THE UNCHANGING POWER DYNAMICS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR:

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE LOCALIZATION DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the power dynamics in the humanitarian sector by conducting a critical discourse analysis of the discourse of Localization. In recent years, the calls for a power shift towards local actors and the crisis affected communities have grown significantly, which led to the emergence of the Localization discourse. Even though the sector agrees upon the benefits of a more localized humanitarian action, INGOs seemingly continue their operations without applying more localized approaches. Therefore, this thesis sets out to consider how the Localization discourse is influencing the power dynamics in the sector, as it implies a power shift that in reality can be only rarely witnessed. In order to address this puzzlement, this thesis conducts a critical discourse analysis.

The theoretical framework is grounded in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of Hegemony and contextualized through the supplementation of Teun van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power'.

The analysis considers two antagonistic positions within the Localization discourse that are both aiming to establish the dominant hegemonic discourse position. One side is expressed through the position of the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) and its outcomes, whereas the other side introduces a more 'people-centered' approach to Localization. Each position's discursive articulations are identified and analyzed. Furthermore, by applying van Dijk's framework, the context of each position is considered, as it is influential to the establishment of a hegemonic discourse position. By analyzing the positions and their contexts, the contents of each position become visible.

The WHS's position includes a wide range of components to more localized humanitarian action. Through the way they are discursively articulated, they allow a wider range of identification. Additionally, the analysis uncovers the emphasized necessity of international actors and their ascribed facilitating role in achieving the called-upon change. The discourse position of the more 'people-centered' approach to Localization on the other hand presents a more distinctly articulated position with the aim of putting affected people and communities at the center of the response as well as demanding a power shift towards local actors and the affected people.

The WHS's position was able to establish itself as the hegemonic discourse position because it articulated the position in a way that enabled wider support and identification. Moreover, the analysis showed that this position attributed a facilitating role to international actors. In combination with the hegemonic position of the UN and the powerful position of

international actors that they occupied previous to the Localization discourse, this explains why the WHS's discourse position dominated over the other. In conclusion, this analysis shows that the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector are not changed through the Localization discourse, as the hegemonic discourse position rather reestablishes the dominant position of international actors.

Nonetheless, as discourse articulation and the struggle over Hegemony are never ending processes, this thesis only presents an insight into the Localization discourse.

List of Abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
C4C	Charter for Change
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
HAR	Humanitarian Accountability Report
HERR	Humanitarian Emergency Response Review
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
L2GP	Local to Global Protection
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
P-FIM	People First Impact Method
SCLR	Survivor and Community-Led Crisis Response
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

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1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and its aftermath can be considered as a significant turning point towards change in the humanitarian sector, as it facilitated a large-scale evaluation of this humanitarian crisis (Cerruti et al. 2013, 4, 6). The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) was to identify and address the shortcomings in the carried out response to this disaster (Cosgrave 2007).

> [T]he Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (composed of donors, aid groups, and independent researchers) found "accountability and ownership" to be a prominent weak spot in the operation. It homed in particularly on power dynamics, arguing that habitual, supply-driven practices by international relief agencies had overlooked and marginalized the more impactful work of local actors. (Konyndyk & Worden 2018, 2)

Within the report, the TEC calls out existing practices and highlights the need for a more localized humanitarian action (Cosgrave 2007). This landmark evaluation called for change within the humanitarian sector and enabled the emergence of the Localization discourse.

In recent years, Localization has gained significant relevance in the humanitarian context. Albeit there not being a universal definition of Localization[1], it entails the idea of shifting aid more directly to the affected communities and working closer with national and local actors. The literature exploring this topic has increased substantially in the last few years and the sector has begun to acknowledge these approaches as well. During the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) held in Istanbul in 2016, a new *Agenda for Humanity* was agreed upon, which included a commitment to Localization in its core agreements. Additionally, the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain* provide commitments of big international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and donors to Localization. Further, the 2016 *Time to Let Go* initiative called upon aid organizations to let go of power and control and give it back to national and local actors. Overall, the humanitarian sector agrees on the benefits of Localization in humanitarian aid, which are closely connected to the efforts of resilience, better and faster on the ground response, and more efficient use of funds.

At the end of last year, I attended the *Kampala Innovation Forum on Locally Led Response to Crisis and Displacement* in Uganda, which provided a space for humanitarian

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[1] Section 5.2 will elaborate on this term further.

workers from all around the world to share experiences of a more locally-led, people-centered crisis response and learn from each other. Everyone seemed to agree that humanitarian work needs to put the affected people and communities in the focus of their work and tailor aid specifically to individual cases rather than applying standardized programs. However, even though small scale examples of locally-led responses were presented, it repeatedly became evident that this type of response is not a universal trend within the sector. This stands in contrast to the benefits of Localization that are agreed upon throughout the sector.

INGOs seemingly continue their day to day operations as before and the change that is called upon seems not to be realized. Thus, there appears to be a contrast between the reality within the sector and the discourse of Localization, which suggests a more localized approach towards humanitarian action. Even though this presents a problem of implementation, this thesis will stay on the discursive level, in order to examine the relationship between theoretical considerations and their influence in practice. Therefore, while staying on the level of discourse, this thesis aims at determining how the Localization discourse influences the existing power structures in the humanitarian sector.

During the above-mentioned *Innovation Forum*, the call for a power shift from INGOs to the affected people and communities and local actors was evident. However, it seemed that INGOs had a different interpretation of what Localization comprises. Therefore, I will explore the Localization discourse by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Further, through the discourse of Localization, this thesis explores the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector by considering two antagonistic positions within the Localization discourse and their efforts to establish the hegemonic discourse. The CDA will yield the answer as to why a certain discourse position dominates over the others, thus allowing me to examine which and why that position is able to establish the hegemonic discourse. At first glance, Localization seems to suggest a shift of power towards national and more specifically local actors. The analysis will clarify who is really dominating the Localization discourse and why. Furthermore, I will consider how the hegemonic Localization discourse position is influencing the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector. In the light of this tension between the theoretical claim of the Localization discourse and witnessed reality in the sector, I will examine the following research question.

2. Problem Formulation

How is the Localization discourse influencing the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector?

While Localization implies a power shift towards local actors and affected communities, the reality within the humanitarian sector seems not to reflect this shift. Therefore, this thesis aims at investigating the Localization discourse and its underlying discursive logic. Through the application of a CDA, the thesis will uncover this discursive logic and its significance to the discourse, as well as to the reality within the humanitarian sector. Further, this thesis aims at determining how the Localization discourse is influencing the power dynamics within the sector and vice versa. More specifically, it explores whether the Localization discourse will bring about the power shift it implies to do, or if the discourse reflects the current power structures.

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. Hereafter, chapter 3 presents the methodological considerations relevant to the thesis. Chapter 4 introduces the selected theories and their application, while chapter 5 produces the background and context within this thesis is set. Thereafter, chapter 6 contains the analysis, in this case a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Lastly, chapter 7 contemplates the findings and concludes the thesis.

3. Methodology

The following section will present the methodology relevant for this thesis as well as discuss the causality of the decisions made, such as the choice of theories and data. Firstly, section 3.1 comprises general considerations and includes the introduction of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the method and choice for the analytical approach. Furthermore, section 3.2 will consider the data methods utilized. Thereafter, section 3.3 will present the theories which will be utilized with the intention of answering the research question as well as elaborate on the choice of theories. Here, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony will be introduced, as it provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. Additionally, their theory is supplemented by van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power'. The theories were chosen in line with CDA, as it presents both theory and method. Section 3.4 presents the research design by Boon and Walton in order to provide structure to the analytical process. The chapter closes with section 3.5 acknowledging the limitations of this thesis.

3.1 Methodological Considerations and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as Method

At this point, I will reflect upon the choice of perspective for this research and the overall research design. The approach for this thesis is a deductive one, which starts "at the intersection of the theorist and the existing knowledge" (Shepherd & Sutcliffe 2011, 361). More specifically, contrary to the inductive approach, theory does not emerge through the data but precedes it (ibid) and starts with a specific problem (Svensson 2009, 192). Deductive research moves from the general to the specific (Shepherd & Sutcliffe 2011, 363). In the case of this thesis, the research started with the formulation of a research problem and the choice of theories in accordance with said problem.

While there are many approaches to Discourse Analysis, this thesis will focus less on the linguistic aspects of the specific discourse but rather utilize a critical discourse analysis which is based on Foucault. This approach considers the social field in its practices and reality. Whereas the socio-linguistic approach considers discourse as an interactionist notion that transpires in social situations, for Foucault, discourse is not limited to text but comprises

"practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (qtd. in Mayr 2008, 8). He combined the socio-linguistic approach with a structuralist understanding and defines discourse "as a kind of practice that belongs to collectives rather than individuals; and as located in social areas or fields" (Diaz-Bone et al. 2008, 8). There are, however, scholars who emphasize the role of the individual, as it is shaped and constructed by discursive practices.

CDA presents a type of research that most prominently studies "the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk 2015, 466). Therefore, it connects the micro level of language use and interaction to the macro level of society, institution and organizations (ibid, 668; Mayr 2008, 9). Gramsci's development of hegemony has been especially influential to CDA (Fairclough et al. 2011, 359) with its focus on domination through persuasion.

CDA is not only a discourse analysis characterized through its focus on power relations, but also defined by its positioning within the research. As the name implies, CDA presupposes a critical perspective, or to cite van Dijk, it is "discourse study *with an attitude*" (*emphasis in the original*, 2015, 466). Its aim is not to simply present and consider social inequalities, but also to expose and challenge them (ibid). Therefore, CDA is a method that stipulates a specific position regarding power relations. Furthermore, when considering CDA, it is important to mention that discourse cannot be viewed without taking the historical preconditions into account, as discursive formations are rooted in a socio-historic process (ibid, 467; Diaz-Bone et al. 2008). As "CDA explores how discourse constructs ideological (hegemonic) attitudes" (Mayr 2008, 13) and this thesis aims at analyzing the influence of the Localization discourse to the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector provides CDA the most suitable analytical approach for this thesis.

3.2 Empirical Data Methods

The data used in this thesis is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Qualitative data is essential for discourse analysis and CDA, as it is in itself a form of qualitative research, which is based in text and talk (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 76; van Dijk 2015, 466). Therefore, this section will elaborate on the specific qualitative data used for this CDA. As this thesis aims at analyzing the discourse of Localization in the humanitarian sector, a variety of qualitative data in textual form was gathered. Within the sector, reports are a

common form of publication. There are reports on events, evaluation reports, and reports as updates for ongoing multi-year processes. They are published by organizations and collectives and enable an insight into discussions and developments within the sector. Additionally, reports often publish policies and updates to said policies or commitments made. Thus, they provide an important type of data, especially for discourse analysis. The majority of data is based on the textual level, as the author's limited access to the humanitarian sector inhibited the gathering of qualitative data in the form of talks or interviews.

As this CDA is split into two antagonistic discourse positions, which the Theory chapter (4) will elaborate on, each entails different documents that present the core qualitative data for the respective discourse position. On one side of the antagonistic frontier is the WHS's position to the Localization discourse. Here, the core documents are the *First Annual Synthesis Report* of the WHS, including the *Agenda for Humanity*, and the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain*, which present key commitments by the sector's biggest contributors and INGOs and are a direct outcome of the WHS. On the other side of the antagonistic frontier is the position presented during the *Innovation Forum*[2]. The core documents of this discourse position included publications on the websites of ReflACTION and Local to Global Protection (L2GP), as well as of the People First Impact Method (P-FIM). Furthermore, the P-FIM *Facilitators Toolkit*, containing an in-depth presentation of the approach, and the L2GP pamphlet *'Local Perspectives on Protection'*, which present recommendations based on L2GP's research, are considered as they provide greater insight in this discourse position. The WHS and its outcomes, as well as the just mentioned initiatives and approaches will be presented in greater depth in the sections 5.4 and 5.5.

In order to further examine developments in the sector, academic publications as well as other publications within the humanitarian sector are relevant. They allow contextualisation and depict how certain movements are assessed.

Quantitative data from the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) is consulted in order to contextualize funding dynamics in the humanitarian sector and developments within specific timeframes. The above-mentioned documents provided the qualitative data for this CDA, the qualitative data is strictly used in a manner to contextualize and provide a more holistic view of the humanitarian sector.

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[2] Section 6.1 of the Analysis chapter will identify each discourse position respectively.

3.3 Choice of Theory

This thesis aims at analyzing the reproduction of power dynamics in the humanitarian sector in the context of Localization. In order to do so, the author chose Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of Hegemony first articulated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in 1985. They present a post-structuralist, rather abstract discourse theory (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 6, 20), initially established as a political theory for the socialist struggles (Smith 2003, 1). Nonetheless, their theory has been applied to a variety of contexts (Boon & Walton 2014, 351–353). As their theory is rooted in Gramscian thought (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, vii), a selection of Gramsci's key concepts is included as a theoretical background, especially his prominent concept of Hegemony.

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony is based on discursive thought on the societal level, and generally follows Foucault's considerations on discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 17). Therefore, their theory was chosen for this CDA. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe's theory provides clear distinctions and dimensions of hegemonic discourse. This will be applied to the humanitarian context in order to define hegemonic actors and hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe produce a theoretical framework for the *articulatory practice*, which will be utilized in order to analyze the discourse of Localization within the humanitarian sector.

Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* provides further considerations of the hegemonic discourse's importance in the political realm, more specifically in connection to radical democracy. After all, their approach stems from political theory and takes a socialist point of view. As this thesis, however, is not aimed at considering a socialist revolution but focuses on power dynamics in the humanitarian sector, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony is adapted to fit this context and some elements of their attention and theoretical considerations are not relevant for this theory development.

In an effort to contextualize Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony, Teun van Dijk's theoretical framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power' is added, which positions a *communicative event* in the context of its social structure while also considering personal and social cognition. It has to be emphasized at this point that van Dijk's theory of CDA is only utilized in order to supplement Laclau and Mouffe. Therefore, this thesis only presents a very selective consideration of van Dijk's work. The above-mentioned framework

will be adopted for the discourse of Localization in the interest of visualizing connections and influences to the articulatory practice. Van Dijk was chosen as he is a scholar central to CDA who focuses his study on power relations on how powerful groups reproduce, construct and legitimize their domination (Donoghue 2017, 1, 4; Mayr 2008, 3).

By combining Laclau and Mouffe with van Dijk, this thesis incorporates two distinct approaches. Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is grounded in post-structuralism (2001, xi), whereas van Dijk follows a socio-cognitive approach (van Dijk 2008). Even though they might seem incompatible at first glance, there are benefits of incorporating aspects of socio-cognitivism into a post-structuralist approach.

Post-structuralism, similar to structuralism, concerns itself with the organization of language systems, though it moves away from the conception that "the language system can be described in an objective and scientific manner, post-structuralism suggests that such descriptions are themselves always highly contextual" (Radford & Radford 2005, 61). For post-structuralists, language is not a fixed organized system, but a system that is open to subversion. This approach is conspicuous in Laclau and Mouffe's theory, which will be presented more comprehensively in the following chapter.

Van Dijk's approach of socio-cognitivism is based on *context models*. He defines context

> as a specific mental model, or subjective interpretation, of participants of the relevant properties of the (social, interactional or communicative) *situation* in which they participate. In other words, where earlier studies often use "context" I use (communicative) "situation." (van Dijk 2008, 24)

His approach combines this definition of context with the assumption that "language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition (personal memories, knowledge, and opinions) as well as those shared with members of their group or culture as a whole" (van Dijk 2015, 469), which presents the cognitive focus. For van Dijk, discourse is established through complex communicative events, composed of text as well as context. This introduces the amelioration of including van Dijk in Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe's theory is rather interested in "'depersonified' discourses" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 20), whereas van Dijk emphasizes on context and personal and social cognition.

