MSF and the Hippocratic Approach
a single case study on communication in the conflict of South Sudan

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) communication in the setting of South Sudan. More precisely, the thesis investigates MSF’s engagement in a discussion regarding the potential harm NGOs, both other and themselves, might cause in terms of conflict dynamics. The thesis takes off in the perceived conflict between the adaptation of the Hippocratic Approach, as outlined by Mary B Anderson, and the increased necessity of branding in today’s humanitarian industry and seeks to understand how this might unfold in practice. Demonstrating MSF’s commitment to ideals in line with the Hippocratic Approach, which encourage self-criticism and accountability, the thesis moves on to illustrate how branding has become an inevitable measure for NGOs to remain operational. Based on previous research identifying a successful branding as information, trust and image, where self-criticism might be counter-productive, the thesis tries to identify the conflict between the two fields. The thesis sets out to uncover some of the tensions more concretely by investigating MSF’s communication in the conflict-settings of South Sudan. It does so utilizing the method Qualitative Content Analysis. The material stems from MSF’s self-published reports, reviews and articles. In conclusion, the thesis finds that MSF does engage in a discussion about harms caused by other organizations as well as harm caused by themselves. However, the harms discussed are not put in terms of conflict dynamics in South Sudan. Furthermore, the thesis identifies some disproportion in criticism towards other organizations versus self-criticism. The thesis refrains from drawing any permanent conclusions and suggest a comparative case study to better understand the tensions in NGO’s building of a Hippocratic brand.
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1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, intra-state conflicts have replaced inter-state conflicts as the more frequent form of warfare. The new type of conflicts, inside countries themselves, created a void by the claimed rigidity of global institutions and politics. In this perceived void, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took it upon themselves to be in the forefront of humanitarian activity (Okumu, 2003; 120). Today, humanitarian aid and NGOs represent a billion-dollar industry with an increased authority in conflict areas (Sullivan & Wood, 2015: 736).

With increased presence in conflict areas, a growing body of literature has raised criticism regarding the implications NGOs have on conflicts. Critical scholars’ have identified mechanisms where NGOs not only help sustain the status-quo, but also prolong or even fuel an escalation of the conflict they are there to mitigate (Anderson, 2005; Frangonikolopoulos, 2005; Okumu, 2003; Thomas, 2017; Sullivan&Wood, 2015; Narang, 2015).

Mary B. Anderson (2005: 640f) has outlined three approaches for humanitarian work, identifying three behaviors aid agencies apply when operating and delivering humanitarian relief. The first approach, "the midnight blinders approach", sees its aid as an undiscriminatory objective tool, disregarding to whom the aid is delivered. The core mission is to save lives, no matter who’s life. The second approach, "the aid on our terms approach", applies a slightly deeper analysis to the conflict, such as withholding the right to withdraw and re-establish presence from the conflict as the organization pleases. This is also used as a tool and leverage in negotiating processes. Lastly, "the Hippocratic approach", stresses the necessity to apply a recurring analysis and evaluation of one's presence in the conflict as well as implementing mechanisms of accountability in the eyes of recipients. The aim is to claim long-term responsibility for the involvement. Anderson argues that the NGO community as a whole is moving towards the third approach, widely recognized as the desired approach to apply (Ibid, 2005; 642f).

Within an industry that counts more than 20,000 NGOs (Okumu, 2013: 120), it has become increasingly important to brand oneself as an organization that successfully applies the Hippocratic Approach while delivering humanitarian aid. This competitiveness has, according to research, further fueled a marketization of humanitarian aid (Schwittay, 2001: 73), where NGOs as part of the non-profit sector (Okumu, 2003: 120), adopts similar tactics as the for-profit sector.
Vital in this expanding marketization is the extraction of funds, which has led NGOs to be criticized for becoming more fund-driven than need-driven (Frangonikolopoulos, 2010; 57f). In organization’s pursuit of funds, branding is key (Kylander & Stone, 2012: 37f).

Yet, this increasing marketization, which blur the lines between the non-profit sector and the for-profit sector, can create a possible conflict of interest for organizations. On the one hand, organizations want to communicate the progresses and tangible results they accomplish on the field while delivering humanitarian aid as part of the branding they need in order to attract and sustain a steady inflow of funds on a more competitive market. On the other hand, organizations in the humanitarian sector are said to be working in ways that could be compared to those outlined in Mary B Anderson’s Hippocratic Approach, indicating self-critique, evaluations and adaptations, which might undermine their brand, their funding and subsequently, their existence.

This study aims to explore this tension by analyzing Medécins Sans Fronitères (MSF) work in South Sudan. MSF is the largest medical humanitarian organization in the world (Fletcher, 2005) and has treated over hundred million patients since its foundation in 19711 (MSF, 2017). In its charters and principles, MSF claims to assume responsibility by accounting for their actions towards both recipients and donors, something which is supposed to be attained through the constant evaluation regarding the effects of its activities2 (MSF, 2017). As evident, MSF is one of the NGOs committed to apply and Hippocratic Approach to their humanitarian work. Yet, an increased focus on branding and communication is something directly affecting MSF. Between 2004 and 2016, MSF expenditures on communication linked to their programs rose from approximately €9 million to about €19 million (MSF, 2004: 12; MSF, 2016b: 19). Furthermore, MSF spent next to €174 million on fundraising in 2016, compared to around €49 million in 2004 (MSF, 2016b: 9; MSF, 2004: 12). Thus, branding and funds has become focal points for MSF. When pursuing funds, one may conclude that visibility is a necessity. One of many ways is through the media. Frangonikolopoulos (2010; 54f) have, amongst other, identified that this leads to un-even concentrations of NGOs in conflict areas, depending on the media coverage. Either, the crises are given generous amounts of attention, becoming a high-profile situation with a lot of funds involved, or it is ignored, letting the conflict go on in the shadow of political and media spotlight.

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Another element of this is the involvement of celebrities, something that will be further discussed later on.

South Sudan is one of the countries experiencing what has been labeled the worst humanitarian crises in modern history (UN News, 2017). The chosen case study of South Sudan gives relevance to the thesis due to its ongoing state and the scope if humanitarian needs, as accounted for above. Furthermore, it is MSFs second biggest program in regard to spending and biggest regarding number of MSF staff operating in the conflict area (MSF, 2016a; 8), arguably demonstrating its given priority within the organization.

1.1 Purpose/aim and research question

The guiding question of this thesis will be if MSF does engage in an analysis of the conflict dynamics in relation to humanitarian action (as stipulated in the Hippocratic Approach) as well as communicate these in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how. The guiding questions will be answered with the help of three research questions.

This will only, as I will highlight in the delimitations, give a partial image of their believed communication as it only covers that which is communicated to the public and not the internal discussion that might go on within the organization. However, analyzing how it is expressed in such material is interesting as it connects to the discussion on marketization and branding. As pointed out earlier, MSF show tendencies of working through principles that coincides with those of the Hippocratic Approach. For that reason, one could expect MSF to communicate reflections on conflict dynamics and their role, potentially harmful or not, publicly. At the same time, there is also a danger in doing so, as too much critical self-reflection may be harmful to the brand and that such critique or reflection instead is made in relation to other organizations. Given this, the study hope to – in addition to the first research question – also shed some light on the possible tension of creating a “Hippocratic brand”.

