalf of beneficiaries within concrete contexts as shown in the lower part of the figure. The data shows how 10 years after the break-up of the organization, MSF has developed its own approach to campaigning for the needs of its beneficiaries with longer-term impact, frequently acting as a founding organization for a multitude of research initiatives in medical topics. This is offset by frequent appeals to the international community reminding it of its humanitarian obligations. One significantly unprecedented example is the call for international military intervention in wake of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

The two levels are not separated from each other or from other humanitarian responses undertaken by the organization that reveal diverse modes of implementation, across spatial and temporal contexts. For instance, Redfield (2013) reports a senior MSF official's description of MSF's operations in Chechnya in the 1990's, questioned as to its medical efficacy but continued because of the sense of "care as protest", a notion difficult to see as apolitical (cf., FOTAKI, ISLAM and ANTONI, 2019).

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[8] Available at: <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/about-us/history-principles/founding-msf>. Accessed on: September 15, 2014.

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The initial formation of MSF in protest of ICRC silence in the face of atrocities also supports this view of denunciation as a form of humanitarian work, yet one difficult to reconcile with a view of humanitarianism as outside the sphere of politics. Figure 4 illustrates a series of similar cases throughout MSF history in which the lines between humanitarianism and politics appears blurred. As one organizational actor in the video material explained, medical aid to vulnerable populations can sometimes attract warring parties to loot them. In this way humanitarian aid can "*Sometimes also be seen as feeding the enemy*".

Figure 4
Illustration 1: – From political boundaries to borderlessness
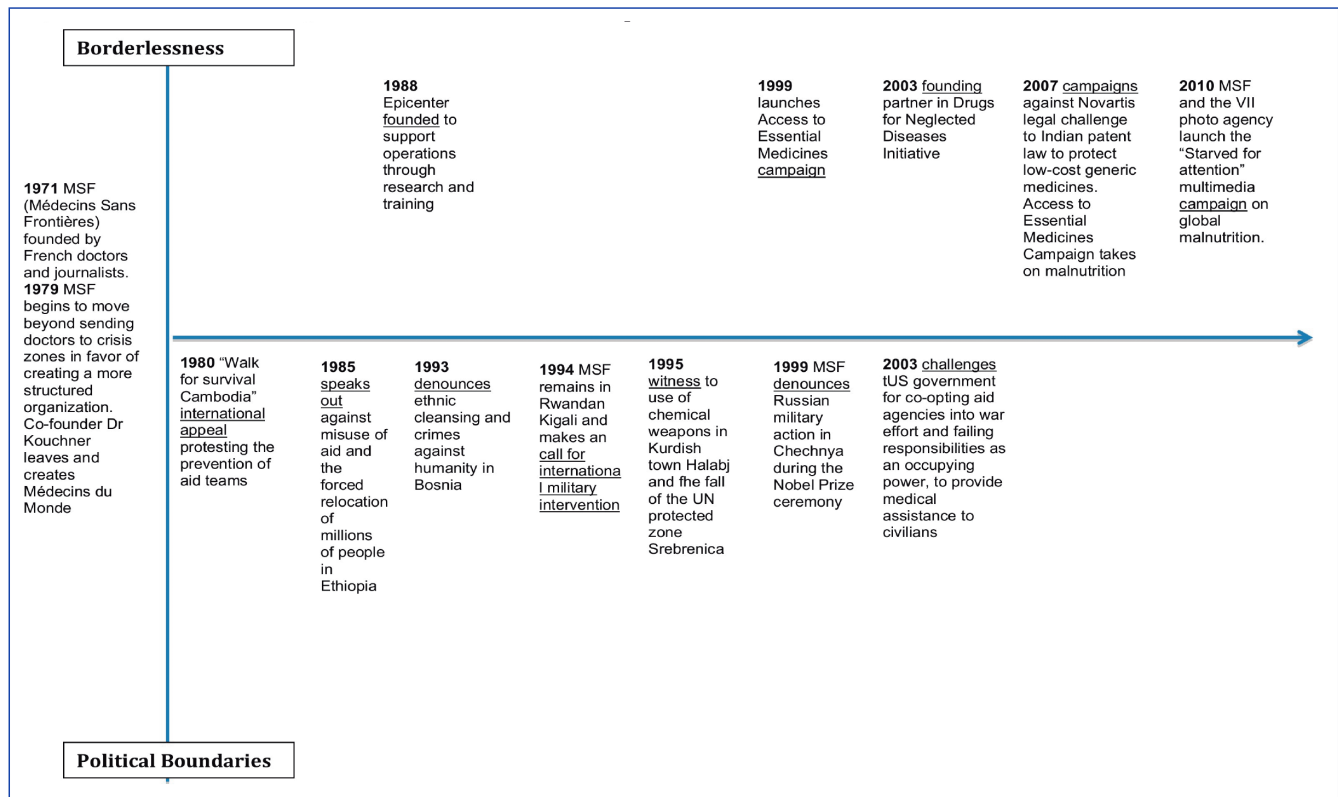
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Illustration 2: Articulating témoignage through witnessing and proximity