<u>3.4 Analytical Process</u>

Even though CDA presents us with a theory and method, Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical considerations do not provide a specific research design. However, as each project or research presents specialized characteristics, the research design should be matched to each project or research, respectively (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 76). The following research design is inspired by Boon and Walton's approach but applied and modified to fit this specific context. This approach was selected because it presents a well-researched and argued-for research design. Specifically for this thesis, this approach enables a comprehensive CDA in order to answer the questions stated in the Problem Formulation (2) concerning the influence of the Localization discourse on the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector.

Boon and Walton present a six step research design, to which two more steps were added by the author. Whereas Boon and Walton's approach merely concludes with the 'hegemonic closure' as its last step, this thesis aims at analyzing the reproduction of power and the reinforcement of hegemonic formations. Therefore, before Boon and Walton's last step, the steps 6 and 7 were added to the research design by the author in order to determine hegemonic actors and formations within the humanitarian sector prior to the Localization discourse. Furthermore, step 7 in Figure 1 emphasizes the relevance of context. As mentioned above, the following research design depicts Boon and Walton's design (2014, 360), supplemented with two additional steps.

Figure 1: Research Design[3]
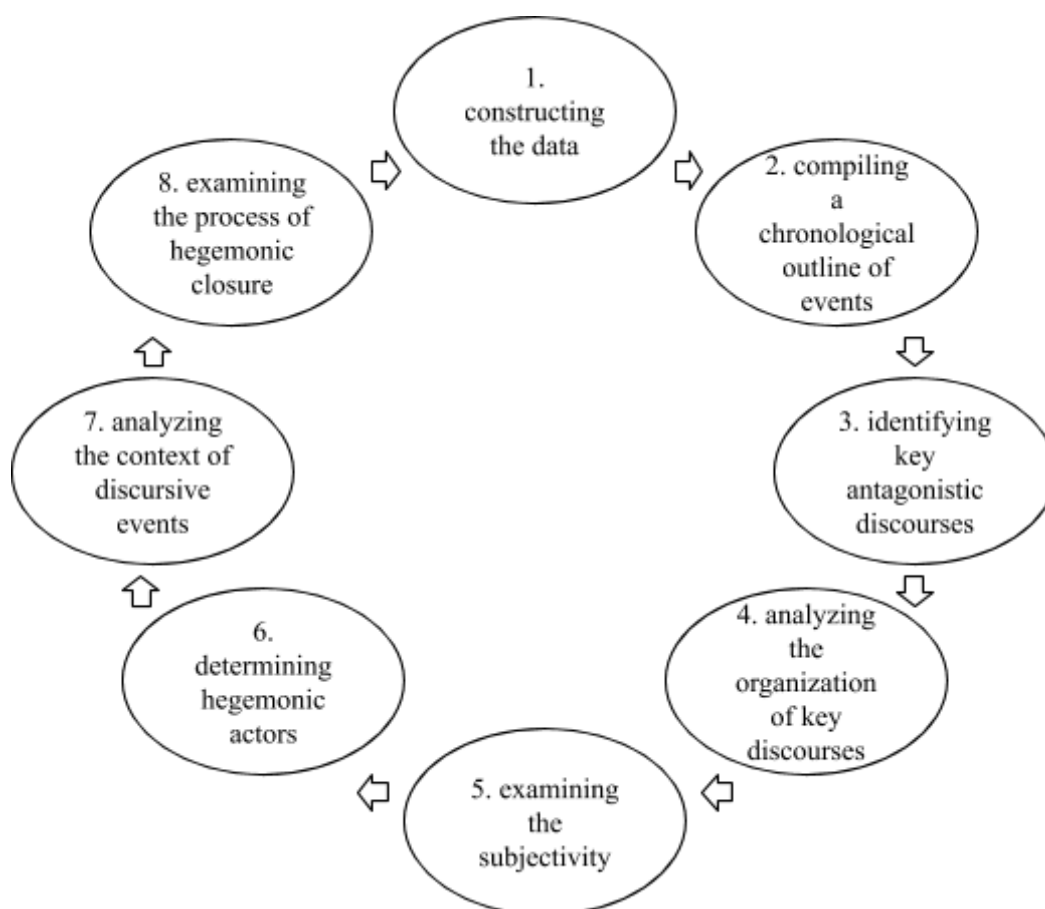
The first two steps signify measures that precede the analysis. Section 3.2 already briefly considered the data used in this thesis. The Background chapter (5) will further elaborate on the textual data used as well as focus on step 2 'compiling a chronological outline of events'. It enables a more holistic view of the discursive events and provides a more general understanding (Boon & Walton 2014, 361).

The following five steps outline and structure the process of this analysis. By applying Boon and Walton's research design, the analytical process of this CDA is well-structured and split into fitting steps. Steps 3 and 4 consider more closely the articulatory practice according to Laclau and Mouffe, by analyzing specific events within the discourse of Localization. The concepts relevant for this will be introduced in the following Theory chapter (4). Step 5 aims to determine subject positions and their creation and mobilization, as this "contributes significantly to an understanding of the conflict and particularly how some voices become

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[3] diagram based on Boon & Walton 2014, with author modifications

more dominant than others" (ibid, 364). Then, step 6 will identify the hegemonic actors within the humanitarian sector prior to the emergence of the Localization discourse. Thereafter, van Dijk's concept is included as step 7 in order to contextualize the articulatory practice in a more holistic view. Lastly, step 8 analyzes "how one of the discursive articulations is able to fix the meaning of the floating signifier" (ibid, 365), in this case 'localization'. Thus, determining the formation of a hegemonic closure. Further, this last step will combine the findings from the preceding steps and allow the answering of the previously stated Problem Formulation (2). As the Figure shows, the research design presents a circular process that is owed to the nature of discourse analysis following Laclau and Mouffe and depicts the never ending characteristic of discourse. This presents one of the limitations of this thesis, which the following section will elaborate on.

3.5 Limitations

If one follows the thought of Laclau and Mouffe that everything is discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 106, 108) and "all identity is relational" (ibid, 106), it becomes quite evident that a discourse analysis can never be complete. It is only able to depict a limited selection of discursive articulations within a limited time-frame. In the case of this thesis, this presents an evident limitation within the Analysis chapter (6), as well as in the selection of data.

In order to allow a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative data, briefly presented in section 3.2, the chosen data presents only a selection of data within the discourse. Even though the data was chosen in an effort to provide a representative insight into the Localization discourse, it does not present an exhaustive analysis of the discourse. Furthermore, the decision to limit this thesis to only two antagonistic discourse positions contributes to this limitation[4]. In addition to the limited resources, this influences the findings and the conclusion to the Problem Formulation. Therefore, this thesis is able to present a limited insight into the Localization discourse and its influence on the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector. Nonetheless, the intention is to provide a different perspective to the existing literature on humanitarian action and Localization through the application of this CDA.

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[4] The choice of these positions will be further elaborated on in section 6.1.

4. Theory and Theoretical Application

This section will present and evaluate the theoretical approaches used in this thesis. In order to answer and discuss the research question, the author chose the approach of a CDA, which Teun van Dijk describes as "research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk 2015, 466). In the context of power relations, their reproduction and legitimation, the consideration of Hegemony is inevitable.

Therefore, the following chapter is firstly considering Hegemony, more specifically Cultural Hegemony according to Antonio Gramsci, and the discursive theory of Hegemony in line with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which provides the theoretical framework for this thesis.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research question, their theory will be supplemented with Bronwyn Boon and Sara Walton's conceptualization of their theoretical considerations in their work *Engaging with a Laclau & Mouffe informed discourse analysis: a proposed framework*. Furthermore, van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power' is presented in order to allow a more comprehensive analysis in the latter. Following the presentation of the theoretical approach, the third part of this chapter is focused on the application of said approach. Lastly, the chapter concludes by acknowledging criticism and limitations to the theories selected.

4.1 Gramsci and Hegemony

Gramsci developed his concept of Hegemony during his time of confinement under the Italian Fascist State in the 1920s and 30s. Initially sentenced to twenty years, his death in 1937 ended his sentence after eleven years in prison (Bates 1975, 351). Due to his ill health and the impairing conditions of his confinement, his work remains fragmented. Furthermore, as Gramsci was unable to finish his work or decide on the publication of his writings, his work has to be viewed as such and equivocal passages have to be acknowledged as such (Hoare & Smith 1992, x-xi). Nonetheless, his Prison Notebooks host the concept of Hegemony that Laclau and Mouffe built upon in their development of a theory of Hegemony

(Laclau & Mouffe 2001, xii). Furthermore, as argued by Donoghue, a greater in-depth engagement with Gramsci's Hegemony in a CDA can increase "the approach's relevance for political studies and analysis" and allow a more comprehensive analysis of power maintenance (2017, 2). The consideration of Hegemony for an analysis of power dynamics is indispensable as Hegemony in and of itself regards power relations. As Gramsci's work is fragmented and does not present a comprehensive theory, only the concept and its key elements will be considered.

Coming from Marx's economic theory of bourgeoisie and proletariat, Gramsci's approach shifts from a solely economic perspective to a political focus. Hegemony then means not power through domination by the way of exercising force but through ideas (Bates 1975, 351). To cite Gramsci, "the foundation of a directive class [*classe dirigente*] (i.e. of a State) is equivalent to the creation of a *Weltanschauung*." (*emphasis in the original*, Gramsci 1992c, 381). Gramsci divides society into two superstructural levels, which are *civil society* and *political society* or *the State*. Whereas the hegemony is carried out throughout society by the dominant group, the State and jurisdiction exert 'direct domination' (Gramsci 1992a, 12). In his essay on 'The Intellectuals' he develops a new dominant group, said 'Intellectuals', that actively participate "in practical life, as constructor, organiser, [and as a] 'permanent persuader'"(Gramsci 1992a, 10). The 'Intellectuals' act as *functionaries* or *deputies* for the dominant group (ibid, 12) and by persuading, that is, constructing a specific world outlook establish Hegemony. They do this through a multitude of "initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes" (Gramsci 1992b, 258).

Gramsci's establishment of Cultural Hegemony provides a distinct change in how power relations are viewed and analyzed. Whereas before, power was defined as what Gramsci refers to as 'direct domination', a coercive power through the military or the State "which 'legally' enforces discipline" (Gramsci 1992a, 12), the concept of Hegemony allows a more comprehensive view on aspects that enable and reinforce domination of a powerful group. It allows a closer analysis of the multitude of aspects that exercising power comprises.

Laclau and Mouffe provide in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* a well-structured and comprehensive theory of Hegemony, which provides the base of this theory chapter. As mentioned above they root their approach in Gramsci's understanding of Hegemony, considering the shift "from the 'political' to the 'intellectual and moral' plane" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 66), or as they summarize,

> For, whereas political leadership can be grounded upon a conjunctural coincidence of interests in which the participating sectors retain their separate identity, moral and intellectual leadership requires that an ensemble of, 'ideas' and 'values' be shared by a number of sectors – or, to use our own terminology, that certain subject positions traverse a number of class sectors. (ibid, 66-67)

Laclau and Mouffe establish the key element of Hegemony here, which is its identity as moral leadership. Whereas identity and its struggle and antagonism are already key elements of their discourse theory (Boon & Walton 2014, 353), identity is further a recurring theme in Laclau's later works.

4.2.1 General Considerations of Hegemony

The question Laclau and Mouffe explore in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is how identity is established and constructed. In this context, they introduce the term *articulation*, which is considered as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 105). *Element* in this context is "any difference that is not discursively articulated" (ibid), meaning something that is not yet defined or has meaning attached to it. Through the process of articulation the element's identity is defined and meaning established. This leads to the term of *moment*, which describes articulated "differential positions" (ibid) that appear in a discourse. Discourse then is the result of articulation as the *articulatory practice* creates a "structured totality" (ibid) that is discourse. Laclau and Mouffe further specify the *discursive formation* through *regularity in dispersion*, emphasizing the regularity aspect that presents an "ensemble of differential positions" (ibid, 106) that within itself can display a totality. Thus,

"where every *element* has been reduced to a *moment* of that totality – all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character" (*emphasis in the original*, ibid). This further underlines the interconnectedness of a discursive formation.

Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe reject the idea of non-discursive practices, which then means that everything is part of discourse and that linguistics and behavioural aspects cannot be separated (ibid, 107). Another important distinction to be made is that of the "impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings" (ibid, 111). This is a key element of the consideration of discourse, as it enables the continuous process of articulation. The development from elements to moments never ends and as Laclau and Mouffe say "there is no identity which can be fully constituted" (ibid). It has to be mentioned here that by rejecting the absolute fixity of discourses they do not endorse absolute non-fixity. An "ensemble of differential positions" (ibid, 106) is never fixed to an ultimate meaning, which means there is more than one fixed meaning possible for moments, hence there is a surplus of meaning. Therefore, the system of differential positions or entities "only exists as a partial limitation of a 'surplus of meaning' which subverts it" (ibid, 111), meaning absolute non-fixity is neither possible.

4.2.2 Laclau's Four Dimensions of Hegemonic Relation

In one of his later works, *Identity and Hegemony*, Laclau presents additional dimensions of the hegemonic relation that are useful to supplement Laclau and Mouffe's initial theory.

The first dimension describes the necessity of unevenness of power for the hegemonic relation. This enables antagonistic discourse positions to interact, whereas power defined as a totality would not allow any such interaction. In the hegemonic discourse, power depends on one's "ability to present its own particular aims as the ones which are compatible with the actual functioning of the community" (Laclau 2000, 54).

The second dimension derives from the dichotomy of the particular and the universal. This refers to the problem of a particular on the one hand providing a universality, while on the other hand also being internally split. Laclau provides here the example of "the particularity of the oppressive regime – which thus becomes partially universalized" (ibid, 55), which then leads to the conclusion that "universality exists only incarnated in – and

subverting – some particularity but, conversely, no particularity can become political without becoming the locus of universalizing effects" (ibid, 56). Laclau's third dimension derives from this assumption.

This dimension regards *empty signifiers* and their relevance in being able to represent the universal (ibid, 57). It describes the production of universal representation of particulars, while still staying particulars. This relevance is a key element of establishing hegemony and is considered in more detail at a later point.

The fourth and final dimension of hegemony is "the generalization of the relations of representation as condition of the constitution of social order" (ibid). This dimension concludes the above-mentioned dimensions, as it revises the aspect of universality for the entire hegemonic discourse. In order to institute social order hegemonic politics have to represent "*something more* than their mere particularistic identity" (*emphasis in the original*, ibid, 58), as they are overdetermined by definition.