The research questions guiding this thesis will be:

- Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harms other organizations can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?
- Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harm they themselves (MSF) can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?
Is there a perceived disproportion in the discussion of harms other organizations can cause and they themselves can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan?

By answering these questions, I hope to shed some light on how much of a Hippocratic Approach can be found in MFS’s public communication. While a potential disproportion in critique of others in comparison to critique of self as well as communicating reflections and evaluations might stem from a range of factors, it might also reflect the tensions of creating a “Hippocratic brand”, namely that this kind of brand is constructed by displaying an image of being engaged in conflict analysis – but blaming others rather than one’s own organization as that might make harm the brand and access to recourses.

Investigating only one NGO in a large sea of organizations may seem ineffective. However, Okumu (2003; 120) points out that the market is still dominated by the biggest actors and that the eight most powerful humanitarian international NGO's (HINGO) control over 75% of all emergency funds. In this regard, it may be argued that by investigating one of the biggest actors is relevant since it might uncover tendencies present in the community as a whole, given the role as gatekeepers they might be assumed to hold. Given the time frame of this thesis, a more quantitative approach was also deemed non-executional.

1.2 Relevance and contribution

The thesis connects to the field of conflict studies, where humanitarian interventions in recent years has been given more and more attention. Humanitarianism has come under attack since they are perceived to no longer just operate in and by their own, but actually have far reaching consequences that heavily impact the resolutions of conflicts (Okumu, 2003: 124). As such, the issue of humanitarianism has become intertwined in that of conflict studies. This thesis tries to highlight one of the many complicated ways these intertwined subjects interact in a practical manner.

The subject of humanitarianism is hard to debate without the mentioning of NGOs as actor in international relations. In contrast with national governments, NGOs are able to work on both sides of the conflict, accessing both rebel territory and government areas. This could arguably have turned them into unique actors within the field of international relations. This unique position has, also attracted never before experienced problems. Problems such as negotiating access for staff, hiring armed protection or work alongside military (Okumu, 2003: 123).
In this regard, the contribution of the thesis is if, and if then how, important actors within the NGO industry communicate such problems.

1.3 Delimitations

The research conducted in this thesis is not of generalizable nature. It is not a quantitative thesis but a qualitative one, extracting information regarding MSFs potential engagement in conflict dynamics and the communication of it in a specific setting, namely South Sudan.

Moreover, as touched upon in the earlier segment, it is impossible to find out if there is an internal discussion regarding analyze and communication of conflict dynamics or if MSF are engaged in an internal discussion regarding the potential harm they or others are doing in conflict ridden areas. However, considering the importance of building a brand and all that it entails, it might be argued that as an organization, you would be inclined to communicate the progress made internally also, externally.

This thesis is a single case study, only investigating MSF as an organization in the chosen conflict. This is another delimitation that would be bypassed by using a comparative case study. Using such a method would have enabled me to measure how Hippocratic the organization is. However, I experienced difficulties finding a relevant organization that would be fruitful for my analysis. Both in terms of funding, budget in South Sudan and number of staff present in the country. I would encourage future peers to proceed with that sort of research.

Furthermore, MSF is a worldwide movement with 21 sections, 24 associations and numerous offices. It hires and relies on thousands of health professionals, logistical and administrative staff all over the world\(^3\) (MSF, 2017). Based on this, this thesis will only investigate the available material on the international MSF website and disregard local or regional associations. This is based on, not only time constraints due to the scope of the thesis, but also that MSF International positions itself as a sort of over-arching branch, providing coordination, information and support to the movement as a whole (Ibid, 2017). It could thus be argued that the relevant information MSF would want to communicate advantageously could be found on their MSF International website.

\(^3\) [http://www.msf.org/en/about-msf](http://www.msf.org/en/about-msf)
An additional delimitation will be made in relation to time. A majority of the findings I will use in the analysis dates back no longer than two years. Overall, no documents or sources connected to the analysis dates back further than 2013, when the original conflict broke out in the newly formed South Sudan (OCHA, 2016: 1ff).

2. Overview of MSF and South Sudan

The thesis will proceed with a background on MSF as an organization, the work their conducting and the scope of their missions. I will proceed to give a brief overview of the information MSF are communicating that could be linked to a desire to establish themselves as an organization moving towards the Hippocratic Approach. I will then introduce the conflict in South Sudan, give a brief history and present the dynamics that led to the recent escalation.

2.1 Médecins Sans Frontières

The now worldwide organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was founded in 1971 by a group of doctors and journalists in France as a response to the famine and war that took place in Biafra, Nigeria at the time. Its objective was to create an independent organization that delivered emergency medicine and aid in a quick, effective and impartial manner. From its inception, the organization was made up of around three hundred volunteers including doctors, nurses and staff. MSF rejected the fact that third world countries were subjected to third-rate medical service. As the name suggest, the organization believes that people's right to adequate medical care goes beyond national borders. Today, it operates all over the world, with offices in 28 countries and a staff force of 35,000 people across the globe. MSF received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999⁴ (MSF, 2017).

MSF has been operating in South Sudan since 1983 and as of 2016, has about 3,600 personnel's active in the country. MSF has treated over 300,000 patients for malaria, conducted more than 47,000 measles vaccinations along with 25,000 routine vaccinations. One thousand patients have been treated for cholera and many, many more has been given medical attention in the form of surgical interventions, treatment in feeding centers or outpatient consultations (MSF, 2016b).

⁴ http://www.msf.org/en/msf-history
MSF prides itself with being independent from both governments and intergovernmental organizations through their restricted capacity to accept funds from them. As such, they argue that they are free to assess where their humanitarian action is most needed and control the aid they provide. Both MSF as an organization and their members state that they respect a professional code of ethics and therefore remain completely independent from political, economic or religious powers. While remaining independent, impartial and neutral at all time, they do not refrain from speaking up when witnessing extreme acts of violence against individuals or groups. This might entail bringing attention to extreme need and unacceptable suffering in the case where lifesaving medical care is obstructed, if medical facilities come under threat or attack, when crises are neglected or when aid is inadequate or abused. As mentioned in the introduction, MSF present itself as striving for accountability, determined to evaluate the effects of their activities. They assume responsibility of accounting their actions to both patients and donors alike\(^5\) (MSF, 2017).

MSF claim to assume responsibility and account for their actions. They also claim to continuously evaluate the effects their activities might have.\(^6\) This indicates that MSF are, intentionally or unintentionally, working with an application of the Hippocratic Approach. Simultaneously, through testimonies\(^7\), statements\(^8\), reports\(^9\), websites\(^10\) and book (Magone, Neuman & Weissman, 2011), MSF could be argued to heavily engage in communication to the public.

After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999, MSF launched a new website called the Access Campaign\(^11\), capitalizing on their arguably newfound media attention. The website offers information regarding their different campaigns\(^12\) and means of advocacy such as press-releases, reports, medical journals and research articles, multimedia, speeches, statements and letters, op-eds and events. To further emphasize their determination to the Hippocratic Approach, MSF have their own website called MSF-Analysis\(^13\) dedicated to the reflection on

\(^11\) [https://www.msfaccess.org/reports](https://www.msfaccess.org/reports)
\(^13\) [http://msf-analysis.org/introducing-msf-analysis/](http://msf-analysis.org/introducing-msf-analysis/)
MSF’s operation as well as the wider humanitarian industry (MSF, 2017). This goes well in line with an organization trying to communicate a desire to apply the Hippocratic Approach. It might also be argued to go in line with a desire to brand oneself as a trustworthy organization, committed to advocacy and media exposure.