While MSF interpreted the humanitarian logic as involving impartiality vis-a-vis the political advocacy role of political parties or states, rejecting the exclusionary nature of states, it also widely rejected what it saw as the complacent role of complete neutrality, which it criticized sometimes in other "neutral" humanitarian organizations.

What became known as "témoignage" (i.e. speaking out), an integral part of the organizations' identity, was first formulated during MSF's original founding at the onset of the 1967 Biafra conflict in Nigeria. During this conflict, several doctors, later to become the founding members of MSF, refused to remain silent about what they were witnessing in the field and considered it at the time to constitute genocidal actions. The doctors spoke out in the media against the Nigerian army's actions, laying a template for MSF's self-affirmed duty to "witness" and speak about humanitarian disaster. At MSF, the principle of volunteering international staff in the field and the proximity of the organization to their beneficiaries through their presence provides for legitimacy for the organization to speak out because they directly see what they speak about.

In this sense, témoignage contains both internal tensions regarding MSF's humanitarian logic according to the *legitimist* and *independentist* approaches. It serves as an expressive attribute in resolving these tensions on the level of identity. On the one hand, speaking out seems to conflict with the neutrality principle, whereby MSF stands for non-involvement and free of judgment of conflict-related action. On the other hand, witnessing entails a journalistic quality that evokes an informative, epistemic form of activity rather than a political, partial activity. Témoignage is a distinctive identity feature of MSF, engaging

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members to speak out on behalf of its beneficiaries or humanity, while assuming voice as a duty. As one MSF volunteer explains in an internally produced public video:

> "It is an obligation to speak out as an expression of our values. There are no guidelines when to speak but there is an obligation when it comes to crimes against humanity [...] when humanity fails we all fail".

From the same archive, another member explains that political neutrality is not an excuse for conscience neutrality, and as humanitarians "*we must allow our conscience to lead our actions and that then we are most likely to be correct*".

Figure 5 illustrates the interplay between the two identity expressions within the humanitarian logic, i.e., proximity and witnessing by showing the entry, withdrawal and re-entry of MSF operations in six specific country contexts: Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, North Korea, Rwanda, and Somalia. The series of events are mapped along the chronological axis in the middle. On the top of the chart we see MSF entering a specific geography and on the bottom its exit. The figure shows how the contextual situation drives the temporal one i.e. the duration of a mission is impacted by environmental circumstances. For example, MSF entered Afghanistan in 1980 in light of the Soviet invasion of the country. In the aftermath of 9/11 in 2001 when the US-led international forces invade the country, the security situation deteriorates, making it dangerous for international staff to remain in the country. They are evacuated from Taliban held areas leaving operations to be run by local Afghani staff members who are also exposed to a certain security risks. In 2004, when five of these MSF staff members are killed, the organization closes its operations in the country, reentering in 2009 when the situation is deemed safer. The determination of MSF to remain as long as possible in geographies of high security risk is an expression of their mission and their own interpretation of impartiality in humanitarian logic i.e. providing help but also the need for proximity and witnessing in their interpretation of their own unique humanitarianism. Often, as in Somalia and Rwanda, MSF is the only international organization that remains in dire security situations, delaying the decision to leave as a statement of advocacy. The departure from a country is accompanied by loud protests and appeals to the international community, enhancing this advocacy expression.