4.2.3 Articulatory Practice as a Prerequisite for Discourse

The previous section focused mainly on the broader outline and distinctions that Laclau and Mouffe present in the context of the hegemonic discourse. This section examines the process of establishing meaning, articulation, and the corroboration of hegemony. To cite Laclau and Mouffe, "any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre" (2001, 112). A discourse that attempts to dominate is characterized by *nodal points*, which are "privileged discursive points of this partial fixation" (ibid), meaning moments with a specific meaning attached to them. A number of nodal points create a *signifying chain* (ibid) or, as Boon and Walton name it, a *chain of equivalence* (2014, 355). This chain connects nodal points, which all have something in common, or as Laclau writes, they all share "something identical" (2007, 57). The 'something identical' is however not a commonality, but established through its demarcation to the external (ibid). Furthermore, a chain of equivalence has always to remain open, as its 'something identical' is only possible through the "absent fullness of the community" (ibid). Elements are *floating signifiers*, "incapable of being wholly articulated to a discursive chain" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 113). As discussed earlier, the transition from elements to moments

is never complete and a floating signifier is subject to a 'surplus of meaning' and neither defined by absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity. Or as Laclau and Mouffe conclude

> [i]t is not the poverty of signifieds but, on the contrary, polysemy that disarticulates a discursive structure. That is what establishes the overdetermined, symbolic dimension of every social identity (ibid).

As Laclau and Mouffe's thought rejects non-discursive practices, thus meaning that everything is part of a discourse and discursively articulated, articulation is not limited to the identity of objects and practices but also includes subjects. Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe present considerations regarding the *subject position*, which depicts a subject within discourse (2001, 115). While analyzing a discourse, it is necessary to consider the discursive articulation of the identity of objects, practices and subjects. Especially subject positions are to be considered in their relations to each other, as these relations influence the identity of each subject position (Laclau & Mouffe 2001).

The following Figure 2 shows the process of articulation in a discursive field according to Boon and Walton, who adopted Laclau and Mouffe's theory for organizational research. The figure visualizes Laclau and Mouffe's process of articulation through the establishment of nodal points, which together constitute a chain of equivalence. This chain composes meaning to an *empty signifier* that aims to establish meaning to the floating signifier. Additionally, an empty signifier is able to be a nodal point to a discourse. Boon and Walton considered in their application of Laclau and Mouffe's theory a "conflict between two sets of inter-organizational articulatory practices" (2014, 354), hence the 'antagonistic frontier' in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Antagonistic Frontier
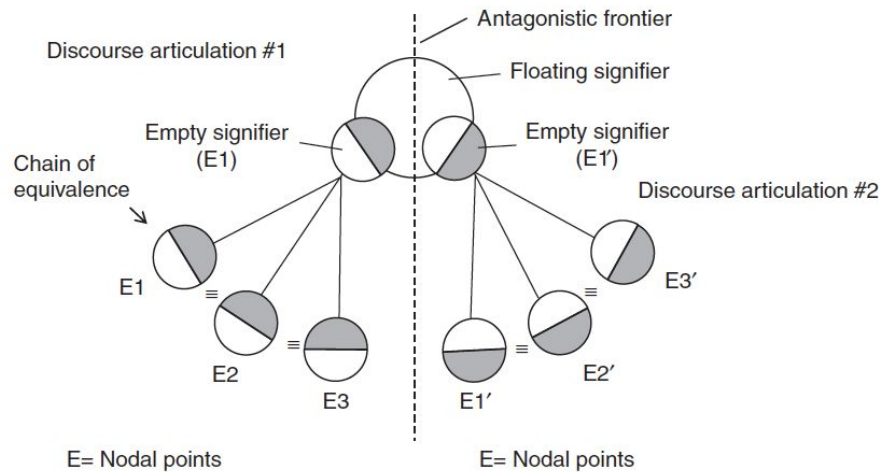
(Boon & Walton 2014, 355)

Antagonism is another key element of hegemonic discourse as it is a condition to hegemonic articulation (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 136). As discussed previously, the social is never a total final structure due to its impossibility of fixity. Antagonism then "is the 'experience' of the limit of the social" (ibid, 127). It establishes "the limits of every objectivity" (ibid, 125). This is to be seen in connection with the above-mentioned consideration of the 'surplus of meaning'. As Laclau and Mouffe emphasize,

> But it is clear that antagonism does not necessarily emerge at a single point: any position in a system of differences, insofar as it is negated, can become the locus of an antagonism. Hence, there are a variety of possible antagonisms in the social, many of them in opposition to each other. The important problem is that the chains of equivalence will vary radically according to which antagonism is involved; and that they may affect and penetrate, in a contradictory way, the identity of the subject itself. (ibid, 131)

This phenomenon is visible in Figure 2, in which the floating signifier is divided in two empty signifiers and their dedicated chains of equivalence. The empty signifiers enable each a different meaning-making for the floating signifier. An ideal empty signifier is able to produce universality in a chain of equivalence and unify popular demands (Laclau 2007, 55). The longer the chain of equivalence, the wider its universal meaning. By representing a more universal identity, the empty signifier is able to represent more nodal points and to attract wider support (Laclau 2000, 56).

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4.2.4 Antagonism and its Conjunction to Gramsci's Organic Crisis

In Boon and Walton's case of a conflict, regarding the harvesting of native beech trees in New Zealand, the conflict was based on an antagonistic understanding of the term 'nature', the floating signifier in this scenario (2014), depicted by two antagonistic discourse positions. However, antagonism is not limited to binary conflicts. If a floating signifier enables a variety of different meanings, due to its unstable social relation, it will allow more points of antagonism. This will make it even harder to create unified chains of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, 131).

Laclau and Mouffe connect this proliferation of antagonism to Gramsci's term of the *organic crisis* (ibid). Organic crisis describes a situation in which "there is a dramatic collapse in popular identifications with institutionalized subject positions and political imaginaries" (Smith 2003, 164). Therefore, as popular identification is lost, the floating signifiers allow new identifications. Since the mainstream identity is being rejected, antagonism will prevail, until a new hegemonic discourse is established. During an organic crisis it is therefore easier to establish a new hegemonic discourse, in that it is easier to create a new identity for or meaning of a floating signifier if its previously dominating meaning has already collapsed.

In this context the *war of position* has to be briefly considered. As discussed previously, Gramsci changed the conception of hegemony by moving away from the approach of direct domination towards Cultural Hegemony. Furthermore, he formulated that in the process of reestablishing hegemony in more modern societies, a war of position is engaged in. This is, contrary to the *war of movement*, not fought through military acts or involvement of violence, but the "whole organisational and industrial system of the territory" is involved (Gramsci 1992b, 234). Or as Smith describes this form of resistance, while following Gramsci, "a complex ensemble of struggles that take place at multiple strategic sites in state apparatuses, civil society and the family" (2003, 165), which is common in contemporary societies, as power is now rather concentrated in diversified institutions (ibid). Hegemonic articulation has two different possibilities in establishing itself, it can "inscribe particular identities and demands as links in a wider chain of equivalences" (Laclau 2007, 57) and it can "give a particular demand a function of universal representation" (ibid). Therefore, it can either be a process of linking one's cause to a field of other causes in order to broaden

one's reach, or it can be a process of making one's cause accessible to others by leaving it indefinitely open (ibid, 57–58).

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Laclau and Mouffe's considerations in regard to hegemonic discourse provide the theoretical framework for this thesis. However, as Jørgensen and Phillips remark, it is "fruitful to supplement their theory with methods from other approaches to discourse analysis" (2002, 24). Therefore, adding to Laclau and Mouffe's comprehensive theory of hegemonic articulation, the following section will introduce van Dijk's socio-cognitive concept of the 'discursive reproduction of power'.

4.3 Reproduction of Power According to van Dijk

In his chapter 'Critical Discourse Analysis' published in the *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, van Dijk considers the various approaches to CDA whilst also presenting his own socio-cognitive approach. Within this context, he sketches the following theoretical framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power' (Figure 3).[5]

Figure 3: The 'Discursive Reproduction of Power'
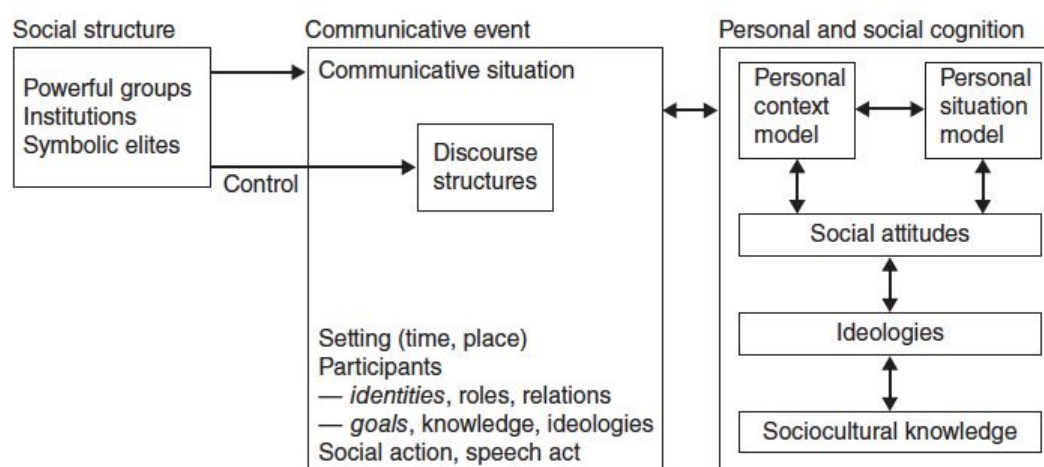
(van Dijk 2015, 474)

This schema visualizes the context in which articulation takes place and enables a more holistic analysis of hegemonic discourse. It shows how powerful groups exercise control over the *communicative event*, thus the specific situation and the discourse structures.

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[5] Keeping in mind, this is a selective presentation of van Dijk's overall theoretical considerations. It is merely to supplement and contextualize Laclau and Mouffe's theory.

Furthermore, it displays the indirect influence to the personal and social cognition, e.g. socially shared ideologies. By influencing social cognition, albeit just indirectly, powerful groups may then provoke social action that is consistent with their interests (ibid), therefore reproducing their dominance. Gramsci's and Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical considerations of hegemony enable the identification of powerful groups, institutions and symbolic elites. Van Dijk's schema is useful for contextualizing their theories, for as each communicative event is subject to its context. Gee defines *context* within a linguistic setting as "everything in the material, mental, personal, interactional, social, institutional, cultural, and historical situation in which the utterance was made" (1999, 54) that is influential to the discursive event. In this framework, the context is depicted by the *communicative situation* (van Dijk 2008, 24). Figure 3 shows this by recognizing the various aspects of a communicative event, such as setting and participants with specific attitudes, but also the interactional component, which is visible in the 'speech act', 'relations' and 'social action'. Furthermore, the section regarding 'personal and social cognition' allows contextualization of mental, personal, and social aspects as well as cultural and historical matters, since 'social attitudes', ideologies' and 'sociocultural knowledge' are subjected to their influence.

4.4 Objective of Applying the Theories

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. As their theory is rooted in Gramsci's thought, it is necessary to consider Gramsci. By recognizing Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony and its contribution to the shift from traditional domination through force to hegemonic relation with domination through persuasion, the analysis of hegemonic actors in the humanitarian sector is ensured. In addition, Laclau and Mouffe define the hegemonic conditions, which allow the analysis of the humanitarian sector and its hegemonic actors. In order to analyze the development of a hegemonic discourse, specifically the discourse of Localization in the humanitarian sector, the theoretical framework of articulatory practice according to Laclau and Mouffe will be applied. By supplementing their theory with van Dijk's approach to the reproduction of power, it allows allocation of the different actors within the discursive event and provides the conceptualization of context.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony remains fragmented and its intention is not clear, as mentioned above. Even more, Gramsci's work is sometimes contradictory. This provides a serious limitation when developing a theoretical framework. Therefore, the author chose the theory of Hegemony from Laclau and Mouffe, which provides a comprehensive and consistent definition. Even though their work has been widely recognized as an important contribution to political theory, it has, nonetheless, been subject to criticism. For instance, the theory does not provide an extensive methodological guideline and stays rather abstract (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 8). Geoff Boucher develops his critique in regards to Laclau and Mouffe's political narrowing to a radicalized political democracy (Sinnerbrink 2010). Henry Veltmeyer on the other hand criticizes Laclau and Mouffe's positioning within Marxism, even though they abandon Marxist thought (2000). However, as their theory is based in socialist political thought, most of the criticism is based around that notion. Since their theory is applied to the context of the humanitarian sector in this thesis, the criticism is not as relevant. Boon and Walton have made visible that Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony can be successfully applied to other contexts (2014, 353).

5. Background

The following chapter will begin with a brief presentation of the humanitarian sector, which includes its history and a definition of humanitarian action. Thereafter, section 5.2 introduces the concept of Localization. Combined with section 5.3, these sections will introduce events that have promoted the emergence of the Localization discourse, as well as relevant sector-wide developments in an effort to provide the context of the discourse. Furthermore, this chapter will present the core literature of the two antagonistic discourse positions, which this CDA will consider. Therefore, section 5.4 will present the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) and its outcomes, whereas section 5.5 will introduce initiatives and approaches promoting a more people-centered humanitarian action.

5.1 The Humanitarian Sector – A Brief Overview

The Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative defines the objectives of humanitarian action as "to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations" (2018), which provides a popular and comprehensive definition (Buchanan-Smith et al. 2016, 24).

Whereas the idea of humanitarian action is centuries old, contemporary humanitarianism can be dated back to the nineteenth century (Davey et al. 2013, 5) with the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863 as a significant event. Even though humanitarian action was not solely delivered through countries of the Global North, they were the predominant players. Especially in the nineteenth century, imperialist expansion peaked and lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. Imperialism is important to consider, as

> It is not a simple matter of resemblance – how contemporary humanitarian action appears to echo the patterns and ambitions of earlier imperial 'projects' – but that the two phenomena are ultimately bound together in a series of mutually constituting histories, in which the ideas and practices associated with imperial politics and administration have both been shaped by and have in themselves informed developing notions of humanitarianism (Skinner & Lester qtd in Davey et al. 2013, 6).

Humanitarian action was not only delivered to colonies (Crawford 2004, 201) but colonies further served as a training field for humanitarian practices and imperialist ideology influenced and shaped how humanitarian action was carried out, sometimes setting standards in place that remained for decades (Davey et al. 2013, 6-7).

The twentieth century made way for a number of developments that changed the sector and its characteristics. Indubitably, the two World Wars and their aftermath urged development in the sector, promoting internationalism and institution-building (ibid, 7-8). The UN being formally established in 1945 and becoming a global humanitarian player provides one of these significant developments (UN 2020b; Davey et al. 2013, 9). After World War II, chiefly during the Cold War period, humanitarian action started moving away from Europe and focussing on the Global South. There was a surge of new countries being established in the midst of decolonization and the expertise of the Global North was called up to support these new governments, which led to a significant increase of NGO's (ibid, 10-11). This development continued throughout the second half of the century, more severely even in the Global South (Salomon 1994, 111). Particularly in the 1990s, around 20% of all current NGOs were founded (Wright 2012, 12).

The end of the Cold War and the surge of conflicts in the 1990s further changed the humanitarian sector, with increased UN peacekeeping missions and overall significant increase in funding. The genocide in Rwanda, however, made the limits of humanitarian intervention visible (Davey et al. 2013, 13-14).

5.2 The Emergence of Localization

As the previous section showed, humanitarian action has always been subject to change and development. In the most recent years, calls for innovation and change within the humanitarian sector have increased. Sandvik dates this development back to ALNAP's publication on *Innovation in International Humanitarian Action* from 2009 (2017, 1), a joint report of UK-based organizations such as ActionAid and Oxfam. The report on *Innovation in International Humanitarian Action* on the other hand recognizes the comprehensive evaluation of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami as a key document in identifying shortcomings

of humanitarian practice (Cerruti et al. 2013, 4, 6). The *Synthesis Report: Expanded Summary* commissioned by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) aims at providing learning and accountability as well as provides four key recommendations. Even though there were no funding gaps, the humanitarian response to the crisis was flawed. Additionally, the operational deficiencies mirrored similar problems in other humanitarian crises, such as in Rwanda in 1994. Therefore, the *Report* notes its recommendations to be of sector-wide relevance and provides a key document in the reflection on contemporary humanitarian action, as well as emphasizes on the importance of local capacities, whilst recognizing the deficits of their inclusion (Cosgrave 2007).