A branding strategy has been to attach celebrities to the organization (Budabin et al, 2017: 1953). MSF has over the years gained support from celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt through their foundation, but also Kanye West, Robin Williams and the Rolling Stones to name a few (LookToTheStars, 2017).

### 2.2 South Sudan

South Sudan is often referred to as the world’s youngest nation and faces challenges stemming from both historical and newly emerged conflicts. Today, an estimated 6.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. To contextualize in health-related struggles, it is estimated that there are only 1 doctor per 65,000 patients. (OCHA, 2016: 1ff). According to the Human Development Index of 2016, South Sudan comes in at country 181 out of 188 (UNDP, 2016).

The civil war in what is now South Sudan has been referred to as the longest running in Africa and dates back to 1956. Since its inception, over two million people have died, making it one of the bloodiest on the continent. A majority of the victims have been civilians (MSF, 2017). Before South Sudan became independent, it fought in a civil war with the central government of Sudan. The conflict had elements of marginalization, religion and control over resources. It ended in 2005 with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement that stated that a referendum would be held regarding the southern region’s independence. Six years later, South Sudan was born. The old rebel group, Sudanese People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) became the newly independent country’s armed forces (ACAPS, 2015: 3).

In December 2013, soldiers from the military began to fight over political and ethnic lines. The newly removed Vice President Riek Machar was accused by President Salva Kiir to attempt to instigate a coup. The fighting spread to several other states in South Sudan and has resulted in several newly formed militias and rebel groups, amongst them Riek Machar’s SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO).

The civil war in Sudan was often described as being a conflict over religion. The same goes for the conflict in South Sudan, where President Salva Kiir, a Dinka, often gets depicted against his former Vice President, a Nuer. (Ibid, 2015: 3f).

In the summer of 2015, the conflicting parties signed the Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). Despite this, fighting resumed the following year and civilians have been severely targeted by both sides with violence spreading to previously spared regions of the country (HRW, 2017a). In February 2016, government forces attacked a UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) site. In July, as Kiir and Machar met in the capital of Juba, fighting erupted leading to fierce violence against civilians, looting of civilian’s properties and attacks on UN sites. In February 2017, a man-made famine in two states was declared by the UN agencies present (HRW, 2017b).

3. Theory and previous research

This segment will highlight previous research and theory. I will first elaborate on the three approaches outlined by Mary B. Anderson, with special attention given to the third approach, the Hippocratic Approach, which as previously mentioned is the desired approach to conduct one’s humanitarian work after. I will continue with theory and previous research about how NGOs, as part of the non-profit sector, pursue resources and how branding is a vital element in that pursuit. This segment will also outline how organizations create a brand, with key factors such as information, trust, knowledge and transparency. This will demonstrate how the industry has moved towards being more fund driven and the importance of branding.

3.1 The Hippocratic Approach

The *Hippocratic Approach* could be said to follow the thought-process of medical professionals. In the inception of their careers, doctors take an oath to do whatever is in their professional abilities to serve the health and wellbeing of their patients. Subsequently, they acknowledge that the scope in which they operate, in their case the medical sciences, are imperfect. Therefore, they assume responsibility to always adhere to the most recent development in their fields. The basis of this oath can be boiled down to the phrase, “first, do no harm”.

Thus, it recognizes the possibility that the knowledges and practices they perform can bring good as well as do harm. Moreover, a NGO committed to the Hippocratic Approach assumes responsibility for the larger and long-term impacts of their presence as well as learning from successes and mistakes.
NGOs are also very attentive to the local recipients they are there to help (Anderson, 2005; 642f). Thus, NGO adhering to the Hippocratic Approach could be assumed to take part in conflict analysis and concerned with dynamics and mechanisms in which they could in fact “do harm”.

When adopting a principle of “do no harm”, one tries specifically to mitigate the negative consequences of how the assistance in conflicts can be used by people to pursue political or military advantage. Its primary focus is the humanitarian aid and the fact that the relief does not escalate the conflict (ATHA, 2010: 10) The Hippocratic Approach can also be argued to adopt high levels of conflict sensitivity – the ability to understand the context in which it intervenes, understand the interaction between its operation and the context as well as adhere to this understanding (Ibid, 3).

By attempting to evaluate, reflect and critique their work, NGOs are aware and stay vigilant of their actions while being open to possible alterations in order to avoid situations where they do harm. The obstacle is that there are no clear measures on how to best attain the Hippocratic Approach. Pamela Aall (2005: 370) writes that different NGO has employed different tactics to avoid “doing harm”; some have set up measures to prevent theft of humanitarian food, supplies and other resources. Others have incorporated conflict management into the planning and implementation of their humanitarian activities. As previously mentioned (note 6-9), MSF can be argued to employ tactics such as conflict reports, statements and the publishing of books to communicate their commitment to the Hippocratic Approach.

3.2 Mechanisms that can “do harm” and counter measures

To better exemplify what “harm” NGOs can inflict on conflict areas and the population they are there to help, the next segment will highlight a few mechanisms in which NGOs can be complicit in fueling and prolonging conflicts. The mechanism mentioned are examples to clarify what the term “harm” can entail. They will to some extent help uncover if an engagement in an analysis of the conflict dynamics is underway. There might be many other mechanisms potentially harmful to conflict dynamics. The chosen mechanisms coincided with the researchers themselves, Mary B Anderson in particular, and were therefore deemed useful to this thesis.
Disproportional aid
The potential risk of neglecting local contexts, as in the two first approached, could result in aid organizations employing people from one side of the warring parties, further boosting hostilities among ethnic groups (Anderson, 1999: 55f). Similarly, NGOs can prolong conflicts by establishing perceptions amongst parties that disproportional aid is given to the enemy. This in turn might fuel tension that risk to undermine the aid (Okumu, 2003: 129).

To avoid tensions that may follow a perceived favorable aid distribution, NGOs could set up committees or use already existing structures to involve local population in the decision making regarding the distribution of aid. The core assumption being that for anyone to gain, everyone must gain. It has been shown that when people themselves are involved in how to distribute aid, they are less prone to see it as a zero-sum game (Anderson, 1999: 47).

Reinforcing tension
NGOs are often stung by the violence and ferocious atmosphere of conflicts. This turns the hostilities amongst parties into the only reality. As such, aid is often focused on the already existing divisions, reinforcing the tensions that may exacerbate the conflict rather than building capacity building measures that may mitigate and build interdependence (Anderson, 1999: 23).

Safe havens, recruiting and capacity-building
NGOs can, under the mandate to feed or shelter anyone in need, help warring parties regain strength to resume fighting. This might intensify the war, leading to more fatalities and escalated violence where the intention was to mitigate and consolidate peace. Such an incident occurred in Zaire, where aid agencies realized they were sheltering and feeding former genocidaires, i.e. former government soldiers and individuals who had participated in the genocide in Rwanda. The camps, turned safe havens, resulted in the genocidaires ability to rebuild, regroup and subsequently launch guerilla warfare into Rwanda. When this came to the attention of MSF, they quickly retracted. However, they were immediately replaced by other international NGOs, (Okumu, 2003: 124f).