Figure 5
Illustration 2: Articulating témoignage through witnessing and proximity
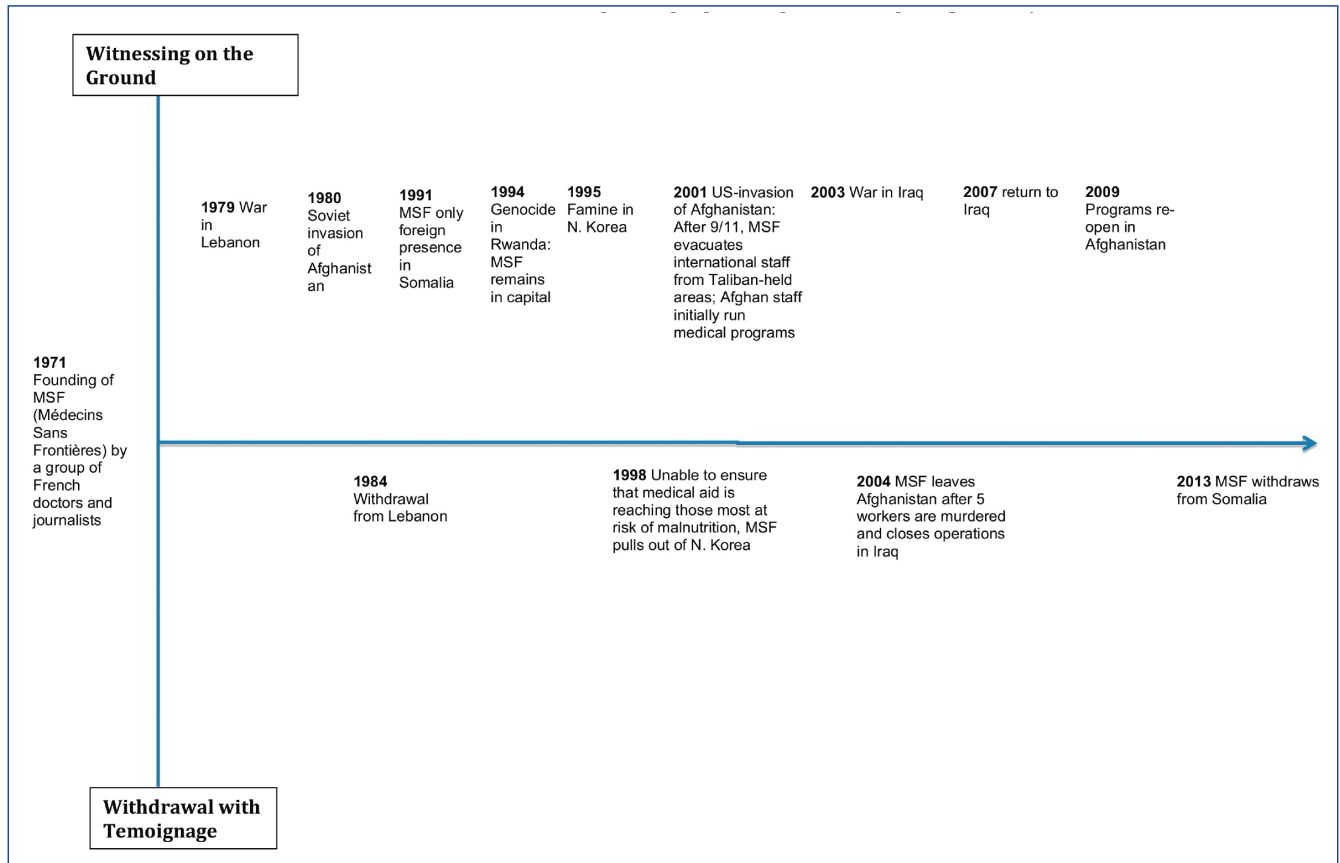
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Illustration 3: Balancing emergency operations and longer-term projects