Before this chapter goes more into depth of the discourse of Localization within the humanitarian sector, the term itself has to be considered and defined. Although the literature regarding Localization does not provide a consistent or generally accepted definition of the term, it can be narrowed down. Whereas some characterize the outsourcing to local partners as Localization, others use it as a way of describing the recruitment of local staff in international organizations (Wall & Hedlund 2016, 3). Nonetheless, it is safe to say that Localization can be summarized as "an umbrella term referring to all approaches to working with local actors" (ibid). In regard to working locally, there can be a specification made through the term of 'locally-led', which refers "specifically to work that originates with local actors, or is designed to support locally emerging initiatives" (ibid). Although this narrows the field of what working locally entails, it opens up the question of who local actors are. Likewise to Localization, the definitions of who local actors are vary (ibid). For this research it is most important to distinguish them from international actors. Local actors can range from local NGOs to volunteer groups or communities, but also signify governments or regional authorities (ibid; Cosgrave 2007, 4).

5.3 Early Beginnings of Localization and its Literature

Whereas topics of local inclusion have been part of the development and peace sector for a long time, Localization in the humanitarian sector has just gained relevance in recent years (Barakat & Milton 2020, 147). The above-mentioned *Synthesis Report* provides an early example of the recognition and relevance of local capacities. The other aforementioned

publication on *Innovation in International Humanitarian Action* by ALNAP additionally provides an early development in the Localization discourse. This report builds upon findings of the *Synthesis Report* and likewise highlights the importance of increased engagement and involvement of local actors (Foley et al. 2009). The report *Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses* commissioned by the UK-based organizations ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund produces a compelling argument for local partnerships. Furthermore, it acknowledges the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) as an exception to the lack of global policies promoting local partnership, even though its benefits have been proven by recent studies (Cerruti et al 2013, 6). HERR proposes a seven thread approach to improving the way the UK government delivers humanitarian action. 'Resilience', which depicts one of the threads, focuses on longer-term development and strengthening local capacities. Additionally, the other threads include emphasis on the local, such as the thread 'accountability' which acknowledges the lack of involvement of local communities and beneficiaries and the resulting losses in delivering the most effective humanitarian aid (HERR 2011).

The above-mentioned concept of Resilience is highly relevant for the discourse of Localization as it relates to local capacities in the context of crisis. Even though there is no fixed definition, Resilience can be summarized as a concept regarding the degree of preparedness and ability to recover from crisis. Or as the USAID defines it, as "the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth" (qtd. in Ramalingam 2015, 5). Resilience is crucial within the Localization discourse, as it depicts the relevance of local empowerment, as well as it highlights the importance of the local actors in preventing and responding to humanitarian crises.

5.4 The World Humanitarian Summit

The *World Humanitarian Summit*, held in Istanbul, Turkey in 2016, presents a significant event within the Localization discourse, as it "signalled the emergence of localisation as a central issue on the international humanitarian agenda" (Barakat & Milton 2020, 147). As

discussed above, Localization had gained pertinence in literature, but the WHS established its global relevance. The WHS set up a multi-year agenda to facilitate change and promote innovation (WHS 17, 3; Sandvik 2017, 1). The *Summit* hosted "9,000 representatives from Member States, non-governmental organizations, civil society, people affected by crises, the private sector and international organizations" (WHS 17, 4) and its outcomes include the UN *Agenda for Humanity*, the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain*.

The *Agenda for Humanity* consists of five core commitments, in which Localization is represented in the fourth commitment 'work differently to end need' as well as in the fifth commitment 'invest in humanity'. The fourth commitment focuses on improving local resilience, promoting local and national leadership as well as preparedness and risk management strategies. Lastly, it aims towards ending need through a more sustainable, development-oriented approach. The fifth commitment, among others, further emphasizes Localization by establishing the goal to invest in local capacities along with recognizing the relevance of local and national institutions for stability.

The Grand Bargain presents a commitment of 52 of the sector's biggest contributors, including donor countries and aid organizations, "that seeks to reduce the financing gap by improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response and the financial efficiency of aid" (WHS 17, 88), thus acknowledging the sector's shortcomings and need for change in that regard. *The Grand Bargain* consists of 10 commitments ranging from transparency to multi-year planning and funding, as well as Localization. Within the commitment of Localization, there are six sub-commitments presented:

> (1) Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination capacities (…)
>
> (2) Understand better and work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders (…)
>
> (3) Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms (…)
>
> (4) Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible (…)
>
> (5) Develop, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and apply a 'localisation' marker to measure direct and indirect funding to local and national responders.
>
> (6) Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders (…) (The Grand Bargain 2016, 5)

These sub-commitments evince the diversity of Localization. In order to include local actors, an important factor is funding. It is needed to increase institutional capacities and generally necessary to carry out humanitarian action. Even though concrete sector wide statistics on funding distribution are unattainable, it is explicit that direct funding to local actors is infinitesimal (HERR 2011, 3; Charter4Change 2015, 1). Therefore, it is not surprising that four out of the six sub-commitments concern funding.

The sixth commitment of *The Grand Bargain* provides a more localized perspective as it calls for a 'participation revolution' and to "include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives" (The Grand Bargain 2016, 10). Even though this commitment highlights the necessity to include the affected people and calls for donors and aid organizations to "work to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups (...) are heard and acted upon" (ibid), the following concrete sub-commitments focus rather on the organization of such inclusion than of the process itself, which the first sub-commitment makes visible:

> Aid organisations and donors commit to:
>
> (1) Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises. (ibid)

The following sub-commitments follow a similar structure and stay more on the level of national and local actors (Muth 2020, 7).

The *Charter for Change* presents another key outcome of the WHS in terms of Localization, as the *Charter's* objective is the Localization of humanitarian aid. The *Charter* has "mobilized 30 international NGOs to change the way they work with national actors, and has been endorsed by 160 Southern-based organizations" (WHS 17, 7).

It presents 8 commitments:

> (1) Increase direct funding to southern-based NGOs for humanitarian action (…)
>
> (2) Reaffirm the Principles of Partnership (…)
>
> (3) Increase transparency around resource transfers to southern-based national and local NGOs (…)
>
> (4) Stop undermining local capacity (…)

（5）Emphasise the importance of national actors (…)

（6）Address subcontracting (…)

（7）Robust organisational support and capacity strengthening (…)

（8）Communication to the media and the public about partners (…) (Charter4Change 2015)

The commitments combine previously discussed elements of Localization as well as depict the global understanding of Localization. They incorporate the funding issue, however they emphasize cooperation with local actors, which is visible in points (2), (4), and (5).

The WHS presents a landmark within the Localization discourse, as it elevated the topic to the international agenda. Furthermore, its outcomes, namely the *Agenda for Humanity*, *The Grand Bargain* and the *Charter for Change* produce policy changes and commitments towards Localization. The WHS and its outcomes depict a global effort towards innovation and change. The following chapter will consider how the Localization discourse has influenced the humanitarian sector.

5.5 Efforts to a More People-Centered Approach to Localization

As just discussed, the WHS and its commitments depict a significant development in the humanitarian sector towards Localization. Even though it might be one of the largest efforts within the discourse, it is far from being the only one. This section does not aim to be comprehensive in presenting all approaches to the Localization discourse, nor does it presume to introduce all approaches to people-centeredness. Rather, this section will introduce a selection of initiatives and efforts to a more locally-led humanitarian action, namely the initiatives of Local to Global Protection (L2GP), the platform of ReflACTION and the People First Impact Method (P-FIM).

The aim of the L2GP initiative is "to document and promote local perspectives on protection in major humanitarian crises" (L2GP 2020a). It has carried out research in Burma/Myanmar, Sudan and South Sudan, Palestine, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe and is currently carrying out research in Syria (ibid). The research was initiated by a number of organizations part of the ACT Alliance[6] as well as other organizations and individuals. Even though the research was initiated by the ACT Alliance, L2GP disclaims that the published

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[6] The ACT Alliance is a "coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations engaged in humanitarian, development and advocacy work in the world" (ACT Alliance 2020).

analysis and opinions are solely representing the respective authors. In addition to their research efforts, L2GP further promotes Survivor and Community-led Crisis Response (SCLR), meaning to allow the affected people and communities to lead the response to the crises. It entails addressing the identified needs within a community and the empowerment of affected people. Justin Corbett, a representative of L2GP, presents in the short video on their website the six key advantages of SCLR (L2GP 2020b), which enable the response to be "more responsive, more effective" (ibid) as well as making the response "often much quicker" (ibid) and "much more cost-efficient" (ibid). Furthermore, the fourth advantage entails "great psychosocial benefits" (ibid) for the affected people and the fifth advantage involves bringing communities together as SCLR can facilitate solidarity and social cohesion. Lastly, the approach enables empowerment to solve long-term causes (ibid).

Thereby, the relevance and necessity of a more people-centered approach are highlighted. As Corbett phrases it, SCLR is "about how we unlearn the things we've been doing to date and start participating in the existing on-going humanitarian response that communities in crisis do without us" (ibid)

The ReflACTION platform offers another initiative promoting locally-led response. It describes itself as "an independent and open platform of experienced professionals and free thinkers from different backgrounds with a heartfelt interest in the emerging future of international response to crises" (ReflACTION 2020a), by providing a reflective network aiming at new ways of humanitarian action (ibid). Furthermore, it calls for a power shift towards local actors by putting "people affected by crises and their voices, visions, and capacities at the center of crisis response" (ibid). It does so by looking for 'practical answers' that are already being implemented and applying them to various situations (Muth 2020, 5). Within this context it co-hosted the three-day *Innovation Forum on Locally Led Response to Crisis and Displacement* in Kampala, Uganda[7]. The event was designed to present concrete approaches to locally-led, people-centered responses to crisis and displacement (ReflACTION 2020b). During the event L2GP was among the speakers and introduced their approach to Survivor and Community-led Crisis Response (SCLR), which the previous paragraph discussed. Another approach presented during the *Innovation Forum* was the People First Impact Method (P-FIM).

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[7] This refers to the *Innovation Forum* mentioned in the Introduction (1).

The P-FIM approach "gives communities a voice. It identifies and attributes impact. It enhances performance" (P-FIM 2014b) and was developed by Gerry McCarthy and Paul O'Hagan, who are based in Kenya and The Gambia respectively (ibid). From 2010 to 2013 the two founders applied the preliminary approach in 8 different countries giving 5,602 community members a voice (P-FIM 2014a, 1). In 2014, they published a comprehensive Facilitator's Toolkit in order to allow sector professionals to apply the approach independently. "The five-day training is mainly directed to local staff of aid organisations, working in the area where the P-FIM training takes place" (Muth 2020, 16), thus it is intended for "front-line programme staff" as the Toolkit phrases it (P-FIM 2014a, 3). P-FIM is in first instance a "methodology for assessing and evaluating impact" (ibid) by engaging with local communities and allowing them to "discuss their issues and to share their knowledge" (ibid, 4).

The P-FIM was only one of the presented approaches to a more locally-led, people-centered response during the *Innovation Forum*. However, due to the scope and focus of this thesis, only the initiatives of L2GP and ReflACTION introduced above, as well as the P-FIM approach will be considered in the analysis. It has to be acknowledged that this provides only a selection of approaches to a more people-centered humanitarian response.

6. Analysis

The following chapter constitutes the analysis of the Localization discourse in the humanitarian sector, utilizing the theories of Laclau and Mouffe and van Dijk that were introduced in chapter 4. The analytical process is structured according to Boon and Walton's research design but adapted to this context, which was developed in section 3.4. This chapter focuses on the discursive articulation of 'localization'[8] by utilizing Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Therefore, section 6.1 identifies the empty signifier of each discourse position. Then, section 6.2 analyzes the organization of these signifiers by determining the key nodal points and the chain of equivalence of each position. Thereafter, section 6.3 concerns the subject positions presented in each discourse position. Additionally, as this thesis aims at analyzing power dynamics in the humanitarian sector and the influence of the Localization discourse to them, section 6.4 establishes the hegemonic actors within the sector. In order to provide a more holistic point of view, van Dijk's theoretical framework is supplemented and examines the context of the discourse positions in section 6.5. Lastly, section 6.6 considers the formation of hegemonic closure, which means the process of a hegemonic actor establishing the dominant fixed meaning of, in this case, 'localization'.

6.1 Key Antagonistic Discourses

As previously discussed in section 4.2.1, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory regards the struggle and antagonism over identity. In the case of this thesis, the discourse of Localization in the humanitarian sector is of concern. This section aims at the identification of two antagonistic discourse positions of 'localization', thus representing the struggle over the identity of 'localization'. As discussed in the Background section 5.2, there is no generally accepted definition of Localization at this point in time, which allows a multitude of definitions and approaches. Accordingly, it has to be recognized that this thesis will not be able to present all antagonistic frontiers. Laclau and Mouffe state that, if a floating signifier allows a variety of different meanings, more points of antagonism are enabled and it will be more difficult to establish a unified chain of equivalence. Therefore, this section will present

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[8] The term 'localization' is put in quotation marks when it is referred to as the floating signifier.

a selection of two antagonistic positions that are relevant to the determination of the hegemonic closure of the Localization discourse, meaning the process of fixing meaning to the floating signifier. The following sub-sections will identify two empty signifiers relevant to the Localization discourse.

On one side of the antagonistic frontier is the UN's discursive articulation of 'localization' established through the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) and its outcomes, while on the other side of the antagonistic frontier is a more people- and community-centered approach to 'localization'. The WHS's position was chosen as the event and its outcomes are recognized as significant contributions to the Localization discourse, as discussed in section 5.4. The 'people-centered' approach to 'localization' was chosen as it presents a distinct antagonistic position to the discursive articulation of 'localization' according to the WHS.

6.1.1 'Localization' according to the UN

Following Laclau and Mouffe's articulatory process in which the floating signifier's identity is constituted through empty signifiers, this section will consider the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) discursive articulation of the empty signifier. An empty signifier allows meaning to be attached to a floating signifier, in this case 'localization'. Hence, the term 'localization' itself does not constitute any identity, but gains it through discursive articulation. Different antagonistic discourse positions present possible identities through empty signifiers. By analyzing the empty signifiers of a discourse, the different possible meanings for the floating signifier become evident. Furthermore, it enables the explanation on why certain antagonistic positions may dominate the discourse, while others do not, whereby this will be considered in the last section of this analysis. Thus, the empty signifiers present a key element of discursive articulation. Therefore, the following sections do not consider how Localization is defined, but rather how, on a textual level, 'localization' is discursively articulated. Firstly, this section will identify the empty signifier of the WHS position.