Legitimizing arms as power
Other detrimental situations can unfold themselves if the NGO's decides to employ armed guards for the safekeeping of their goods and/or staff. By hiring armed guards, the NGO legitimizes the arms role in power relations, sending out an implicit message that an upper hand in weapons give you advantage over resources (Anderson, 1999: 42).
One might argue that the militarized protection of aid staff highlights the inequalities between the visiting staff and unprotected local population, as outlined in the second approach.

*Resources*

As Anderson (1999: 38) stresses, the very existence of aid resources can lead to escalation, simply due to the fact that resources mean power in a context of war where resources tend to be fiercely scarce. Resources most often imply medical materials, food, money but as Okumu (2003: 128) describes, even the building of a road intended to facilitate the delivery of aid could subsequently be used for faster transportation by warring parties. Sullivan & Wood (2015: 737) also argues that very influx in resources itself can have negative outcomes to the conflict in two main ways, especially to civilians. First, the inflow of resources from humanitarian organizations into conflict areas increases the risk of looting and pillage, which often result in severe violence towards civilians. Second, humanitarian organization’s presence challenges the authority and control over local population. Thus, rebels are more likely to use excess violence in order to maintain that control over civilians or dissuade them from exploiting the aid.

Rebels have been known to inflate the numbers of refugees so as to divert food supplies that could later be sold for profit. Other tactics used by warring parties in conflicts include extortion through bribes or the introduction of import duties, license and visa fees, rent contracts and port as well as airport charges imposed by warlords. Other arrangements may include so called access fees in order to get through roadblocks and checkpoints or “protection fees” (Okumu, 2003: 127).

*Legitimacy*

These means to attain resources as stated above, results in NGOs entering into arrangements with actors in the conflict. This recognizes that side as a legitimate actor. Even though the intension may be to guarantee aid’s successful delivery to civilians in need, it might lead to an escalation due to an immediate expansion of that sides activity and capacity (Okumu, 2003: 127f).

To not give legitimacy, one has to identify what is illegitimate about that power. Violence and threat can be argued to always be illegitimate means to power. Same goes for greed and self-serving purposes. What is encouraged is accountability, responsibility and concern for civilian welfare. Thus, the measures need to create incentives to assume those characteristics.
NGO should refrain from using aid as resources to coerce, threaten or bribe warlords and instead use those resources to emphasize communication, tolerance and trust. Co-opting warlords into systems helping them grow concern over civilian welfare have also been proven useful to turn the relationship around (Anderson, 1999: 51ff).

*Theft*
Since resources mean power, those resources are often the subject of theft. In fact, theft is considered the most recognized process where aid contributes to conflict dynamics. In order to steal, thieves would need information, opportunity, incentives and impunity.

Therefore, as an NGO, one could counter the risk of theft by putting in place different mechanisms. Such mechanism could include never to deliver aid according to schedule, never deliver aid to the same exact location twice, to loudly advertise one’s delivery so as to be able to hold thieves accountable if the aid would be stolen (Anderson, 1999: 39f). Another measure may imply importing aid that have value for use but not for sale (Ibid: 51ff).

*Support counterinsurgency tactics*
Governments have been known to use NGOs as part of their counterinsurgency. Claiming the help of NGOs to secure civilian’s safety, the built refugee camps and settlements can help promote the warring side’s tactics to depopulate an area. Even if done impartially, the camps can be part of the government’s deliberate warfare to either pressure civilians or fight rebels (Okumu: 126).

### 3.3 Humanitarian NGOs as brands

This segment will try to elaborate on how NGOs as actors depend on branding in order to receive funds. First, I will try to explain the essence of a brand and a brand’s meaning in order to attain valuable income from private donors. I will then touch upon the notion of trust as a vital part of a successful brand in order to maintain a flow of funds and expansion of support. Lastly, I will grasp upon the commercializing aspect, highlighting the use of celebrity and media-coverage to strengthen one’s brand, and the implications.

Financial resources from private funds are crucial for non-profits organization's persistence. MSF's received slightly over 96% of their income from individuals (MSF, 2016a; 29). Thus, it might be argued that branding in MSF’s case might be crucial for retrieving funds.
In search of funds, Aldashev & Verdier (2010; 48) points out that there are several ways in which NGOs can pursue them; direct mailing, door-to-door campaigns, advertisement in the media or organizing fundraising dinner. However, a successful brand might determine those tactics.

What constitutes a brand? Michel and Rieunier (2012; 701) defines it as a name, sign, term, drawing or a combination of several that help to identify an organization's services or help to differentiate them from other actors. A brand is however not only something tangible, but can also be a notion associated with meaning, good or bad. Furthermore, Kylander & Stone (2012; 37f) argues that with a strong brand, organizations are able to gain financial, human and social resources. The brand's strength also lends authority over allocation of those resources, since trust is embedded in a brand's strength.

Branding is of utmost importance when competing for public and private funds. An organization's image, attained through successful branding, contributes to the extent in which people are willing to donate money to the NGO.

Additionally, previous research has shown that past donation behavior also determined one's probability to invest human resources, i.e. people who donate are more probable to also volunteer for the same (Paco, Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2014; 11).

It has been argued that brand is even more critical in the non-profit sector than the for-profit sector. This is based on the fact that in the for-profit sector, customers provide financial resources in return for a product or service - something tangible. In the non-profit sector however, customers, or donors, give financial support based on the knowledge that their donations will be used appropriately. The donors do not in the same way receive any tangible product, and their donations are often used in attaining social goals (Daw & Cone, 2010; 7). The immediate consequence of course, being that the non-profit sector has become more competitive (Ibid; 10).

How then does some organizations attract more funds than others? Apart from branding, Burt (2014; 1) argues that trust is a vital factor for donor's support of the organization. Trust also is key in determining the sustainability and growth of an organization's donor population.

How does one explain the essence of trust? Burt (Ibid; 3f) present the cognitive trust and the affective trust. The former is based on the donor's perception of an organization's ability, reliability, predictability.
In lesser words, the cognitive aspect stresses the amount of knowledge the donor has of the organization in question. Knowledge further helps the donor to differentiate between trustworthy organizations and opportunistic ones. This crucial knowledge need to be presented as evidence, or information. Thus, information gaps reduce the risk of un-trustworthiness. The affective trust is based on cares and concerns donors and organizations share, i.e. poverty, children or health. However, for a possible donor to be able to assess if a shared concern exists, the organizations must communicate this. One way to communicate this is via information. Hence, information is key to establish the knowledge of a shared concern.

In a landscape of more than 26,000 other NGO's, standing out is pivotal to communicate one's message. As Aldashev & Verdier (2010; 48ff) points out, NGO’s in comparison with the public sector, need to compete for the funds they aim to maintain their mission with. Such competing activities include the media. More concretely, a tactic employed may be to follow the TV camera, to steal spotlight. Another tactic, as outlined earlier, has been to attach a celebrity to one’s brand.

4. Methodology

To answer the research questions, this thesis will proceed as a single case study where the current conflict in South Sudan will be given center stage to examine if MSF is engaged in an analysis of the conflict dynamics in relation to humanitarian action (as stipulated in the Hippocratic Approach) and in that case how. Additionally, are these communicated in the settings of South Sudan. This guiding question will be explored through three separate research questions. To adequately assess this, a qualitative content analysis will be applied.

