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SARA DE JONG, PETRA DANNECKER

**Managing Migration with Stories?
The IOM “i am a migrant” Campaign**

ABSTRACT *This article offers an analysis of the aim, audience, form and content of the “i am a migrant” campaign of the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). We suggest that the campaign directs public opinion in Western ‘host countries’. We furthermore propose that the campaign’s website as a platform for migrants’ voices is not antithetical to the mission of the IOM to manage migration according to a logic of productivity and rationality, but rather a logical extension of it. We show that the migrant narratives presented not only confirm, but also disrupt the assumed naturalness of migrants’ strong ties with their countries of origin, frequently underpinning established policy on the migration-development nexus.*

KEYWORDS *International Organisation of Migration, migration management, development, return migration, campaign, public opinion*

1. Introduction

Since the nineties, there has been a shift from thinking migration policy in terms of simply migration control to understanding migration as something that needs to be managed. Although it is too simplistic to draw a hard line between migration control and migration management, a main characteristic of migration management is that it presents migration as an inevitable phenomenon, which should be pragmatically approached to make the ‘best’ out of it, rather than merely contained. Migration is no longer presented as a problem *per se*. Rather, the logic goes, *mismanagement* of migration makes migration problematic for all involved. Migra-

tion management has been considered an expression of a new form of politics and power, one which exceeds mere coercion and discipline (Andriasevic/Walters 2010: 980; Kalm 2010). A review of the critical literature on migration management shows that a governmentality framework has emerged “as a particularly salient way to analyse the workings of [...] migration management” (de Jong 2016: 352), since this can capture the soft power of persuasion, the constitution of subjectivities, and the role of expert knowledge as technologies of government. In line with a neoliberal agenda, ‘making the best out of migration’ has been defined in migration management as the so-called ‘triple-win’, with ‘host’ countries, countries of origin, as well as migrants themselves benefitting in economic terms. This depoliticising approach negates the fact that the interests of migrants, and those of sending and receiving countries, do not always align (Geiger/Pécoud 2010: 11). Proponents of migration management expressly support a liberal human rights framework as guiding their policies. Critics, however, argue that neoliberal migration management is in conflict with human rights-oriented global migration governance, since it prioritises neoliberal market interests over rights (Basok/Piper 2012). While advocates for migration management position themselves as more progressive compared to approaches that seek to stop or control migration, they are far removed from an open or no border politics approach.

Migration management is not just a set of policies, but also a discourse, which produces a certain way of understanding what migration ‘is’ and which form of knowledge, capacity and policies are needed to deal with migration (Geiger/Pécoud 2010: 2). This article offers an analysis of the discursive production of an increasingly important international actor in migration management, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). Before presenting our specific case study, the IOM campaign “i am a migrant”, launched in December 2015, we will introduce the IOM and its programmes, especially in relation to the migration-development nexus and the role of return migration, as a relevant backdrop to our subsequent analysis. We depart from the assumption that discursive and material practices relate to one another, albeit not in a straightforward manner. Therefore, this article explores what at first sight might seem like a tension or discontinuity between the IOM’s *operational practices*, in particular its controversial migrant return programmes, and its *discursive work*, as artic-

ulated in the “i am a migrant campaign”. Basok and Piper’s comparative study of the programmes and rhetoric of International Organisations in relation to migrant women found discontinuities between the discourse of rights on the one hand, and a practice of neoliberal management, on the other. As they state: “While at the discursive level, IOM attempts to balance [a human right-oriented and a neoliberal management oriented trend], its specific programmes clearly privilege migration management” (2012: 53). In this article, instead of comparing practice and rhetoric, we will look at what the IOM’s discourse, as constructed in the “i am a migrant” campaign, does for migration management.

2. The IOM and migration management

As several accounts reveal, the IOM has become an important player and global leader in migration management (Geiger/Pécoud 2014; Georgi 2010), although it is often overlooked by researchers (Andrijasevic/Walters 2010; Ashutosh/Mountz 2011: 22). In fact, it can be argued that its mission epitomises the productive and rational logic of migration management. As the IOM states: “IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society”¹. The IOM is an intergovernmental organisation, and since September 2016 is a ‘Related Organization’ in the United Nations (UN) structure². It was created with a precise mission, namely to help states to resettle refugees produced by the Second World War. To provide services for its member states is still the major task of the IOM. Increasingly however, this is conducted in the context of regulating migration in general, especially through migrant return (Koch 2014).