The *First Annual Synthesis Report* of the WHS names the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain* as key initiatives in an effort to "better support and fund local and national responders" (WHS 2017, 3). Therefore, the following section will consider these

initiatives, as well as the *Agenda for Humanity*, which presents the multi-year agenda of the WHS. The position of the UN within the Localization discourse is visible in the description of their agenda, which is to be "as local as possible, as international as necessary" (ibid, 5). This highlights the continued importance of the 'international', and is further emphasized in the way the *Report* describes their efforts, which consider "how international actors can best reinforce, not replace, local humanitarian action" (ibid, 3). These two phrases reappear in the *Agenda for Humanity*, under the fourth commitment, as well as in *The Grand Bargain's* second commitment regarding local and national responders. Only in the *Charter for Change* do they not appear. Nonetheless, the *Charter* credits the WHS in its first paragraph,

> We believe that now is the time for humanitarian actors to make good on some of the excellent recommendations arising through the WHS process by committing themselves to deliver change within their own organisational ways of working so that southern-based national actors can play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response. (Charter4Change 2015)

Therefore, it can be argued that the *Charter* as well follows the agenda of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. Additionally to being recognized as a key outcome of the WHS (WHS 2017, 3) and being referred to numerous times within the *Synthesis Report*, the *Charter for Change* presents no contradictory position, which will be further elaborated on in section 6.3.1.

6.1.2 'Localization' as People-Centeredness

As previously discussed, 'localization' presents an "umbrella term used to refer to any and all activities considered to involve local actors" (Wall & Hedlund 2016, 11), allowing a wide range of empty signifiers to exist. The following section will present the approach of 'people-centeredness' within the Localization discourse, which presents a point of antagonism to the notion of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. 'People-centeredness' includes the idea of shifting aid more directly to the affected communities and allowing them to decide themselves what needs they have and how they should be approached, therefore "placing crisis-affected people at the centre of humanitarian

action" (HAR 2018, 28). This is an important distinction to be made, as L2GP, SCLR, ReflACTION and P-FIM, who are contributors to this approach, use varying terminology. L2GP's SCLR presents a 'people-centered' approach as it aims at participating in the "on-going humanitarian response that communities in crisis do without us" (L2GP 2020b). ReflACTION as well is very clear in its positioning with its slogan 'from voices to choices', which translates to "expanding crisis affected people's influence over aid and response decisions" (ReflACTION 2020b). Lastly, P-FIM evidently suggests in the name, People First Impact Method, its correspondence to a 'people-centered' approach, as it is designed to give 'communities a voice' (P-FIM 2014a).

Therefore, these initiatives and approaches to a more localized humanitarian response can be summarized as being 'people-centered' approaches.

6.2. The Organization of the Two Discourses

As discussed in section 4.2.3, the articulatory practice consists of the establishment of chains of equivalence that produce meaning, or identity to an empty signifier, which then presents a possible identity for the floating signifier. After having identified the two empty signifiers relevant to this analysis in the preceding sub-sections, the following section will constitute the analysis of the organization of these signifiers by analyzing their chains of equivalence. In this case, 'localization' presents the floating signifier and the empty signifiers 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' and 'people-centeredness' identified in the previous section, discursively articulate meaning for said floating signifier. These two discourse positions do so by each establishing a chain of equivalence, through the connection of key nodal points. By analyzing the organization of an empty signifier, thus their chains of equivalence, it shows how each antagonistic discourse position aims at articulating the floating signifier, in this case 'localization'. The nodal points that make up said chains of equivalence depict key articulations for the discourse, because they present the specific identity of the empty signifier. Both antagonistic discourse positions can potentially display similar nodal points, however as a nodal point can in and of itself be an empty signifier, the analysis will determine how each position discursively articulates these nodal points.

The following sub-sections will first analyze the organization of the WHS's empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' and thereafter the antagonistic discourse position of 'people-centeredness'.

6.2.1 The Organisation of 'localization' as 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'

The section 5.4 identified three key documents to the WHS's agenda for Localization. In addition to the *Agenda for Humanity, The Grand Bargain* and the *Charter for Change* contribute to the chain of equivalence of the WHS's discourse position towards 'localization' to be 'as local as possible' and 'as international as necessary'.

The *Agenda for Humanity's* fourth commitment's first section 'A' is titled 'Reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems' (WHS 2017, 101), which presents two sub-sections: one concerning 'community resilience' and the second focussing on the above-mentioned aim to be as local as possible and as international as necessary (ibid). This first section discursively articulates a number of nodal points on a textual level to the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

First, the relevance of international actors to be necessary is continuously highlighted. Already the title of said section 'A' 'reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems' prescribes a facilitating role to international actors. The choice of language in this section further emphasizes this position, as the commitment calls upon international actors to tailor their support in order to achieve "complementarity with national and local efforts", "[s]upport and enable national and local leadership" and to "[s]hift tasks and leadership from international actors to local actors" (ibid). The call for local leadership presents another nodal point and coheres with the first part of the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international necessary'. However, even though local leadership is presented as a key element, it is not further specified. Rather, the meaning of local leadership is kept open to interpretation, as the document does not define what local leadership entails.

The following excerpt from the *First Annual Synthesis Report* visualizes the perspective of the WHS:

> International responders must respect and support national and local leadership by seeking opportunities to support their management of crises, while curbing ways of working that undermine this goal. International actors should add value to what people and communities already do to help themselves. (WHS 2017, 59)

While the text calls upon the support for national and local leadership, the focus lies with international actors and their role in crisis response, which complements the considerations of the two nodal points just presented.

Additionally, the fourth commitment introduces a sub-section titled 'put people at the center: build community resilience' (ibid, 101), which presents the nodal point of the inclusion of affected people and communities in the programming. This nodal point entails the recognition of already existing "local coping strategies and capacities in preparedness, response and recovery" (ibid) and aims at enabling "people to be the central drivers in building their resilience and be accountable to them, including by ensuring consistent community engagement, involvement in decision-making and participation by women at all levels" (ibid). Here, a similarity to the nodal point of local leadership is visible. Even though existing strategies and capacities are acknowledged and called for to build upon, the specific process is not further specified. This is visible in the component of putting affected people at the center of the response as well, which entails inclusion in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, financial concerns regarding the utilization of financial incentives to stimulate genuine community engagement as well as cash-based programmes are specified (ibid). The idea of cash-based programming is a relevant tool of empowerment, as it allows the affected people to choose how to spend the cash, thus providing flexibility as well (ibid, 63). Therefore, it can be concluded that the nodal point regarding the inclusion of affected people entails empowerment strategies of cash-based programmes, financial incentives for community engagement, the inclusion of affected people in the response and the acknowledgement of pre-existing local response strategies.

The fifth commitment of the *Agenda for Humanity* concentrates on the topic of investment with its first section 'A' aiming at the investment in local capacities (ibid, 103).

Here, the nodal point to change funding habits is presented and discursively articulated most dominantly through the call for increased direct funding to local actors, but also entails lowering the transaction costs for remittances, addressing current hindrances to direct funding and the increase of UN country-based pooled funds to 15% (ibid). Furthermore, the call for more transparency is included in this commitment, with reference to *The Grand Bargain*, which will be considered in a greater depth at a later point.

These aforementioned sections of the *Agenda for Humanity* provide a first overview of how the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' is discursively articulated. The term used by the WHS is 'Localization agenda'. In a few instances the term 'locally-led' is used in the *Report*, but is not further defined, though it seems to be referring to instances where local actors are in a leadership position in the response to humanitarian crises (WHS 2017). However, donors and international organizations are attributed the role of empowering "national and local actors in preparedness, response, coordination and resource management, and sustain investments over multiple years" (ibid, 6). Furthermore, the term 'locally-led' appears two more times in the *Report*, where both times, within the same sentences, the support of international actors is incorporated. Thus, even though the relevance of local leadership is highlighted, the role of international support is always incorporated.

The WHS presents one side of the antagonistic frontier aiming at establishing meaning to the floating signifier of 'localization'. This is depicted in the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' and its nodal points regarding international actors to be necessary, local leadership, the inclusion of affected people and to change funding habits. The previous section analyzed how these are discursively articulated, for example how international actors are attributed a facilitating and enabling role or how local leadership remains rather undefined. However, within the nodal point of inclusion of affected people a number of meanings are included, such as the empowerment through cash-based programming and the aim to build on already existing local response strategies, although the specific process of building upon said strategies remains unconsidered.

Nonetheless, these nodal points all constitute the meaning of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. Each of them equally attribute meaning to the empty signifier. Thus, one nodal point, such as the one prescribing international actors a necessary role, produces meaning for the empty signifier interchangeably with another nodal point. Evidently, each nodal point varies in its specific meaning, since the inclusion of affected

people and the change in funding habits are not the same. However, the nodal points all constitute the meaning of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

Here, CDA allows us to analyze how these nodal points are discursively articulated, that is, how meaning is attached to them. For example, local leadership can present a nodal point on both sides of the antagonistic frontier, but can be articulated in a different way. In the case for the 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' position, local leadership remains undefined, which has the advantage of enabling any definition for local leadership to be correct. A nodal point can in of itself become an empty signifier in a discourse (Boon & Walton 2014, 355). Hence, by not defining local leadership, the empty signifier local leadership is able to represent any nodal point the reader of the document associates with local leadership. Following Laclau's consideration, that the more universal an empty signifier is, the wider it can attract support, the empty signifier local leadership is able to resonate with a wider audience, because it can incorporate any nodal point.[9] This phenomenon is visible in the nodal point inclusion of affected people, which is discursively articulated in a way that is inclusive of a number of meanings, such as empowerment and cash-based programming.

As mentioned earlier, the *Agenda of Humanity* is only one component of the WHS's commitments to the Localization discourse, the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain* are key documents as well. Henceforth, the following section will firstly consider *The Grand Bargain* and thereafter the *Charter for Change* in how they discursively articulate 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

The Grand Bargain, as mentioned in the section 5.4, is a shared commitment by 52 of the sector's biggest donors and aid organizations. With this, it is not surprising that the document itself regards mainly funding and financial concerns. Among its 10 commitments, it includes as the second commitment "More support and funding tools for local and national responders" (The Grand Bargain 2016, 5), which coheres with the nodal point to change funding habits towards more direct funding to local actors. In its introductory section to this commitment, the phrases 'as local as possible and as international as necessary' and 'reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities' present a direct quotation from the *Agenda of Humanity*. Furthermore, these phrases again highlight the nodal point of

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[9] The character of nodal points as empty signifiers themselves with their chains of equivalence is not considered in depth, as it is not the focus of this thesis and would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, the analysis stays on the level of the empty signifiers 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' and 'people-centeredness'.

international actors to be necessary, which prescribes international actors a facilitating role. *The Grand Bargain* depicts a direct outcome of the WHS, which is very evident in the document itself, as the previous example visualizes.

Within the above-mentioned second commitment, *The Grand Bargain* presents 6 sub-commitments, which concurring to the *Agenda for Humanity,* include "multi-year investment in the institutional capacities" (2016, 5) and the reduction of barriers that inhibit efficient cooperation with national and local actors, which articulates the nodal point of partnership. This nodal point is evident in the WHS's *Report* (2017, 6), however, neither the WHS's *Report* nor *The Grand Bargain* further define what partnership means or entails. Therefore, partnership presents itself to be similarly undefined as local leadership.

Nonetheless, *The Grand Bargain* does also include specific commitments, such as the "aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders" (2016, 5) by 2020, cohering with the nodal point to change funding habits. Here, a key topic is transparency, which presents another nodal point. This nodal point includes the aim of accountability, traceability and an achieved common standard of reporting (ibid, 4).

The sixth commitment of *The Grand Bargain* titled 'A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives' (ibid, 10) presents an interesting addition to the discourse, as it highlights the inclusion of affected people. However, due to the nature of the document, the specific sub-commitments concern how the donors and aid organizations can include a more localized perspective in their programming. Therefore, the nodal point of the importance of the inclusion of affected people, which was presented in the *Agenda for Humanity* is presented here as well, but the attached commitments demonstrate a top-down perspective, such as "[d]evelop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation" (ibid). Nonetheless, *The Grand Bargain* does not contradict the *Agenda for Humanity*.

As the *The Grand Bargain* depicts a direct outcome of the WHS, the visible nodal points present themselves to be similar to the ones just presented within the context of the *Agenda for Humanity*, merely the focus on financial aspects is greater. Furthermore, as the perspective of the document is of donors and aid organizations a top-down perspective is visible.

The *Charter for Change* displays a similar perspective as it presents 8 commitments signed on by 29 INGOs, enabling national NGOs only to endorse the document, which over
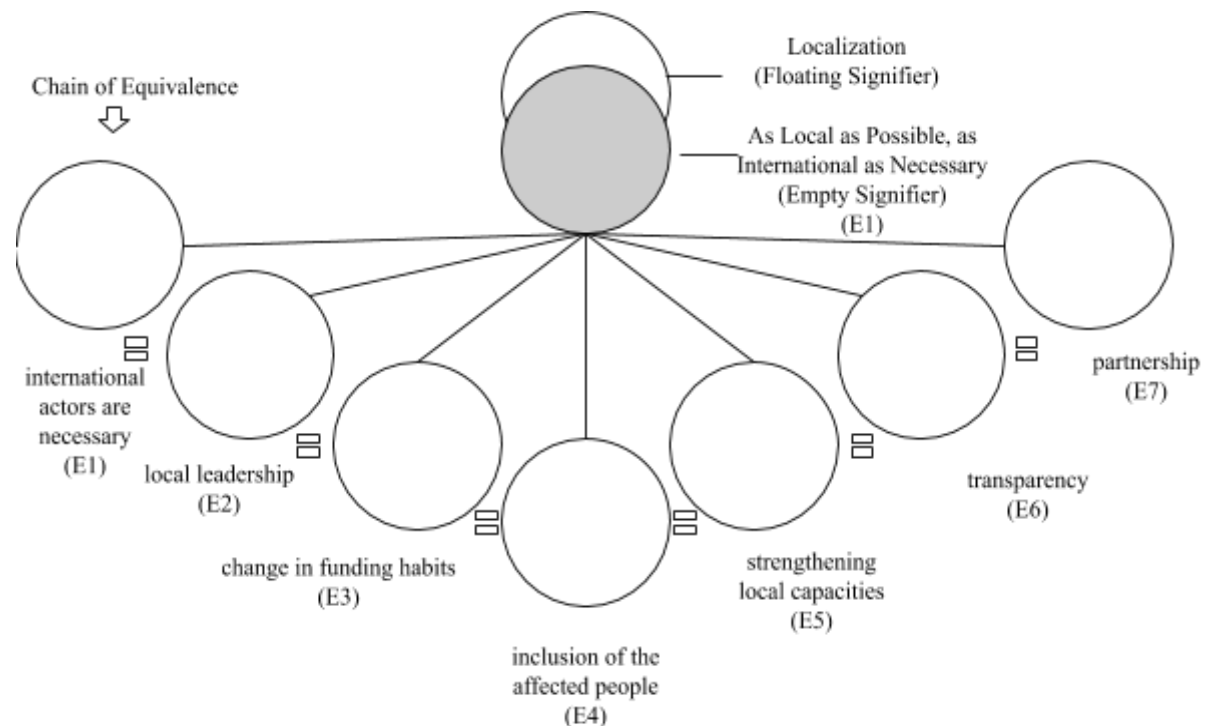
130 have done (Charter4Change 2018, 1). The *Charter*, similar to the WHS and *The Grand Bargain*, stresses on a change in funding habits and capacity strengthening. Unlike the preceding documents, the *Charter's* main focus is the demand for a change in practices when working with national and local actors, highlighting equality in the commitment of partnership and in the commitment of 'address subcontracting', thus presenting the nodal point of partnership, defined by equality between actors. As mentioned above, partnership is considered by the WHS's *Report* and *The Grand Bargain* too, however there it remains undefined. Without the context of the *Charter for Change,* the nodal point would present similar traits of undefinedness as local leadership, which was considered earlier. Fortunately, the *Charter for Change* articulates partnership by referencing the *Principles of Partnership* defined by the *Global Humanitarian Platform* 2007, which are "Equality, Transparency, Results-Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity" (Charter4Change 2015).