4.1 Material

The material consists of reports and reviews written by MSF concerning MSF. The Maban Review was published after a refugee emergency in 2013 and the Malakal Report was published by MSF in aftermath of an attack on a UN base in which MSF operated. Both events happened in South Sudan. They contain most information and thus make up a large part of the analysis.

I will in these reports and reviews firstly analyze if MSF is engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harms other organizations can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?
Secondly, is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harm they themselves (MSF) can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how? Thirdly, I will attempt to identify if there is a perceived disproportion in the discussion of harms other organizations can cause and they themselves can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan?

Moreover, the material consists of activity updates. The activity updates are authored by MSF and include shorter reports from the field. Mainly, the activity updates communicate the conflict dynamics, state by state, of the month it was published. Furthermore, it contains data, such as numbers of patients, number of staff etc.

The material also consists of articles and additional testimonies from staff. The articles may refer to critical events that need to be communicated swiftly concerning the conflict. Such events may include attacks on medical facilities, outbreak of diseases, world politics and so forth. They make up additional information and represent another type of communication MSF are part of.

Complementary sources are MSF’s websites devoted to reflections on humanitarian actions. “MSF-Analysis”\(^ {15}\) contains Op-Eds and speeches regarding actualities where MSF are involved in the conflict in South Sudan\(^ {16} \) (MSF-Analysis, 2017). MSF-crash\(^ {17} \) is a platform devoted to directly study and analyze the actions of MSF to improve its work. The website lends access to a multitude of articles, blog-posts and a book\(^ {18} \). Concretely, five articles were identified as relevant, three blogposts and one book alongside a cahier (MSF-Crash, 2017). I will also use reports from MSF Centre for Applied Reflection on Humanitarian Practice (ARHP)\(^ {19} \). Even though ARHP is limited due to its perspective coming from MSF’s Operational Centre Barcelona, there is useful information that can be said to gain the analysis as a whole, especially their Emergency Gap Series (1, 3 & 5) and MSF’s internal review regarding the attack on the Malakal Protection of Civilians Site\(^ {20} \) in 2016 (ARHP, 2017).

\(^{15}\) [http://msf-analysis.org](http://msf-analysis.org)

\(^{16}\) [http://msf-analysis.org/tag/south-sudan/](http://msf-analysis.org/tag/south-sudan/)

\(^{17}\) [https://www.msf-crash.org/en/crash](https://www.msf-crash.org/en/crash)


\(^{19}\) [https://arhp.msf.es/about-us](https://arhp.msf.es/about-us)

\(^{20}\) [https://arhp.msf.es/publications/reports](https://arhp.msf.es/publications/reports)
As mentioned earlier, MSF created the Access Campaign site in the aftermath of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999. Even though its purpose tends to lean towards advocacy\textsuperscript{21}, I still deem it useful since it stores one report, a press releases and letter that will be analyzed (MSFAccess, 2017). The material stems from MSFs websites since it is deemed most relevant for the thesis. By extracting information from their website, one uncovers what MSF they themselves choose to share with the wider public. As such, one attains what MSF want to communicate to the wider public.

This information, in its own being, can be argued to be either for branding purposes or by adhering to the Hippocratic Approach, intentionally as well as un-intentionally. However, since the source is MSF and the subject is MSF, investigating what their websites shares is deemed most relevant in regard to the research questions.

\textbf{4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis}

With a qualitative content analysis, one attempts to attain the meaning sometimes hidden in the context or in-between the lines of texts. The idea is that some parts and passages are deemed more important than others, which requires a qualitative methodology to reach and interpret beyond the words written (Esaiasson et al., 2012: 210)

There are two main strategies to the qualitative content analysis, the systematizing and the critical review. The former is often used in descriptive analysis and can be fruitful when the aim is to clarify thought patterns with actors that are part of the larger societal debate (Esaiasson et al, 2012: 2011). This corresponds well with the aim of this paper. As one of the biggest NGOs in the world, MSF is part of the societal debate regarding humanitarian action, and the thesis pursues an objective to identify if they adopt a Hippocratic Approach which can be said to represent a desired thought pattern within organizations, complying to the methodology.

While conducting a qualitative document analysis, the data used could be varied and may include advertisement, manuals, charters, books and brochures, diaries and journals, press releases, organizational reports, survey data amongst other. Furthermore, they may stem from both printed and electronic sources.

\textsuperscript{21} \url{https://www.msfaccess.org/the-access-campaign}
To properly analyze the findings, one needs to select, make sense of and synthesize data contained in documents. This data could imply excerpts, quotations or passages to highlight interesting findings related to the research questions. The data is then organized into themes of categories through the ongoing content analysis (Bowen, 2009: 27f).

Esaiasson et al (2012: 215f) also emphasizes the importance of categorizing the findings to better analyze the data and answer the research question. While renamed questions, Esaiasson et al. (Ibid) stresses that they make out the corner stones of one’s research. Furthermore, these questions, or analytical tools, are to be considered the empirical indicators to the formulated research problem, meaning that they should be relevant to the topic. Additionally, it is important to think of these questions in terms of validity. I therefore found it fruitful to handle my research questions as my empirical indicators.

4.3 Operationalization

The categories referred to when analyzing data in a qualitative content analysis will in this thesis fall under each research question. Thus, each question will be regarded as a category, to help guide the reader and clarify the analysis.

My guiding research questions is “Does, and if then how, MSF engage in an analysis of conflict dynamics in relation to humanitarian action (as stipulated in the Hippocratic Approach) as well as communicate these in the settings of South Sudan?”.

It will be answered, however, through my three additional research questions

- Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harms other organizations can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?
- Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harm they themselves (MSF) can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?
- Is there a perceived disproportion in the discussion of harms other organizations can cause and they themselves can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan?

By narrowing the questions down to a matter of communicating other organizations potential harm and one’s own potential harm, the questions relate to how they might be involved in branding vis a vis their tendencies to work along a Hippocratic Approach.
Can content from the material published by MSF be linked to such mechanisms outlined in 3.2? And what implications may it have on the dynamics? But most importantly, are those communicated from MSF’s side? And when they are communicated, are they communicated in relation to other organizations or to MSF themselves?

When referring to conflict dynamics, this thesis implies the interconnectivity across stages. That is, a stage within a conflict process that affect what happens in a later stage of the conflict (Jones & Metzger, 2016: 4).

In order to clearly uncover if MSF is engaged in an analysis and communication of the conflict dynamics, and in that case how – it is vital to operationalize what will be sought out as dynamics. I will seek help in the mechanisms outlined in section 3.2. Do they, for instance, engage in a discussion about disproportion of aid. Are they involved in a discussion regarding the hiring of armed guards during attacks? Is there an ongoing discussion outlined in the reports or reviews concerning imported resources and potential implications? Do they communicate the consequences of entering into agreements with local stakeholders and the risk of legitimizing that party?

In the latter question, however never included, a small-scale quantification will help guide a conclusion to whether a disproportion of criticism could be argued for and who’s criticized. What kind of organizations are they engaged in a criticism against? Is it the UN and similar intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) or other NGOs?

Dynamics that will be sought after primarily are those that can be linked to the mechanisms that might bring harm. Those dynamics are deemed more relevant to the thesis since they will in a clearer manner be able to tell us if MSF are involved in an analysis of the conflict as well as the harm other organizations and/or they themselves can cause in terms of conflict dynamics.