The IOM is, however, more than just a service deliverer to its now 165 member nation-states. The IOM also plays a significant role in constructing the ‘reality of migration’ by identifying and framing the ‘problems’ with migration; in the context of a competition for resources with other large organisations in the field, it serves the IOM well when they can subsequently offer to solve these ‘problems’. Since the IOM only recently became a ‘Related Organization’ of the UN organisation, it previously needed to justify its legitimacy by reference to the discourse on the growing need

for global migration management (Korneev 2014: 890). The IOM does not have a legal protection mandate like the UNHCR, but nevertheless wants to be considered as an organisation which protects and represents migrants and refugees. Hence, the IOM, continuously and seemingly successfully, engages in promoting this image. For instance, when the IOM announced its new status as a 'Related Organization' of the UN on its website, it framed this as follows: "Through the Agreement the UN recognizes IOM as an indispensable actor in the field of human mobility. This includes protection of migrants and displaced people in migration-affected communities, as well as in areas of refugee resettlement and voluntary returns, and incorporates migration in country development plans"³.

The IOM is a fast-growing organisation. It proudly presents on its website a range of key indicators for its growth, including its increased membership from 67 States in 1998 to 165 in 2016, its growing expenditure (from USD 242.2 million in 1998 to an estimated USD 1.4 billion in 2014), and an increase in active projects from 686 in 1998 to more than 2,400 in 2014. When looking at the history and development of the IOM, it can be observed that the organisation is striving to extend its mission in relation to changing circumstances, and that its role in designing and implementing migration policies and its portfolio of activities has grown over recent years (Gabrielli 2016: 6; Geiger/Pécoud 2010). At the same time, the IOM was and is still doing important humanitarian work, for instance in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami. The IOM is, according to the sociological perspective taken by Branett and Finnemore (1999: 699), one of the International Organisations which, through taking an embodied rational-legal authority "gives them power independent of the states that created them". Following this perspective, Koch (2014: 911f) argues that the IOM is therefore not just implementing so-called voluntary return and integration projects, or organising regional consulting processes around the world to manage mobility, but has also room to shape their content.

The IOM has also managed to establish itself as a trusted intermediary between states and migrants, legitimising its actions and shaping public opinion through research, the World Migration Reports, journals, information sheets, handbooks and flyers, thereby actively framing the issue of migration and how it needs to be managed (Betts 2011; Geiger/Pécoud 2010). For quite some decades the IOM has supported the European Union

(EU) and its member states, vital donors to the IOM (Wunderlich 2013) in legitimising and implementing their immigration policies as part of the process of the securitisation of migration (Bigo 2002). Furthermore, as argued by Ashutosh and Mountz (2011: 22f), the border enforcement strategies rely increasingly on the ability of the IOM to operate on behalf of, yet beyond the traditional bounds of, the sovereign state. At the same time, however, the IOM presents itself as an important actor protecting and representing migrants and their rights, and as a counterweight to increasingly coercive immigration and border enforcement strategies. The IOM thus “...stands at the intersection of the nation-state, international human rights regimes and neo-liberal governance” (Ashutosh/Mountz 2011: 22). As Fabian Georgi (2010: 65) points out, the IOM can be categorised among the “liberal global migration governance” camp, which “includes progressive notions of a more humane, just and open regulation of migration, while stressing that this can only be realized within a firm framework of migration governance or migration management”. This camp struggles in its attempt to become hegemonic in global migration policy in competition with at least two other dominant political projects, the national sovereignty project and the rights-based approach.