> *"The inclusion of nonemergency work in MSF's portfolio was not itself novel, but rather an alternative path present from the outset. Although emergencies continued to define the group's public profile and sensibility, its definition of what constituted a crisis expanded to include problems such specific diseases and disenfranchised populations, conditions unlikely to be resolved quickly, cleanly, or conclusively"* (REDFIELD, 2013, p. 27).

The third illustration (figure 6) shows how emergency medical operations have been increasingly complemented by longer-term projects to meet evolving environmental demands, reflecting the increased capacity of the organization to deal with more complex demands. This contrasts with the "self-consciously classic form of action" (REDFIELD, 2013, p. 14) that emergency operations represent throughout the history of MSF. Further, longer-term projects suggest longer-term structures and commitments, encroaching upon traditional governmental and development agency functions, threatening the identity of MSF volunteers as 'humanitarian' rather than 'political' actors.

The upper part of the chronological mapping in Figure 6 shows the launching of longer-term activities mainly over larger geographies or as a fundamental change in medical services, such as mental health programs or the treatment of rape in emergency operations. On the lower side of the mapping, we see how MSF reacts to immediate contemporary situations by launching specific missions in these. It shows further that, when MSF speaks on behalf of beneficiaries, its actions tend to be specific, timely and therefore are context driven. For example, MSF used the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in 1999 to denounce Russian military action in Chechnya, after being active in that country since 1995.

As in the previous illustrations, the two dimensions (spatial and temporal) are closely intertwined. For example, when the campaign on the Access to Essential Medicines takes on the theme of malnutrition in 2007 it is a response to a reoccurring food crisis, for example, in South Sudan and North Korea (1998) or Angola (2002). Continuous attention is given to this theme through multimedia campaigns and in 2007 the theme of malnutrition is integrated into the Access to Essential Medicines Campaign. At the same time, the launch of the latter campaign in 1999 is almost anticipatory as it precedes the extensive pandemic treatment for HIV/AIDS in seven countries in 2000. As notions of humanitarian aid change to emphasize a more inclusive and transversal approach, environmental demands increasingly call for more complex and longer-term interventions. As one actor (G) explains:

> *"...We understand better that purely medical issues is a counterproductive approach. When we now speak about complex diseases it is not only about the individual but also about community, much larger context, we need a deeper understanding of the community, medical anthropology, focus on transmission, legal risks. The time of diagnosis and prescribed medicine is over. Now we see it from psychological, social, legal dimensions".*

Therefore, longer-term treatment of diseases can include complex diseases such as HIV and TB, or preventive medical measures such as vaccination campaigns and intensive mental health (trauma) support in the aftermath of natural disasters or sexual violence. One actor (D) explains:

> *"We have a strict definition for emergency. This is not the same for 8-10 year long activities... long-term projects are about policy, quality and developments in the field where expertise being developed. Emergencies have a different context: information, contacts, financials, networks and contacts..."*

Although these longer-term projects have evolved as a response to an environmental demand, emergency intervention consciously remains at the core of MSF identity and action. At the same time, the differentiation between emergency and longer-term responses is blurred on the ground. It appears that longer-term projects are often proactive or preventive responses to emergencies (e.g. vaccine campaigns) and are considered 'urgent' despite their preventative nature. However, the introduction of longer-term treatment or medical care might also be response to a crisis situation. Figure 6 shows through a selection of examples how longer termed projects evolved (upper part of timeline) but also that the extent of crisis interventions are maintained (lower half of the timeline). Here the temporal dimension (the time of a mission) appears to play a pivotal role in distinguishing the type of activity emergency versus longer-term mission. For example, health care or vaccination treatment has a longer temporal dimension in terms of effectiveness then emergency operative treatment, for example, in the case of war – although the actual duration of the intervention maybe the same for both.