4.4 Discussion on methodology

As stated earlier, this thesis will pursue a single-case study while conducting the research. An alternative, and maybe more fruitful one, could have been to conduct a comparative case study. By comparing, the thesis could have reached more concrete results regarding organizations communication about their application of a Hippocratic Approach.
However, difficulties finding a matching organization (budget, size etc) in relation to which to make a relevant comparison and the time-frame of this bachelor’s thesis meant that I had to limit myself to a single case-study. Some initial matching organizations I considered were the International Medical Corps (IMC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). However, in comparison with MSFs $87 million in South Sudan alone (MSF, 2016b: 6), IMC spend around $72 million on the whole of Africa (IMC, 2016: 37) and relies on a body of national staff amounting to 700 individuals (IMC, 2017: 2). MSF employs little under 3,700 full time staff (MSF, 2016a: 8). As for ICRC, I was more hesitant to its mandate and recognition that seems to coincide more with that of an institution than a NGO22 (ICRC, 2017).

To ensure more credibility, the thesis could have reached for triangulation. Bowen (2009: 28) elaborates that such a triangulation is the result of document analysis combination with other qualitative methods or sources such as interviews, semi-participatory or participatory observations. This may counter the fact that one’s findings are just an artifact of one single method, one single source of the researcher’s bias. This would also counter the potential internal discussion MSF may employ about the adherence to a Hippocratic Approach. However secondary to my purpose which is to investigate MSF’s external communication.

5. Analysis

The analysis will be divided into each research question, so as to better outline the arguments and uncover the potential results in a clear way. First, the analysis will tackle the two research questions, then proceed to the third, more comparative one. The research questions will be analyzed while maintaining the mechanism from part 3.2 in mind, drawing links between them, the research questions and the material, so as to better identify if MSF are engaged in communicating an analysis in terms of conflict dynamics. To better give a sense of the perceived tone and delivery of criticism, the analysis will incorporate quotes to better illustrate this.

5.1 Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harms other organizations can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?

In the wake of the attack on the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Malakal, MSF was particularly critical of UNMISS. According to MSF, they failed on numerous accounts – in preventing the attack, by blocking the escape of internally displaced people (IDPs) while the violence was ongoing and the failure to stop the ongoing violence. They go on to blame other NGOs at the same time, but refer to other NGO’s dependent situation on the UN Cluster system as a reason for that rigidity:

“The rigid structure of the UN integrated mission within the PoC site prevented an efficient emergency response, as the strong reliance that humanitarian organizations had on the UN security apparatus and its recommendations for security meant that they could not be mobilized and thus assist in the humanitarian and medical emergency response.” – MSF, 2016c: 2.

MSF goes on to criticize UNMISS for their wider maintenance of the camp and the negative consequences connected to such approaches, mainly in relation to their sector of humanitarian aid, which is medical:

“Even today, living conditions in places like Bentiu and Malakal PoC sites fail to meet minimum standards, a problem which is widely known to produce a detrimental impact on the health of the camp residents” MSF, 2016: 9

MSF expresses concern about perceived inactivity from UNMISS. MSF claims in the Malakal review that holes in the fences were reported, but ignored. Furthermore, MSF reports that agencies alarmed UNMISS about the ongoing weapons-smuggling, however, never dealt with either (Ibid, 24). Additionally, MSF mentions allegations that SPLA soldiers were seen entering the PoC, disguised as IDPs, which led increased tension in the camp (MSF, 2016c: 16).
The quotes demonstrate communication from MSF side about the potential harm other organizations can cause. These harms could further be linked to some of the mechanisms outlined in 3.2, namely importation of resources through weapons smuggling and recruitment and capacity-building through the alleged SPLA soldiers infiltrating the camp. This link between harm and mechanism as potentially worsening of conflict is not communicated by MSF which only communicates the harm, but does not put it in perspective. As such, MSF does not communicate the harms in terms of conflict dynamics, but rather harms as operational from UN’s side.

In the post-fighting settings, MSF identifies what they mention as extremely worrisome measures taken by UNMISS. Instead of repairing the fences of the PoC themselves, UNMISS put resources in to directly repairing and reinforcing the fencing separating the PoC site from the UN base within the site.

“Of extreme concern is that UNMISS has not adequately reinforced the outer perimeter of the PoC to ensure that attacks like this one do not happen again in the future. Instead, they have put resources into reinforcing the fencing between the PoC and the UN LogBase” – MSF, 2016c: 28.

This will, according to MSF, lead to a situation where IDPs, in a similar attack, will not be able to reach safety and hence be even more vulnerable (Ibid: 28). In this severe criticism by MSF targeting the UN operation, it does not go on to communicate to what extent this could be detrimental to the conflict in terms of dynamics. MSF continues by expressing concern about the fact that IDPs no longer feel safe inside the PoC, which are established sites of protection.

“Many IDPs, however, also stated their fear of returning to the PoC, especially as they assert that UNMISS has done nothing to improve the security of the camp from the outside.” – MSF, 2016c: 32.

MSF reports criticism several IDPs made regarding UNMISS post-events actions. The UN soldiers were perceived as giving favorable protection to Dinka and Darfuri IDPs. They were argued to benefit from favorable protection and special treatment, especially in relation to the amount of protection, or lack thereof, experienced during the attacks themselves:
“UNMISS soldiers were put on duty to protect and separate a section of the Dinka houses, which angered many of the other IDPs in the camp as it contrasted sharply with the lack of security presence during the events themselves and made UNMISS appear partial.” – MSF, 2016c: 28.

MSF clearly communicates a criticism targeting another organization, here the UN. MSF also expresses the concern of partial aid, something that can be linked to the mechanism of disproportional aid. MSF does not present this partial aid as a mechanism however, but simply state this to be a problematic handling from UN’s part.

MSF criticizes the other NGOs present during the events that occurred in the PoC in Malakal. According to MSF, the other organizations remained passive during the attacks, leaning on UN recommendation. MSF clarifies that even though UN staff are bound to adhere to these recommendations, remaining NGOs are not (Ibid: 26). The fact is simply communicated by MSF, and not put in relation to potential harms this might have led to in the setting of the attack.

MSF expresses concern regarding the fact that ethnic lines have been drawn inside the camp, reflecting the conflict dynamics outside of the PoC:

“Due to the fact that the ethnic lines have been drawn inside the PoCs just as they have been outside, the PoCs have themselves now become a pawn in the conflict.” MSF, 2016c: 9.

MSF does seem to engage in an analysis of the conflict dynamics. They discuss a harm, that the tensions present outside of the camps now recreate themselves within the sites. This in turn, has made the camps themselves intricate in the conflict, affecting it negatively, by becoming pawns. What MSF does not include is the organizations role in these dynamics or harms. Thus, a discussion about harms in terms of conflict dynamics is present, but not in relation to other organizations or themselves.

In a report following the emergency response in Maban, MSF can be said to praise themselves vailed in criticism towards ICRC. MSF stresses that it took extensive lobbying for ICRC to even perform an assessment of the situation unfolding in Maban (Healy & Tiller, 2013: 8). The results did not impress MSF either, as they go on to claim that:
ICRC are further singled out as being a passive actor during the emergency, only acting upon pressure from MSF, even with their legal mandate to assist and protect civilians caught in violent conflicts (Ibid: 16). The criticism here is targeting ICRC, but MSF does not incorporate it into a discussion on how ICRC’s harms might affect the conflict dynamics.