The *Charter for Change's* fifth commitment further highlights the importance of national actors and working through them, which coincides with the nodal point of strengthening local capacities. The commitment 'stop undermining local capacity' presents another interesting addition to this discourse position, as its title suggests the reinforcement of the relevance of local capacities, however the content of the commitment regards the financial aspect of fair compensation (ibid). This coheres with the nodal point of strengthening local capacities as articulates its meaning further, which concerns the financial aspect of fair compensation.

As mentioned earlier, the *Charter*, similar to *The Grand Bargain*, represents a direct outcome of the WHS. Consequently, the *Charter* presents similar nodal points. However, the *Charter* displays a closer commitment to collaboration and the equal treatment of national and local actors. Whereas the *Agenda for Humanity* and *The Grand Bargain* remain vague in terms of what working with local actors really entails, the *Charter* presents clear commitments, such as further discursively articulating the nodal points of partnership and strengthening local capacities.

In regard to the chain of equivalence of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', there are a number of discursively articulated nodal points constituting meaning to said chain of equivalence, which the following Figure 4 visualizes.

Figure 4: The Organization of 'As Local as Possible, as International as Necessary'

Chain of Equivalence
⇩

Localization
(Floating Signifier)

As Local as Possible, as
International as Necessary
(Empty Signifier)
(E1)

international
actors are
necessary
(E1)

local leadership
(E2)

change in funding habits
(E3)

inclusion of the
affected people
(E4)

strengthening
local capacities
(E5)

transparency
(E6)

partnership
(E7)

6.2.2 The Organization of 'localization' as 'people-centeredness'

In contrast to the WHS's empty signifier for the floating signifier 'localization' stands the empty signifier 'people-centeredness', which is represented in this thesis through the initiatives of L2GP and ReflACTION as well as the approaches of SCLR and P-FIM. Similar to the WHS's call for change and innovation "to bring people affected by crises, national and local organizations into the process of measuring change and results" (WHS 2017, 8), the following initiatives and approaches aim at facilitating change in the sector. However, they do so through a people-centered approach, which illustrates the antagonistic empty signifier to the WHS's position. The following section, therefore, will analyze the organization of said empty signifier, thus considering which key nodal points constitute the chain of equivalence for 'people-centeredness'.

L2GP can be divided into two different, though complementary, areas of activity. On the one hand, L2GP aims at documenting and promoting local perspectives, on the other hand it supports and provides training for Survivor and Community-led Crisis Response (SCLR). Within its research efforts, L2GP has "undertaken in-depth interviews with more than 1,500

people trying to survive and protect themselves in major humanitarian crises" (L2GP 2015, 3). In its pamphlet *Local Perspectives on Protection*, nine recommendations for a community-based approach are given, which are based on the main lessons learned from their research (ibid). Thus, it provides key nodal points of how meaning is attached to a 'people-centered' approach. The first key nodal point concerns the importance of affected people at the center of response for this approach. Each of the nine recommendations recognizes and considers the affected people in various aspects, which leads to further nodal points for 'people-centeredness'. One of them considers the knowledge and the already existing protection strategies of local communities, which is presented in L2GP's first recommendation. This highlights the relevance of the "detailed and sophisticated understanding of threats and challenges" (ibid, 5), which the 'people-centered' approach is grounded in. International actors are also considered in this approach, however only as complementary to local strategies, especially in cases where affected people are only able to mitigate a threat but not remove it. The role of international actors is therefore not negated in the 'people-centered' approach, but seen as a supporter of pre-existing local strategies (ibid). Thus, the nodal point concerning the role of international actors is discursively articulated in a more complementary function to crisis response. This nodal point and how it is articulated is further elaborated on in consideration of the other approaches. More explicitly, L2GP stresses the importance of local leadership, which is not roughly summarized under leadership, but entails the "capacity to lead, plan, implement and coordinate effective initiatives" (ibid, 11). The gravity of the local knowledge is repeatedly emphasized throughout the recommendations. Furthermore, L2GP stresses the diversity of people affected and their needs, which is further emphasized under the fifth recommendation accentuating the limitations of standardized programming.

In addition to their research, L2GP provides a concrete community-led approach, SCLR. Since the approach is informed by their research, it presents itself to be consistent with the above identified nodal points for 'people-centeredness', as it "primarily aims to support autonomous self-help by crisis affected people" (Muth 2020, 18).

The four core components of SCLR are:

1. Community Mobilization
2. Community Cash Grants
3. Emergency Capacity Strengthening
4. Locally-Led Coordination (L2GP 2020b)

The first component entails the rapid identification of existing coping mechanisms and the rapid knowledge exchange between the involved actors, which translates to the nodal point of the importance of local knowledge and pre-existing response strategies. The idea behind the facilitation of cash grants is to enable existing self-help groups and efforts to better respond to the crisis, as well as take into account the diversity of affected people and allow them to utilize the grants according to their needs. This depicts again the relevance of pre-existing strategies, however it also entails the above-mentioned diversity included in 'people-centeredness', which intends not to subsume all affected people under one simple group, but understands that the affected people display diverse needs. The third component is demand-led and, similar to the other components, aims at enabling the affected communities themselves to facilitate crisis response. The last component considers strengthening coordination systems for a locally-led response and connecting those to the already existing aid architecture (ibid), while following the L2GP position that locally-led response is at the core of crisis response. Furthermore, this component emphasizes the nodal point of local leadership, which is already visible in the approach's name of 'Survivor and Community-led Crisis Response' (SCLR) and re-highlighted in this last component. Even though this approach is more technical, it shows its consistency with the L2GP initiative's nodal points and its aim to put affected people and communities at the center of the response.

ReflACTION provides another initiative with the aim of developing and promoting a more 'people-centered' approach to crisis response, in contrast to "top-down policy directives" (ReflACTION 2020a). As Laclau points out, nodal points connect on the basis of sharing 'something identical', which distinguishes them from the external (2007, 57). In the case of 'people-centeredness', this is visible in the example above, as the approach connects the nodal points on the basis of not being top-down, but rather bottom-up. The nodal points presented in connection to L2GP and SCLR follow the same logic, as it is continuously

highlighted to put the affected people at the center of the response while giving international, thus external, actors a supporting and enabling role. ReflACTION is consistent in their position, as they call for a power shift of responsibility in the sector towards local capacities (ReflACTION 2020a). In the short video presented on their website, which describes ReflACTION through five questions, the aim of putting local actors in the center of the response is highlighted, and by that, assigning international actors and the donor community a new subsidiary role. Therefore, ReflACTION reemphasizes the focus of 'people-centeredness' to be distinguished from existing top-down approaches. Further, it calls for "a truly collaborative response to crises" (ibid), implying that existing response strategies are not truly collaborative, which is a point made not only by L2GP but also the WHS and other publications (L2GP 2015; WHS 17; HAR 2018; Konyndyk & Worden 2018; Sandvik 2017). This presents a similar dynamic to the demand for change that is visible throughout all of the presented approaches to Localization, which is also evident as a core component of ReflACTION.

ReflACTION's promotion of 'people-centeredness' is emphasized in the convention of the *Innovation Forum on Locally Led Response to Crisis and Displacement* in Kampala last year. The choice of words for this event's name coheres with the nodal point of local leadership, here depicted through 'locally-led response'. Furthermore, in the promotion of the event on their website, the choice of language continuously affirms 'people-centeredness' and a number of its nodal points. The nodal point of putting affected people at the center of the response is evident in phrases such as "*From Voices to Choices* – expanding crisis affected people's influence over aid and response decisions" (*emphasis in the original*, ReflACTION 2020b), as well as in "People affected by crisis take decisions every day about how to best use their capacities and the resources available to them to meet their specific needs" (ibid). The second phrase further highlights the nodal point of importance of local knowledge and pre-existing strategies. The nodal point regarding the subsidiary role of international actors is detectable in the following phrase concerning external actors, who are "supporting the population affected by crisis and filling gaps only as needed" (ibid). Here, the use of "only as needed" implies the relevance of external actors to provide only what is necessary, while staying in their supporting role.

With ReflACTION's aim as an initiative to test and promote people-centered approaches, P-FIM was one of the presented approaches during the *Innovation Forum* in

Kampala. With its five-day training, it aims at enabling 'front-line programme staff' to "engage communities fully" (P-FIM 2014b, 3). As P-FIM presents a 'people-centered' approach, the nodal points presented here mirror the ones discussed in the previous examples. The following paragraph highlights a number of nodal points already identified for 'people-centeredness'.

> By training front-line staff who are rooted in the local context to use simple, proven techniques, it enables community members to discuss their issues and to share their knowledge and views openly e.g. about what is working, what is not working and why. Agencies, governments and donors learn first-hand about positive and negative changes and the issues that are most important to local people; often including crucial perspectives that agencies are unaware of. (P-FIM 2014b, 4)

Firstly, the aim of putting affected people in the center of the response is visible in the way how P-FIM and its aim to "properly engage communities" (ibid) are described. The language used puts the affected people, here referred to as 'community members', not in a subsidiary role, but rather emphasizing their important role in successful crisis response. Secondly, the importance of local knowledge and opinion is emphasized, as, within its aim to engage communities, the core element is to allow the 'community members to (...) share their knowledge', as well as considering the 'often crucial perspectives' of people affected that external actors otherwise are unaware of. The 'people-centeredness' of this approach is very explicitly apparent in a sentence later on, in which P-FIM is described as a method that "puts people where they belong, at the centre of their own development" (ibid). The subsidiary role of external actors is not as explicit as in the previous initiatives and SCRL, because P-FIM is a method directed at local actors as a tool to engage with local communities. Nonetheless, it is continuously emphasized that external actors are there to act upon the issues voiced by the communities and lend support when necessary (ibid, 4–5; Kipfer-Didavi 2017, 2). Lastly, the relevance of pre-existing strategies that presents another nodal point, is visible in P-FIM as well (Kipfer-Didavi 2017, 2).

Therefore, it can be summarized that the 'people-centered' approach to Localization consists of the nodal points of the importance of local knowledge and pre-existing strategies, the subsidiary role of external actors, the diversity of affected people, local leadership, and most importantly is defined by the aim of putting the affected people in the center of

response. Together these nodal points constitute the chain of equivalence for the empty signifier 'people-centeredness', which the following Figure 5 visualizes.

Figure 5: The Organization of 'People-Centeredness'
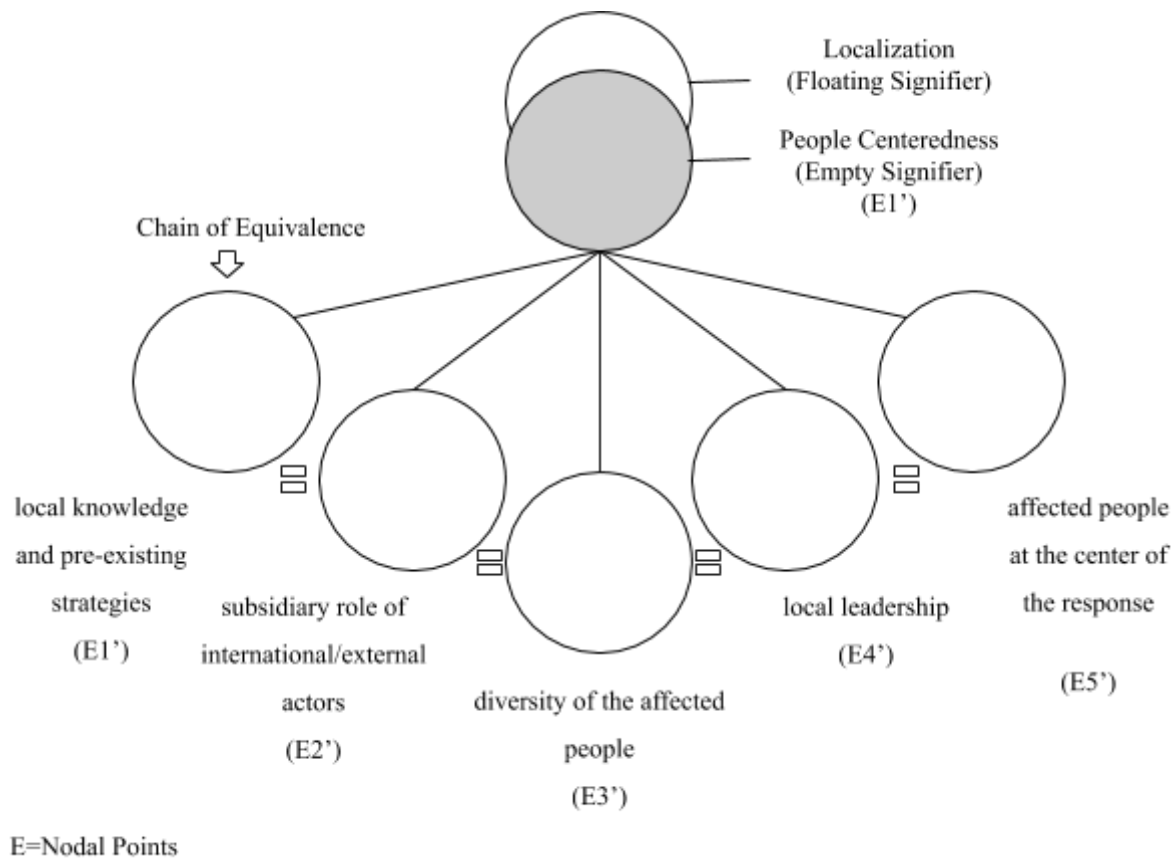
E=Nodal Points

These nodal points constitute the chain of equivalence by each signifying meaning to the empty signifier 'people-centeredness'. Each of them represents a part of the identity that defines 'people-centeredness'. As this section showed, each of these nodal points are specifically articulated. For example, the nodal point of local leadership is not vaguely defined, but specified through SCLR and L2GP and entails the "capacity to lead, plan, implement and coordinate effective initiatives" (L2GP 2015, 11). This is as well emphasized through SCLR's aim to support the "autonomous self-help by crisis affected people" (Muth 2020, 18), which was discussed in this section. Furthermore, this example depicts how the above-mentioned nodal points constitute the chain of equivalence to 'people-centeredness'. Even though local leadership presents its own nodal point, it matches the other nodal points, as it additionally entails the importance of pre-existing strategies, which involves putting affected people at the center of the response. And the subsidiary role of external actors is

implied through highlighting the local leadership. Each of the presented initiatives and approaches do not present just one nodal point to 'people-centeredness' but always a number of nodal points. Although each nodal point presents a specific meaning for this discourse position, they all complement each other. The way local leadership is discursively articulated in this position facilitates the other nodal points and vice versa. The aim of the discourse position 'people-centeredness' is to put people in the center of the response in a facilitating role, while external actors are prescribed a subsidiary role.