Like témoignage, the emergency medical relief definition distinguishes MSF from other humanitarian organizations, and from it being labeled a "development" organization. However, by increasing involvement in longer-term projects, MSF runs the danger of replacing local health institutions and assuming the role of the political bureaucracy that it has criticized for failing its humanitarian responsibility. As a result, longer-term involvement raises issues of legitimacy. Equally, however, these complex long-term interventions support advocacy initiatives by the organization, for example, the access to essential medicine and the AIDS pandemic treatment, at a time when AIDS was considered taboo. This ability to do what other agencies cannot is important for MSF's organizational identity and allows for seemingly paradoxical actions such as longer-term projects and emergency crisis interventions. Cohesion in the tension between these actions is further maintained by identifying with the overarching organizational mission.

Figure 6
Illustration 3: Balancing emergency operations and longer-term projects
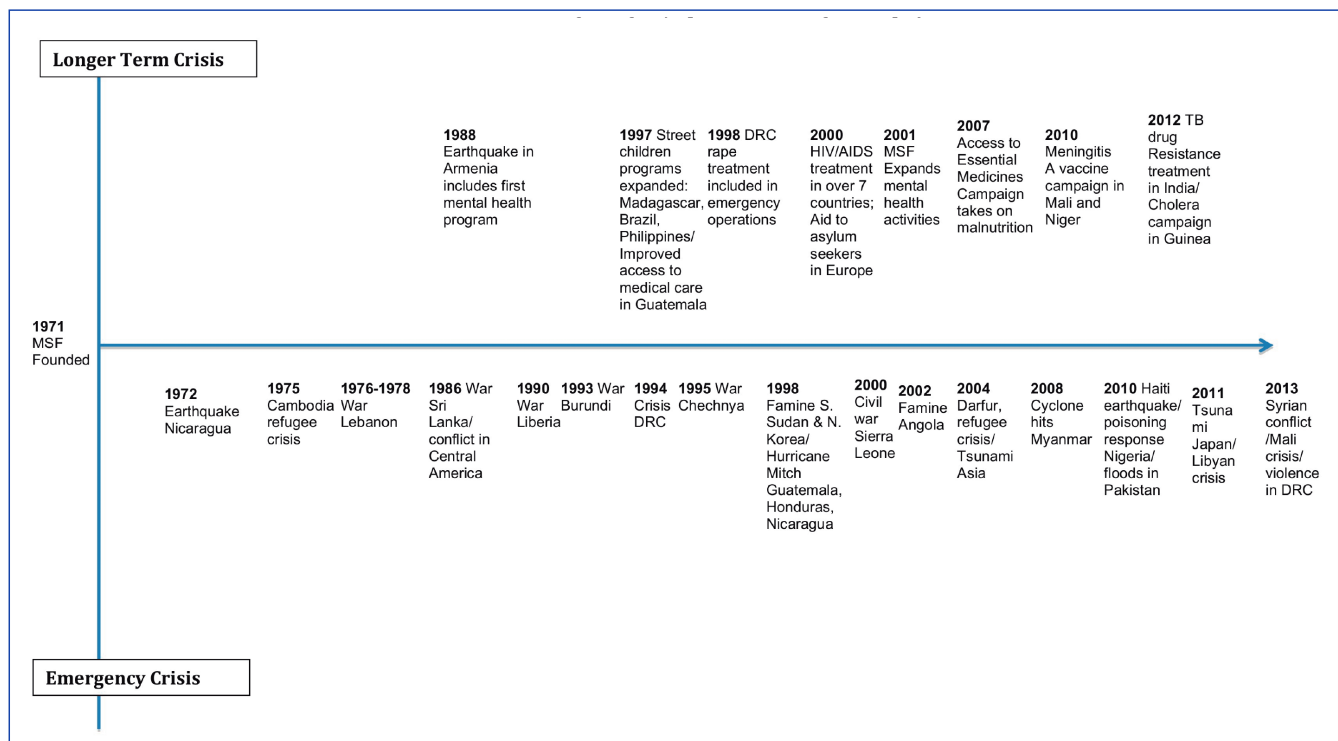
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