MSF also criticizes IMC for relying too heavily on them during the emergency in Maban. IMC, which had been present in the region for over 25 years had, according to MSF, difficulties scaling up to meet the demands (Healy & Tiller, 2013: 11). MSF concludes that:

“It seems that MSF should revise its expectations of what other actors are capable of in such an emergency.” – Healy & Tiller, 2013: 2.

The critique highlighted above are of other specific organizations, acting within the humanitarian field. The criticism concerns the overall performance rather than targeting aspects during the events that could do harm. It is not put in context of conflict dynamics either, but rather may be interpreted as criticism aiding self-praise.

An event concerning the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), responsible for camp management, shelters and protection (MSF, 2016c: 14) involved the request of armed guards to escort them during the tumultuous events. This delayed their post-events response, in particular their management of dead bodies (Ibid: 27). MSF’s criticism towards DRC concerns their response during the attack, but does not elaborate on potential harms DRC’s actions might have caused or implications such harms might have had in terms of conflict dynamics.

A potential harm DRC’s actions might be linked to is that of legitimizing arms as power through the employment of arms guards in conflict settings, as outlined in 3.2.

The review on Maban goes on with MSF highlighting other barriers NGOs faced in the conflict setting. Besides financial struggles hitting the distribution, MSF report that NGOs experienced extra fees such as bribes, so called taxes or unexpected charges to have been necessary at every stage. They also had to fraternize with informal mafias in order to meet the surplus of need experienced in Maban (Healy & Tiller, 2013: 12). The criticism delivered by MSF is not put in relation the potential harm it might cause in terms of conflict dynamics.
Rather, it might be examples to illustrate the point MSF made earlier, namely that they might have to rethink the amount of support they can count on.

From section 3.2, one might identify mechanisms in doing harm connected to resources, such as taxes and other charges allocated to “informal mafias”.

In a paragraph addressing the wider NGO sector in the emergency that unfolded in Maban, MSF does not seem to find many positive notes, criticizing the humanitarian response as too slow, too small, too poor and too careful:

“In Maban, notwithstanding their long-time experience in South Sudan and the ease of access, international NGOs were slow /.../ Some had significant capacity issues – especially not enough qualified people /.../ Smaller agencies especially suffered from their size, and the consequent high start-up costs, lack of quick and ready financing /../” – Healy & Tiller, 2013: 16.

This is an all-encompassing critique concerning every NGO mobilized during the events. MSF can be said to target every aspect of their mission, from their size, funding, capacity and execution. However, MSF does no put this in perspective in how is may have caused the refugees harm or how it might jeopardize the conflict dynamics.

MSF regrets in an article that the humanitarian aid in South Sudan has developed into a situation of integration of politics and aid. They argue that the delivery could have been more efficient. However, the integrated projects are relying on each other to a too great extent. When one fall, the whole mission falls as a consequence:

“In South Sudan, integration of politics and aid is what reduced access and increased expenses when the conflict erupted” – Hofman, 2015

MSF has an opening to analyze what these failures might do in terms of harm to conflict dynamics. Such analysis does not occur, but is left un said. It should be said that the article is not meant to be a reflective peace on the conflict in South Sudan specifically, even if the conflict is mentioned.
5.2 Is MSF engaged in a discussion regarding the potential harm they themselves (MSF) can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, and in that case how?

The report finalized in the wake of the attack on the PoC site in Malakal does show an engagement from MSF’s side to discuss harm they caused. MSF remains critical of the way they handled dead bodies during the attack.

This was caused by a lack of protocol which meant that staff member had no clear guide lines in how to receive the deceased, to mark them by name or dealing with them in a dignified and organized matter (MSF, Malakal 2016: 20). MSF does here discuss a wrong doing committed by them as an organization. They do not engage in the harm it could cause in terms of conflict dynamics however.

MSF continues to deliver a mild criticism regarding their contingency plans, which had been visualized but found incredible to actually occur, when interviewing staff post events. A mass casualty plan has been revised but never approved and therefore, never communicated to staff members. Both plans failed to predict the potential attack from outside the camp:

“Moreover, the plan had not envisaged an armed attack from outside the PoC.” – MSF, 2016c: 19.

The choice of word “moreover”, could arguably be interpreted as quite an objective word describing more an event in a formal way. The critical stance is thereby lost in a sense, from MSF side.

There is no mentioning of what the lack of preparedness in their contingency plan had on the events in Malakal. Neither do MSF engage in a discussion about the potential harm their lack of communication regarding the mass casualty plan had on the attack.

MSF published a review in 2013 connected to the emergency response conducted in Maban. This event is more connected to violence in Sudan, as refugees fled violence in Sudan. However, the review is based on events that took place in camps in South Sudan. It can thus be argued that they might have had an impact on conflict settings in South Sudan, therefore being deemed relevant to explore. In the review, MSF is self-critical in regard to their planning of unforeseen events, in this case a drastic influx of refugees.
Coordination and strategic overview are also focal points for criticism, where meetings turned meaningless due to lack of communication. Same goes for NGO’s overstating their own activities while down-sizing the scope of programs needed (Healy & Tiller, 2013: 13). MSF delivers clear self-criticism, but refrains from elaborating on how these shortcomings might affect the conflict negatively. MSF does not discuss any plans or changes to limit such shortcoming from happening again, either.

MSF remain critical against their perceived, and experienced, ambiguity. Sometimes MSF was more involved in criticizing other NGO’s work, and only intervened to fill the gap they criticized. This gap-filling tactic led to delays and uncertainty of operation. The review is also self-critical on how MSF shared information such as medical data to others (Healy & Tiller, 2013: 15). MSF concludes that this approach, wanting to be both an outsider and an insider.

An insider is given space to negotiate with other NGOs around key issues of the operation and outlining strategies for the program. An outsider is free from obligations to the wider operation, such as sharing data, and is able to point fingers of wrongdoings in other directions (Ibid: 18). This is problematic consequences in relation to claiming responsibility and thus, accountability. As such, it complicates its desire to adhere to the Hippocratic Approach. This view is not communicated by MSF explicitly, but can arguably be linked to Anderson’s theory separately. However, MSF engages in ways to counter such ambiguous behaviors in the future (Ibid: 18), arguably showing ability to adjust and change where necessary, which in turn may be interpreted as tendencies falling in the scope of the Hippocratic Approach.

In a different review, where the case of Maban is mentioned once more, MSF discusses its advocacy as being very confrontational and sometimes intimidating in how it pressures other organizations on fulfilling their commitments. MSF maintains a position where this brought positive outcomes, but it also created tensions amongst the agencies (Healy & Tiller, 2014: 26).

The two points of criticism referred to above includes harm MSF caused from an intra-agency perspective. Rather than being criticism in regard to refugees, IDPs or larger conflict dynamics, they engage in a discussion with bureaucratic tendencies.

In the Emergency Gap 05, MSF elaborates on difficulties the organization has experienced in South Sudan in regard to negotiating access as well as arrangements made with national and local stakeholder in assuring the safe delivery and execution of their aid.
Even if they have attained such approvals, MSF and their services still remain targeted and exposed to looting, attacks and destruction. One of the reasons for why MSFs facilities have been targeted is listed as attaining resources, such as vehicles, generators, radios and medical equipment.