6.3 Subjectivity

The previous sections have identified the antagonistic empty signifiers and the organization of each of their chains of equivalence respectively. The following section will consider the absence and presence of subject positions in the texts concerning the discourse of Localization. This follows the assumption of non-essentialism at the basis of Laclau and Mouffe's theory, meaning that identity is not fixed to a specific object, practice, or subject but is constituted through discourse (Boon & Walton 2014, 364). Thus, "the subject emerges where there is dislocation; at the point at which things are still at stake, where meanings and identities are loosened from their structural subject positions" (Norval qtd. in Boon & Walton 2014, 364). By identifying the subject positions and their presence and absence in the discourse, it contributes to the analysis of the process of hegemonic closure, as it allows to determine why certain positions dominate more than others (Boon & Walton 2014, 364). Subject positions can present key nodal points to a discourse, similar to objects and practices. The nodal points within each of the discourse position's chain of equivalence were established in the previous sections. The following sections will consider the subject positions relevant to each discourse and their influence in establishing the identity of each empty signifier. Considering the scope of this thesis, this can only be done exemplarily in terms of the textual basis. However, within the antagonistic frontier, the two positions present themselves to be consistent, as the preceding sections have shown. Therefore, the subject positions can safely be determined on selected sections of the documents.

6.3.1 The Subject Position of International Actors

The discourse position of 'localization' to be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' presents the subject position of international actors as necessary through the position that they are the key deliverer of change towards a more 'locally-led humanitarian action'. The executive summary of the *First Annual Synthesis Report* of the WHS presents recommendations "to further support and empower nationally and locally-led humanitarian action" (2017, 6). Even though people affected are considered, they are not prescribed a facilitating role. Most prominently, national and international organizations as well as donors are given the role of promoting change and the empowerment of national and local actors (ibid). Local organizations on the other hand are called upon to "strengthen networks to facilitate peer-to-peer support, advocacy and cohesive engagement with national and international partners" (ibid, 7). Here, the position of the necessity of international actors is emphasized, as local organizations are requested to engage with international partners, even further through the choice of word describing them as 'partners'. The affected people and communities on the other hand are excluded as facilitators and contributors towards change within the sector. The discourse position of the WHS here negates their voice. Even though it acknowledges the felt exclusion of national and local actors "from critical conversations" (ibid, 6), the affected people are not mentioned. Thus, the WHS stays on the international level of the humanitarian sector, promoting 'localization' to be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

The Grand Bargain and the *Charter for Change* present a variation to this subject position. However, as they display commitments by INGOs and donors, as well as UN Agencies, they nevertheless present a top-down perspective.

In the *Charter for Change* it is stated that the undersigning INGOs are "committing themselves to deliver change within their own organisational ways of working so that southern-based national actors can play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response" (2015, 1), thus highlighting the role of INGOs as a facilitator of change complementary to the WHS's position. A similar position is visible in *The Grand Bargain* due to the nature of the document to present commitments from the sector's biggest contributors. Albeit *The Grand Bargain* is calling for a 'participatory revolution' by including the affected people in the decision-making process (2016, 10), the top-down

perspective is being upheld. In both the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain*, the relevance of local actors and capacities is emphasized, along with the importance of equality of actors (Charter4Change 2015; The Grand Bargain 2016). Due to the nature of these commitments being made by international organizations and national donors, the perspective of these documents is derived from their position (ibid). Therefore, even though the affected people and communities are considered in *The Grand Bargain*, they are not given a voice. Rather, it is about how the big organizations and donors can include them in their programming. This presents itself to be consistent with the discourse position 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', with the necessity of international actors being highlighted through the emphasis on them to bring about change within the sector and being attributed the role to empower and include local actors and affected people into their programming.

Due to the nature of the *Charter for Change* and *The Grand Bargain* presenting commitments by international organizations and donors, the top-down perspective of these documents is only fitting. The documents themselves focus on the commitments by said actors. Therefore, it can be argued that these documents, simply due to their nature, negate subject positions other than the one of international actors. However, the *First Annual Synthesis Report* of the WHS does not present commitments of just international actors, or donors, but displays commitments made by all actors within the sector (WHS 2017, 4), and even though the *Agenda for Humanity* includes affected people and local actors, the *Report* and the *Agenda for Humanity* continuously highlight the necessity of international actors and their role as the facilitators of change.

6.3.2 The Subject Positions within 'People-Centeredness'

In contrast to the previous section, the subject positions presented within the 'people-centeredness' discourse position include the affected people and communities in a facilitating role. International actors present a subject position within this discourse position, but in comparison to the previous discourse, they are not depicted as the only facilitator for change towards a more 'locally-led' humanitarian action. The international or external actors are prescribed a supporting and facilitating role, which at first glance seems comparable to

the subject position considered above. This role, however, is not presented as a necessity for 'people-centeredness' but "as a means to complement local strategies" (L2GP 2015, 5). Furthermore, the initiatives and approaches considered for 'people-centeredness' in this thesis are not facilitated by big international organizations or donors. Even though L2GP's research was initiated by a number of organizations, the research is not attached to said organizations, but is only to be attributed to the authors (L2GP 2020a). As ReflACTION presents a network of individuals, its position is as well not the one of a big international organization. The same can be said about P-FIM, which was founded by two professionals within the humanitarian sector. Especially ReflACTION, due to its nature as a network, allows the individual subject position of professionals within the sector along with "free thinkers from different backgrounds" (ReflACTION 2020a). Therefore, it is visible that 'people-centeredness' presents a different perspective than 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', as 'people-centeredness' provides an individual subject position.

Another subject position, which is negated by the antagonistic discourse of the WHS, is the role of affected people and communities. As previously discussed, affected people and communities are at the heart of the 'people-centeredness' discourse position. Their significant contribution to crisis response is continuously highlighted, but most importantly they are given a voice in the discourse. L2GP's research is based on "in-depth interviews with more than 1,500 people trying to survive and protect themselves in major humanitarian crises" (L2GP 2015, 3). The approach of SCLR is defined by its aim to support pre-existing response strategies of the affected people and communities and intends to let survivors and communities lead the crisis response. One of the aims of the *Innovation Forum* convened by ReflACTION was to "be a space to listen to crisis-affected people and those working with them at community level" (ReflACTION 2020b). And even though P-FIM provides a method for 'front-line programme staff', that is, external actors to the affected communities, P-FIM is designed to 'fully engage communities' and to give them a voice. This is exemplarily evident in Kipfer-Didavi's reflections on P-FIM exercises (2017, 5). Additionally, local actors present another subject position within this discourse position, as P-FIM is designed to provide a method for said 'front-line programme staff' (P-FIM 2014a) and their voice is not negated (Kipfer-Didavi 2017). This subject position coincides with the *Innovation Forum* considered above, in which local actors were also given the space to share their experiences and have their voice heard (ReflACTION 2020b; Malteser International 2019). As L2GP's

focus lies with the affected people and communities, the subject position of local actors is not as prominent. The same is evident for SCLR.

Therefore, it can be summarized that the 'people-centeredness' discourse includes the three subject positions of international actors in a subsidiary, complementing role, the position of individuals as well as local actors, and the position of affected people and communities.

6.4 The UN and its Role as a Hegemonic Actor

Before the next section will consider the context of each discourse position, hegemonic actors in the contemporary humanitarian sector have to be established, as van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power' includes hegemonic actors as a precondition. Therefore, this section aims at determining hegemonic actors in the humanitarian sector, prior to the emergence of the Localization discourse.

The end of the Cold War catalysed the rise of the international community and accelerated globalization. Namely, the UN's role as a global player consolidated (Hehir 2010, 3–5), which presents a key hegemonic actor in the humanitarian sector as well as in the overall international community. According to Gramsci, a hegemonic actor is signified through the construction of a specific outlook, or 'Weltanschauung' (Bates 1975, 351; Gramsci 1992c, 381). Laclau and Mouffe follow that idea and sutiate hegemony as "moral and intellectual leadership" (2001, 66). The UN, with its 193 Member States, presents a unique international organization that, among others, takes action in humanitarian crises (UN 2020e). With the UN being an organization including the vast majority of countries in the world, it presents the only organization of that kind. There are other alliances of countries such as the NATO, EU or ASEAN, but these are limited to regional areas. The only other organization of comparable size is the WHO, which is connected to the UN as only UN Member States are allowed to join. All of the UN Member States are WHO Member States (WHO 2020).

According to Laclau's first dimension of hegemonic relation, there is no total power, but power is constituted through antagonistic positions and through the ability of a hegemonic actor to present a position appealing to and compatible with the functioning of

society. As just mentioned, the UN presents a unique organization. By being governed through almost all of the countries of the world, it does present a consensus on the international level[10]. Thus, the UN presents a position compatible with the functioning of society on a global level as it is agreed upon by the Member States. However, this does not translate into total power. The structure of the UN consists of the diversity of its Member States, issues are voted on by the General Assembly, or the Security Council in international peace and security concerns (UN 2020c). The UN is able to intervene in form of authorized peace-keeping missions (Davey et al. 2013, 13), and the UN Security Council is able to exert hard power through sanctions if there are threats to international peace and security (Charron 2011, 2). However, the *UN Charter* prohibits the UN "from interfering in the domestic affairs of its member-states" (Hehir 2010, 47). The UN is not a global government, but an organization that "can take action on the issues confronting humanity in the 21st century" (UN 2020e). Therefore, the UN's structure of Member States complies with Laclau's first dimension of the unevenness of power as the UN is not an absolute power but rather defined through its representation of appealing positions on the global level. Within the UN, Member States are able to present antagonistic positions, this is also evident in the Security Council with its five permanent state members and ten elected state members, which vote on decisions (Charron 2011, 1-3). Even though its power is limited by the above-mentioned *Charter* (ibid) and its decision-making process, the UN is a powerful player in the international community.

For instance, the UN has been a key player in the promotion of human rights. Already in 1948, the UN proclaimed the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which established a common standard of human rights and has been translated into more than 500 different languages (UN 2020d). Later, in 1998, the UN General Assembly established the International Criminal Court and internationalized human rights. The Court was equipped with "unprecedented powers to prosecute individuals for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanitiy and crimes against opression" (ibid, 4). The establishment of the International Criminal Court depicts the ability of the UN to establish human rights as a basic right, that the international community saw the necessity in instituting an International Court

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[10] It has to be acknowledged that the UN decision-making process could be a chapter, or book, of its own but this is not the aim of this thesis. Rather this section intends to highlight the relevance of the UN in the international community and the humanitarian sector.

with real prosecuting powers. Furthermore, starting with the *Declaration of Human Rights*, a new norm was established, which coincides with the role of hegemony as 'moral leadership'.

Laclau's second and third dimensions concern the universalizing properties of particulars. The example of the *Declaration of Human Rights* can be applied to these dimensions as well. Human rights in this case present an empty signifier, or as Laclau specifies, a right of particular groups "can be formulated only as *universal* rights" (*emphasis in the original*, Laclau 2000, 58), even though the demand of rights presents a particularity (Laclau 2007, 54), meaning that a demand presents a specific concern. However, if the right presents the demand of a group, it cannot be a particularity but becomes universalized through its representation of a group of people. Thus, one can demand human rights, but by demanding human rights for a group, or all people in this case, it becomes universalized.

Human rights have to become a 'locus of universalizing effects' in order to gain relevance for a hegemonic discourse. Thus, for a particular demand to become relevant as the popular demand, it has to incorporate universalization. This means, for a demand to become popular, it needs to be able to represent a demand of a majority. And through the process of becoming the popular demand, the demand loses its particularity, and will likely incorporate more demands in its chain of equivalence. In this case here, the *Declaration* defines human rights in 29 articles, providing a variety of considerations (UN 2020d) and therefore presenting a universalized definition of human rights and the plurality of the demands, which is significant for Laclau's second dimension.

Laclau's third dimension emphasizes the role of empty signifiers, which allows the particular to produce universal representation, while upholding the incommensurability of the two (Laclau 2000, 57). As discussed above, human rights produce an empty signifier that allows the universalization of human rights. Even though the Declaration has been placed in the context of post-Holocaust developments, it has also been recognized as "an amalgam of competing or converging universalisms – imperial and anticolonial, 'Eastern' and 'Western', old and new" (Amril & Sluga qtd in. Davey et al. 2013, 9), hence, emphasizing the universalizing character of human rights.

The last and forth dimension of the hegemonic relation considers the "generalization of the relations of representation as condition of the constitution of a social order" (Laclau 2000, 57), meaning the necessity of the hegemonic actor to represent more than its particularistic identity, which is achieved through generalization. In the case of the UN and

human rights, one could argue that the UN has become a key organization in the promotion of human rights. Even though events such as the genocide in Rwanda and other crises indicated the limits of the UN's reach, the UN managed to uphold its position as a provider of peace and security and as a protector of human rights. The UN's website signifies the above-mentioned generalization by including phrases such as "[i]t is upholding international law, protecting human rights and promoting democracy" (UN 2020a). Especially the use of concepts such as 'human rights' or 'democracy', which are, as discussed with the example of human rights, already in of itself overdetermined, the UN is able to include a variety of universalizing effects and achieve generalization.

Therefore, it can be argued that the UN is a hegemonic actor on the global level according to Laclau's four dimensions of hegemonic relations, which are closely connected and build upon each other. The first dimension regards the unevenness of power, which complies with the UN, as it presents no total power. The second and third dimension, more specifically applied to the human rights discourse, considered the universalization of particularities and the role of empty signifiers, whereas the fourth and last dimension considers the aspect of generalization.

Furthermore, the preceding sections showed that the UN is an important actor in the humanitarian sector as well. In the literature on humanitarian intervention and action, the UN is omnipresent and its significance for the humanitarian sector is undeniable, with its provision of humanitarian action since the middle of twentieth century and its significant expansion since the 1990s. For context, according to the *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2010* out of the US$17 billion donations to the sector, the UN agencies funds and organizations received close to US$8 billion, which is almost half of all donations (HERR 2011, 3). The *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020* presents a similar distribution, while the amount of funding in the sector increased to US$31,2 billion in 2018, the UN received still close to half of all donations (Thomas & Urquhart 2020). This further emphasizes the dominant position the UN occupies in the humanitarian sector.

Whereas section 6.3 considered the subjectivity on the textual level, the following section is aimed at providing a more holistic view on the discourse of Localization by applying van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power'. The framework visualizes the context in which the articulatory practice takes place and will allow the last step of the analysis to consider the process of hegemonic closure in a more comprehensive way. This section concentrates on the communicative event of van Dijk's framework in order to contextualize the discourse positions, while the last step of the analysis will include the 'social structure' and 'social cognition' components of van Dijk's framework.

The following section is focused on the context of the discourse position to 'localization' promoted by the WHS. Further, it will consider the context of the antagonistic discourse position of 'people-centeredness'.

The WHS is considered to be a significant event in the internationalization of the Localization discourse and *The Grand Bargain* is considered to be "a landmark agreement between large donors and humanitarian organisations" (Barakat & Milton 2020, 148). The setting of the WHS has to be viewed in context of the growing calls for change and innovation in the humanitarian sector in the previous years, as discussed in section 5.3. The international community had to address the increasingly evident deficiencies of humanitarian action, and thus the WHS set out to facilitate change (WHS 2014).

As previously discussed, *The Grand Bargain* and the *Charter for Change* signatories include some of the sector's biggest contributors and INGOs. The 9,000 participants of the WHS included "representatives from Member States, non-governmental organizations, civil society, people affected by crises, the private sector and international organizations" (WHS 17, 4), thus combining the relevant actors of the humanitarian sector. Within the communicative event, according to van Dijk, not only are the setting and the participants of relevance but also the identities, roles, and relations, as well as the goals, knowledge, and ideologies. Section 6.3 considered these by analyzing the subject positions within the two antagonistic positions. The discourse of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' most prominently highlights the role of international actors as the facilitator of change in the sector. Even though *The Grand Bargain* and the WHS's *First Annual Synthesis Report*

highlight the relevance of the affected people and communities, they are not attributed the role of facilitators of change, and the same is valid for local actors.