DISCUSSION

The three empirical illustrations presented above show how identity attributes allow for heterogeneity in enactment within a single humanitarian logic, tracing how the different aspects of this logic play out over concrete situations from three intertwined perspectives a) structure versus borderlessness; b) silence/denunciation and the development of témoignage; and c) emergency operations and longer term projects. The notion of humanitarianism adopted by MSF encompasses very diverse and often contradictory practices. Organizational actors freely admit and discuss these oppositions, while strongly insisting on the unified identity of being humanitarians at MSF. They even identified these tensions as giving direction and motivation, thus paradoxically increasing potential positive identification.

If institutional logics provide direction and legitimacy for organizations, organizations also provide the concrete means by which these institutional logics are made "real" in practice. Both processes depend on how organizational actors formulate identity attributes – both those identities that tie actors to wider institutions, and those that link them to particular organizations.

In this way logics, identity and their enactment in practices are linked. Organizations that enact multiple logics must contend with these logics' different and potentially conflicting institutional demands (KRAATZ and BLOCK, 2008; PACHE and SANTOS, 2010; THORNTON, OCASIO and LOUNSBURY, 2012). However, multiple demands do not only arise from multiple logics, but from the open interpretive possibilities of underlying logics, in interaction with the diverse and unpredictable demands of practice. This is possible because multifaceted logics contain internal heterogeneity (SGOUREV, 2011), allowing actors to find responses consistent with their values.

The multifaceted enactment of logics allows organizations to meet evolving internal dilemmas and changing external environmental demands, at the same time expressing a dynamic yet stable identity. This mixture of stability and complexity allows a diversification of practices without multiple logics. In this way, identity acts less like a filter (KODEIH and GREENWOOD, 2014) - interpreting and responding to organizational complexity –than as an elastic band, enabling a diversified but coherent understanding of a variety of responses under a single, multi-facetted logic. This dynamic quality of identity is maintained by the on-going identity work of organizational actors in response to tensions in enactment (cf., KARJALAINEN, ISLAM and HOLM, 2019). In Lok's (2010) terms, the logics became grounded in identity projects, potential identifications which were open and yet to be worked out.

Our research contributes towards shifting a current research focus on hybridity as a response to these conflicts to heterogeneity. Hybrids are considered as recombinations of different types rather than mutations within a type. To cite Battilana and Lee's (2014) example, a mule is a hybrid, but a chameleon, in its multitude of expressions, is not. Our research suggests that organizations have the ability to transform or evolve in the face of highly complex institutional demands along temporal and spatial dimensions, and that the role of identity is pivotal.

Second, our research provides new insights regarding the relationships of logics and identity, proposing a stabilizing role for identity and suggesting that identity work is a key process in linking practices and institutional logics (LOK, 2010). Organizational identity is expressed through practices. If we consider identity work as the continuous effort by organizational actors to construct, amend and negotiate their self-perceptions to maintain a coherent sense of self, then such work involves sense-giving processes through which these organizational actors embrace or adapt practices, depending on the 'fit' or resonance with identity. Rather than a diffusion process, identity work may thus resemble Weick's (2005) description of sensemaking as the "continued redrafting of an emerging story". As such, we further a recommendation by Kraatz and Block (2008) to investigate how organizations cope with institutional complexity from the viewpoint of identity structure comprising both institutional and organizational identities.