They are mentioned as desirable to the relatively poorly equipped troops. To counter such tactics, MSF claims to have put in place measures that offers medical treatment to all sides of the conflict, regardless of community affiliation, ethnicity and so forth.

They have also decided to match the value of assets with the risk of looting, unfortunately limiting the quality of treatment (Buth, 2017: 18). The fact that they here both communicate the mechanism of looting and theft as well as how they have countered such risks goes well in line with the risk of harm outlined by Mary B Anderson and the measure one can put in place to mitigate such risk. By communicating this, MSF shows that they employ an analysis of consequences, and hence the Hippocratic Approach to some extent. However, they do not engage in a discussion about the harms these mechanisms might cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the setting of South Sudan.

5.3 Is there a perceived disproportion in the discussion of harms other organizations can cause and they themselves can cause in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan?

In the settings of the attack on the PoC in Malakal, MSF concludes that they acted timely, relevant and effectively in the situation, taking the lead when many other could not (MSF, 2016c: 2).

“MSF’s medical response to the crisis was timely, relevant and effective. MSF took the lead in the emergency response and was able to act when many others couldn’t.” – MSF, 2016c: 2.

The Malakal report counts 37 pages. However, MSF only dedicates two pages to the title “MSF response”. Furthermore, as elaborated in 5.2, the self-critical parts tend to be focused on matters of logistics, such as the management of dead bodies. Other self-reflecting passages are more focused on the relationship between organizations MSF might have negatively affected. As such, the critique might be argued to be of secondary importance for the recipients of aid.
Additionally, most of the dynamics or mechanisms communicated by MSF concerning MSF are in regard to their operations, such as how it has affected MSF’s work in the area. They fail to make an analysis on the dynamics and mechanisms in regard to the conflict in South Sudan. When claiming failure, it might be argued as such in relation to the commitment they show in their principles and charters that might suggest some tendencies towards a Hippocratic Approach.

In comparison to their self-critique, the criticism surrounding the UNs mission and the other NGOs, especially in the Malakal report, had severe consequences on the safety of the IDPs. Moreover, the critique referred to wrongdoings that could do harm in the pre-event face, during the attack and the post-event circumstances.

One might point to the fact that criticizing the UN might be an effective way to gain support as an advocating organization, without really criticizing much at all. As such, it might be perceived as a safe position, with little risk of imminent repercussions. At the same time, MSF has a unique position and ability to criticize the IGO, given the fact that they receive such a large portion of their funds from private sources.

In comparison to many of the other NGOs operating within the UN cluster system, MSF might be argued to hold a unique position in conflict settings. Hence, the criticism found in the Malakal report might not be located in other organizations reviews, in fear of repercussions such as a cut in funding and so forth.

Referring to the wider NGO sector operating in the conflict in South Sudan, the critique is overall linked to their inability to conduct proper aid, in reference to their size or budget. While criticizing the rest of the NGOs, they could be said to praise themselves by claiming that many of the other actors rely too heavily on MSF for successful execution.

It is important to notice that other than trying to decipher the tone of the quotes, it is hard to really come to a conclusion regarding the actual disproportion of criticism and its nature. It might be the case that MSF, as one of the largest HINGOS operating in conflict areas, actually execute their missions as stated in the various reports published. Furthermore, the critique concerning the other organizations might be well argued and legitimate, and thus not part of a potential branding tactic.

However, it is neither possible to exclude the possibility that the perceived difference in nature of criticism might have something to do with a branding tactic.
Overall, one might conclude that MSF communicate what harm both other organizations can cause and themselves. However, these are seldom put in context of conflict dynamics. It is at times easy, for oneself, to draw links between the harms presented by MSF and the mechanisms from 3.2 in this thesis. It might also be argued that those links are easier to draw in the criticism targeting other organizations.

This might have to do with the fact that the self-criticism is more from an administrative point of view, and that such harms are not dealt with in research and theory applied in this thesis. Therefore, it might be un-attainable for the analysis. It could however be that the different critiques might be perceived as different in relation to their impact to the conflict, that of immediate and secondary. For example, criticism about not mending fences, thus paving way for weapons smuggling might be of immediate concern, whereas the failed management of dead bodies during attacks could be said to have secondary impact to the harm in relation to conflict dynamics.

In conclusion, MSF does engage in a discussion regarding the potential harms other organizations can cause. Additionally, MSF does engage in a discussion regarding the potential harm they themselves can cause. MSF does not, however, engage in a discussion these harms can have in terms of conflict dynamics. Neither in regard to other organizations or themselves. The analysis showed however that those discussions were possible, since the harms mentioned by MSF could be linked to mechanisms detrimental to conflict dynamics, outlined by researchers.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that there is a perceived disproportion in the discussion of harm other organizations can cause in relation to the discussion of harm MSF themselves can cause. The disproportion is not linked to conflict dynamics, but rather linked to amount of criticism as well as type. This might however only be in regard to the material per se.

6. Conclusion

This essay has tried to illustrate some of the perceived difficulties organizations may face when operating within the field of humanitarian aid. While there is an agreed path of working towards a more Hippocratic Approach, there is also an increased move towards a marketization of the field and competitiveness over resources so fundamental for organization’s to be able to even provide their humanitarian aid.
The thesis has showed how MSF could be seen as wanting to apply a Hippocratic Approach. The thesis has also demonstrated the need for resources from MSF’s side and the necessity for them to engage on the market in order to maintain funding. The perceived conflict can be said to exist in the material analyzed where a slight disproportion of criticism was identified. One may argue that there was a disproportion in both amount of criticism and type of criticism, where the critique MSF pointed to themselves were of administrative and logistic substance. MSF criticism of other could be said to be largely either operational on a larger scale, as in the case with IMC and ICRC, or specific, as in DRC’s case. The main source of criticism was the UN however. In the scope of this thesis, it is hard to come to a conclusion to as why the UN might be given the hardest critique. The report on Malakal was a PoC managed by the UN, making one argue that they had the biggest responsibility, and thus deserved the hardest critique. One might argue that UN is an easy target, overwhelming in size and sources. Still, the criticism might be fair and just. The self-praise from MSF’s side as well. A comparative study would have uncovered more in that area.

The research found more closely that MSF do engage in a discussion regarding the potential harm other organizations can cause. MSF do also engage in such a discussion regarding the harm they themselves might cause. What they fail to communicate in the material investigated, is discuss those harms in terms of conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan. As such, MSF can be said, strictly with this material in mind, to not engage in an analysis of conflict dynamics in relation to humanitarian action (as stipulated in the Hippocratic Approach). Rather, MSF engage in a discussion regarding potential harms other organizations and themselves might cause. Since this discussion is not put in regard to the conflict dynamics in the settings of South Sudan, the analysis is absent. Why that is may further be investigated to identify if that might be a branding tactic or maybe communicated through other channels than reports and articles.

Aid might not solve the conflicts, but it can help those most in need. In a perfect world, humanitarianism might be a superfluous. Until that day however, aid organizations will continue to operate both within conflict and within markets.
7. References


IMC, 2017. ”South Sudan”. International Medical Corps. [www] <CS_SouthSudan_web.pdf> [Accessed November 2017].