The initiatives of 'people-centeredness' presented in this thesis are not the product of an international organization's agenda, as previously discussed. Rather, they are facilitated by individuals within as well as, in the case of ReflACTION, outside the humanitarian sector. However, the initiatives are set within the same context of the call for change in humanitarian action and more localized work.

The L2GP initiative works with local partners, such as the YMCA East Jerusalem Women's Development Program in Palestine "to design and implement their own protection and resilience responses" (Grundin 2018, 2). Their work is limited to the seven regions they have conducted their research in. Nonetheless, their published research is available online and has led to published recommendations (L2GP 2015). Additionally, they provided training and training materials for SCLR (L2GP 2020c), which has been applied within the above-mentioned cooperation in Palestine (Grundin 2018). This case study is also referred to on the *Charter for Change* website under the section 'country and case studies' (Charter4Change 2020).

The *Innovation Forum* convened by ReflACTION had an estimated 100 attendees, ranging from "humanitarian frontline workers from six African countries as well as (...) participants from Europe, the United States, and Asia" (Malteser International 2019). During the *Forum*, L2GP presented SCLR, and P-FIM was presented as well as exercised in the week leading up to the *Forum* (ReflACTION 2020b).

The preliminary P-FIM method was initially carried out by its two founders, but has attracted wide attention since the publication of its Facilitator's Toolkit in 2014. International organizations such as Malteser International and The Johanniter International Assistance have included P-FIM in their programming (Malteser International 2020; Kipfer-Didavi 2017). Furthermore, the approach has been acknowledged by the CHS Alliance (Kipfer-Didavi 2017) and commissioned by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO (Trocaire & P-FIM 2012).

As mentioned above, section 6.3 presented us with the subject positions within the 'people-centeredness' discourse, which can be translated to van Dijk's considerations of identities, roles and relations as well as the goals, knowledge and ideologies. As discussed, the affected people and communities are at the heart of this discourse and international actors

are prescribed a subsidiary role. Local actors are key facilitators of this approach. Therefore, 'people-centeredness' presents a different context than the WHS's discourse of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

Nonetheless, it can be concluded that the context of the WHS's discourse position has a considerably larger reach than the discourse of 'people-centeredness'. Even though the presented initiatives and approaches to 'people-centeredness' have a considerable reach and have been carried out in a number of countries, due to the fact of being organized rather by individuals, their international reach compared to the WHS is smaller. The following section will tie in the findings from this and the previous sections and their relevance for the hegemonic closure of the Localization discourse.

6.6 Process of Hegemonic Closure

The following section presents the last section to this analysis and will conclude the findings of the previous sections. It concerns the process of hegemonic closure, thus "how one of the discursive articulations is able to fix the meaning of the floating signifier" (Boon & Walton 2014, 365). The previous sections considered two antagonistic positions within the discourse of Localization, both competing to attach meaning to the floating signifier of 'localization'. Hegemony is then established when one antagonistic discourse position is able to assert itself as the dominant position. Therefore, "the major aim of hegemonic projects is to construct and stabilize the nodal points that form the basis of concrete social orders by articulating as many available elements as possible" (Howarth & Stavrakakis qtd. in Boon & Walton 2014, 365–366). As previously discussed, the hegemonic relation is partially defined through its ability to provide an empty signifier that allows universal representation (Laclau 2000, 57; Laclau 2007, 55). The longer its chain of equivalence, the more meaning it is able to attach to the empty signifier and thus is able to represent more. Furthermore, the nodal points connecting to the respective chain of equivalence are, depending on how they are discursively articulated, able to represent universal meaning. The following section will consider, which and why one of the antagonistic positions dominates the discourse.

With the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and the TEC *Report* recognizing the shortcomings of humanitarian action, the calls for substantial change in the sector grew. Even

though Gramsci's definition of an 'organic crisis', in which "there is a dramatic collapse in popular identifications with institutionalized subject positions and political imaginaries" (Smith 2003, 164), might present a too drastic description of what happened in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the humanitarian sector was in need to redefine its structure and ways of work. Within this context, the calls for a more localized approach to humanitarian action grew in order to address the sector's shortcomings, as was discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Firstly, this section will consider why the WHS's position for 'localization' to be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' ultimately dominated the Localization discourse and in which context 'people-centeredness' has to be viewed.

Section 6.4 described the UN as a hegemonic actor in the international community and its hegemony in the humanitarian sector. With the example of the human rights discourse, the section showed the hegemonic domination of the social cognition that human rights present a universal right for all human beings. When the calls for change and a more localized approach to humanitarian action grew within the sector, the UN had to act and restore its hegemonic position.

The WHS's discourse position was able to dominate the discourse for a number of reasons. Section 6.5 showed that the WHS had a very wide reach in the international humanitarian sector. Following van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power', the 'powerful groups', 'institutions', and 'symbolic elites', that is, hegemonic actors, control 'discourse structures' and 'communicative situations' (van Dijk 2015). In the case of this analysis, the UN as a hegemon is able to control said communicative events. Therefore, it is not surprising that the WHS was recognized as a significant event within the Localization discourse (Barakat & Milton 2020) and was able to bring together the sector's biggest contributors and international organizations, additionally to other relevant actors to the sector (WHS 17). By hosting this event, the UN was able to exert power on how the conversations were being held and, more importantly, control and facilitate the discursive articulation of the discourse position's chain of equivalence. This is visible through the publication of the *Agenda of Humanity*, by the UN and through the WHS enabled the facilitation of *The Grand Bargain* and the *Charter for Change*. These documents, combined with the evidence of funding habits, displayed the dominating role of international actors in the humanitarian sector. The current funding habits show that a vanishingly small portion of funding goes

directly to local actors (HERR 2011, 3, Charter4Change 2015, 1), not even speaking of the affected communities.

As one could argue, that if the affected people and communities are already carrying out a significant portion of crisis response, which is an argument made by L2GP, international organizations would lose their justification to their dominant position in the sector. However, the discursive articulation of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' is dominated by international organizations and the UN, which is visible in their prevailing subject position within the discourse and made possible through their dominating positions within the sector before the Localization discourse.

Following Laclau's considerations, hegemony is established either as a process of linking one's cause to a field of other causes in order to broaden one's reach, or as a process of making one's cause accessible to others by leaving it indefinitely open (Laclau 2007, 57). In the case of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' the second case applies. Section 6.2.1 presented its chain of equivalence, which features a number of relevant elements in order to establish the hegemonic discourse position. Firstly, it is evident that the chain of equivalence connects quite a few nodal points, thus enabling the empty signifier to unify a wider number of meanings. More importantly in this case, however, is the way in which the nodal points are articulated. While, the nodal point of local leadership is kept undefined, the nodal point regarding the inclusion of affected people combines a number of meanings attached to the nodal point. Here, some of the meanings attached are kept rather vague, such as the aim to build upon pre-existing local response strategies (WHS 2017, 101), without further specifying the actual process. Furthermore, the nodal point partnership is discursively articulated through the Principles of Partnership (Charter4Change 2015).

The nodal point regarding the necessity of international actors establishes international organizations as key facilitators of change and the promotion of Localization, thus securing their position within the sector. This coincides with van Dijk's framework of 'discursive reproduction of power', in which the hegemon by controlling the discourse re-establishes its powerful position. Throughout the three considered documents, the nodal point regarding international actors to be necessary is continuously highlighted and emphasized. Even though the Localization discourse seemed to imply a shift of power towards the affected people or at least local actors, the WHS's position re-established the dominant position of international actors by prescribing them the facilitating role.

Overall, due to the organization of its nodal points, the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' is able to represent a more universalized position. Especially by leaving certain nodal points less articulated, thus leaving them indefinitely open, this discourse position presents itself to be more inclusive to the general public. Here, discourse analysis displays its worth, by considering how nodal points are discursively articulated.

The antagonistic discourse position 'people-centeredness' one the other hand presents a less universal chain of equivalence. The chain of equivalence is shorter than the one of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. But more importantly, the nodal points attached present clear articulations of what they are and what they are not. Contrary to the other position, local leadership is clearly articulated as well as the nodal point to put the affected people at the center of the response. Furthermore, this position presents a wider range of subject positions including affected people and communities, as well as local actors.

However, the most severe difference between the two positions is the role of international actors. As discussed above, international organizations are currently dominating the humanitarian sector. Here, 'people-centeredness' calls for a distinct power shift towards the affected people and communities. Its chain of equivalence is united by this aim and international and external actors are prescribed a subsidiary role. This demand for change questions the current power structures and threatens the dominant position of international actors. Even though there have been international organizations who have endorsed a more 'people-centered' approach to the Localization discourse, such as the Malteser International and The Johanniter International Assistance, this is not common practice. This explains why the WHS and its commitments emphasize the necessity of international actors. If 'people-centeredness' would establish the dominant position for the floating signifier 'localization', the dominating position of international actors would be called into question, or international actors might even become obsolete, a "topic of much closed-door discussion during the WHS process" (Wall & Hedlund 2016, 21). Therefore, it becomes evident why international actors and the UN aim at dominating the Localization discourse, which they do through a number of components. Firstly, their predominant position prior to the emergence of the discourse allowed them to control the communicative event in which the discourse was articulated, in this case the WHS and its outcomes. Paired with the openness of its chain of

equivalence the discourse position is able to represent a more universalized meaning than 'people-centeredness'.

One could even argue that 'people-centeredness' could be placed within the 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' discourse position, as it does not prohibit such a position as the one of 'people-centeredness'. The necessity of international actors presents a key nodal point of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', but international actors are articulated in a way that prescribes them a facilitating and enabling role towards a more localized humanitarian action. Therefore, it does not contradict the nodal point of the subsidiary role international actors articulated within the 'people-centeredness' discourse. In combination with the openness of local leadership and the inclusion of affected people, 'people-centeredness' could be placed within the 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' discourse position, as these nodal points are articulated in a way that allow them to be rather openly defined.

However, during the *Innovation Forum*, it became evident that within the 'people-centeredness' discourse, there have been visible efforts to distance this discourse position from the term 'localization'. Throughout the discussions, it was voiced that the dominating 'Localization agenda' by the WHS, here signified through the empty signifier 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', did not focus enough on the affected people and communities.

The dissatisfaction with this situation has led to 'people-centeredness' aiming at establishing its own discourse outside of the Localization discourse. This is because it cannot possibly attain a hegemonic position within that discourse, as it is lacking the institutional support and funding, as described in previous sections. Therefore, the 'people-centeredness' discourse position necessarily remains an antagonistic position to the hegemonic discourse position of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. Otherwise, it would risk being absorbed by the dominant discourse and having its nodal points effectively integrated into the chain of equivalence of the hegemonic discourse position. Therefore, the way the nodal points of the 'people-centeredness' discourse are articulated allow the discourse to be viewed as an antagonistic position and different to the dominant 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' discourse.

Even though 'people-centeredness' did not establish the dominant meaning to the floating signifier 'localization', the discourse is not entirely negated from the humanitarian

sector. As the HAR stated, "there appears to be more momentum to work on localisation, rather than participation of crisis-affected people in decision-making" (HAR 2018, 36), which highlights the domination of the 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' discourse, but also depicts the discourse position of 'people-centeredness'.

The research puzzle that facilitated this thesis was based in the tension between the theoretical claim of the Localization discourse and witnessed reality in the humanitarian sector. The analysis showed how the discursive articulations of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' and the power dynamics within the sector enabled this position to establish the dominant discourse position. Furthermore, it showed why 'people-centeredness' was unable to establish the hegemonic discourse position.

Nonetheless, section 6.5 showed that 'people-centeredness' has gathered considerable reach within the sector and is able to provide a wide range of positive examples of the implementation of 'people-centered' approaches. This, combined with the growing discontent with Localization commitments not being met, adds momentum to this discourse position (HAR 2018; Konyndyk & Worden 2018) and can aid the position to establish its own discourse.

Therefore, it has to be kept in mind that "universality can easily be questioned and can never be actually maintained" (Laclau 2007, 56). Moreover, the emptier a signifier and the longer its chain of equivalence, and thus the wider its universal meaning, the more unstable this empty signifier will be. By aiming for a more universal meaning, the particular original identity will be weakened, which destabilizes the hegemony (Laclau 2007, 55). Therefore, this process of hegemonic closure presents only a limited insight into the Localization discourse.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyze the Localization discourse and its influence on the power dynamics in the humanitarian sector. Intrigued by the benefits of a more localized humanitarian response that are agreed upon throughout the sector and the contrast to the reality of INGOs still dominating the sector, this thesis intended to examine the Localization discourse by analyzing two antagonistic positions within the discourse. Through the application of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Hegemony each position's discursive articulations were determined and it was shown why the discourse 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' was able to dominate the Localization discourse. Due to its openness, the position was able to present a position seemingly inclusive of all actors and people affected by crises. However, the analysis further showed that this discourse position negates the subject positions of local actors and people affected. Instead, 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' promotes the role of international actors in this effort for a more localized humanitarian action, that is, rather a reestablishment of the relevance of international actors in reality.

Through the contextualization with van Dijk's framework of the 'discursive reproduction of power', the analysis further showed factors that enabled said discourse position to establish the hegemonic discourse position. By dominating the Localization discourse, the UN was able to establish its hegemonic position in the humanitarian sector. With that, the call for a power shift within the sector, which has been growing in the last few years, most significantly following the evaluation of Indian Ocean Tsunami response, was not achieved by this discourse position. Rather, the nature of this discourse position enables the power dynamics to stay how there are, with big INGOs and UN Agencies dominating.

Nonetheless, even though the discourse position 'people-centeredness' did not dominate the Localization discourse, this position is far from being negated. Initiatives like L2GP and ReflACTION, as well as the approaches of SCLR and P-FIM present distinct efforts for a more locally-led, people-centered crisis response. Moreover, these initiatives and approaches present only a small number of efforts to facilitate a power shift within the sector.

Furthermore, as the Localization discourse does not present a closed system, the struggle over identity never ends, which refers to Laclau and Mouffe's considerations of the 'impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings'. The struggle over the identity of the floating

signifier 'localization' is not over, rather, this thesis presents a limited insight into the discourse. Therefore, discourse positions can always be challenged, especially empty signifiers with longer chains of equivalence will allow more points of antagonism. Thus, change within the humanitarian sector is still possible. These changes will require a shift in power towards local actors and affected people, which are not facilitated by 'localization' articulated through the discourse position 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.

Even though the WHS's position constitutes the hegemonic discourse position, it would be desirable and beneficial to shift power towards local actors and the affected people in humanitarian action, as is agreed upon throughout the sector, which was also shown through the literature above. This would also counteract some of the adverse effects the status quo is having on crisis response, which were mentioned above. Achieving "the aspiration of people-driven humanitarian action will require uncomfortable—but overdue—changes to the humanitarian system's incentive structures and power dynamics" (Konyndyk & Worden 2018, 1). However, as discourse is a never-ending process and as there is evidence of more people-centered approaches that have gained not insignificant attention within the sector, change can still happen. This is true especially in consideration of the history of the humanitarian sector, which was briefly introduced in this thesis and which showed that the sector has always been subject to change. Therefore, it can be concluded that this discourse is an ongoing process that still can, and hopefully will, change the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector and enable a more locally-led, people-centered humanitarian action.

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