We also contribute to understanding the bases of identity by showing how a given identification with an institutional logic – in this case, humanitarianism- becomes the basis for particular organizational identity attributes. Attributes such as neutrality, independence and impartiality are important in providing for the conditions for the expression of the underlying logic. Such conditions, however, leave a great deal of space open for practices, which may cloak themselves in the organizational identity while enacting a wide variety of potentially contradictory forms of practice.

It may be asked whether the logic we study here – the humanitarian logic- is of a peculiar sort, limiting the generalizability of our findings. To elaborate, we argue for the multiplicity and heterogeneity of logics, proposing a conception of logics that allows great internal diversity as well as diversity over time and space. It may be that the humanitarian logic, because of its tendency to universalize, and highly (some might say overly) ambitious scope, would inevitably become reflected in a myriad of possible expressions, reflecting the diversity of humanity itself (BARNETT, 2011). Developing this criticism, one might argue that with other logics, such as industrial or medical logics, specific protocols or procedures would be more prevalent than broad-based principles like "humanity" because of the relatively well-defined parameters of the logic. Such a question would open up the unexplored issue of the equivalence or comparability between different logics themselves. Such an interesting avenue to pursue research intuitively arises once we reimagine logics not as recipes for action but as spaces that afford greater or fewer forms of enactment depending on how the space is constructed.

A further avenue for future research involves to what extent identity serves to hold together a diversity of institutional practices. Although identity may have the virtue of being open ended and pliable (ISLAM, 2013; IBARRA, 2010), this pliability is likely not without limit; at some point, practices at MSF can no longer be justified under the banner of humanitarianism. At what point does the "elasticity" of an identity give way to skepticism and re-categorization, and further, can this feature of identity be affected by personal and organizational features? Given that engagement with institutional practices involves

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both interpretations of complexity and personal beliefs about practice (e.g. RAAIJMAKERS, VERMEULEN, MEEUS et al., 2014), how to members' identities feed into these interpretations and value-based judgement? Because identity has historically been studied in terms of categories and not overarching logics (e.g. ALBERT and WHETTEN, 1985), the openness of identities to contradictory interpretations has been largely understudied. Such interpretations are intimately tied to settings such as the current one, however, and require research on the potentials and limits of identity.

An additional area for future research concerns the effects of hybridity on the development of logics and identities themselves. In the current setting, we acknowledged implicitly that the humanitarian logic itself was in a state of evolution, but it was beyond our scope to examine the complex feedback effects between practice and logic that likely influenced this evolution. For simplicity, we examined practices as an outcome of identities and logics, in order to answer the important problem of heterogeneity in practice. In part, this contribution was needed because, while a growing literature examines multiple logics (e.g. BATTILANA and LEE, 2014; LOUNSBURY, 2007), heterogeneity of practices within logics is less prevalent. However, we do not mean by this to position logics as an *ex machina* force governing practices, and we acknowledge that the logic itself is in flux. The next step in empirical research, therefore, would be to examine the *internal* sources of change in logics that can occur as practices lead to rethinking the nature of principles themselves.

We build on the idea that heterogeneity of organizational practices are determined only partially by multiple and conflicting institutional demands, illustrating how such demands can produce complexity-in-practice without reflecting conflicts at the institutional level. Rather, the obstacles that institutional logics confront in their translation into practice, as well as the conflicting tendencies within the logics themselves, can lead to diversity over time and space. By building on the notion of institutional heterogeneity, we shed light on how highly identified workers can create diverse practices, not despite, but because of, their strong identification to a set of principles. These identifications hold organizations together and allow conflict without disintegration. Thus, the contribution of identity to institutional logics is not simply to give a mechanism by which institutions become enacted, but also to allow a diversity of institutional enactments to be held together under the same banner.

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