2.1 The IOM and the migration-development nexus

In recent decades, the IOM has also played a decisive role in the process of incorporating international development into migration management, in line with migration management’s understanding of the migration-development nexus as one of its main pillars. Lavenex and Kunz (2008: 449) describe the IOM and ILO as actors that “adopted a broad approach focusing on protecting migrant’s rights and harnessing the potential development impact of their return to the country of origin”, in contrast to the World Bank and the IMF, which took a narrow financial approach. Since the new millennium, the IOM has actively addressed development issues with the aim, in its own words, “to contribute to a better understanding of the links between international migration and development in order to harness the development potential of migration for the benefit of both societies and migrants and to contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction”⁴. This statement has to be read in the context of the ‘discovery’ of remittances and the economic potential of migration, and

thus the perceived developmental significance of migration, migrants and their remittances, which has been especially pronounced since the findings of the Global Development Finance Report of 2003 from the World Bank (Faist 2008).

The hype around the migration-development nexus has been accompanied by debates, policies and strategies on how governments and international organisations, in collaboration with each other, can cultivate the positive relationships between migration and economic and social development (Gamlen 2014: 582). One example of this cooperation is the agreement between the IOM and the European Union, which was published in 2011 by the European Commission Press: “The EU and IOM work together on a daily basis on projects which promote international cooperation in areas such as legal migration, irregular migration and development. This new agreement will [...] make our work together much more efficient”⁵. This meant, for example, that Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, which have a long history, are becoming increasingly integrated into the field of development cooperation and presented and framed as a strategy to foster social and economic development in the countries of migrants’ origin. Project components with the aim of assisting migrants in setting up businesses in their countries of origin, or vocational training courses, can be interpreted along these lines, since they aim, according to the IOM, to link return to local development⁶. These new projects have to be understood in the light of the fact that earlier promises of the migration and development nexus, and the initiated activities, such as promoting diaspora engagement, have not led to the results anticipated by national and international policy offices (Vammen/Bronden 2012: 34; Sinatti/Horst 2014). This explains the enthusiasm for return migration as a way to keep migration and development on the international agenda, yet with an emphasis on migrants’ and returnees’ agency. Connecting return migration and post-return reintegration assistance to development, and embedding the projects in the international human rights regime, as the IOM does, or calling return programmes ‘development’, as national governments such as the Netherlands and Great Britain do (Vammen/Bronden 2012: 38), increases the social and political acceptability of state-induced migrant return.

This acceptability is, however, widely challenged by academics and international and national NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Watch (Koch 2014: 911). Whereas Koser, for example, states that there is a fine line between facilitating return and encouraging it (2015: 15), others focus more on the IOM's definition of voluntarism and criticise its practice (see for example Noll 1999; Dünnwald 2014; Koch 2014). While the aforementioned criticisms of the IOM remain on the terrain of "legalistic points and a rights-based approach", others offer what Georgi and Schatral (2012: 213) consider a much needed radical critique of the premises of the IOM, by underlining that "migration controls *as such* can never be fair and just and adequate to the ideal of humans as free and equal beings". As Georgi (2010: 67) writes elsewhere, this radical critique does not preclude recognising that "on an individual basis, IOM has benefited many refugees and migrants by providing food, shelter, medical aid, advice or transport services [and that] on an individual level most IOM staff members genuinely want to 'help' migrants".

Between 2001 and 2003, the IOM, including its return programmes, was the subject of a critical counter-campaign led by the NoBorder network, under the name "Stop IOM! Freedom of Movement versus Global Migration Management" (Noborder Network; IRR 2002; Georgi 2010). When the IOM opened its first London office in 2002, the British Institute of Race Relations (IRR) featured a critical article on the IOM, inspired by the work of the European NoBorder network, asking "should NGOs be co-operating with the IOM?". It noted that return schemes require co-operation with partners such as academics and NGOs, some of which have a history of supporting migrants, and warned that while the IOM's programmes "appear perfectly worthy", there are reasons for "alarm bells" to ring (CARF 1 Oct 2002). At the occasion of the opening of the IOM's Manchester office, the website of the group Manchester No Borders featured an article on the "shadowy organisation" IOM, in which they describe its return programmes as follows: "If forced removals are so costly and cause a lot of fuss, the logic goes, why not do it another way, while pretending to be compassionate and humane. If detention is the stick, the IOM are the carrot. Both are part of the same system of migration management." (Manchester No Borders 13 October 2008). In response to these public attacks, the IOM "avoided the spotlight" (Georgi 2010: 45).

More recently, arguably, the IOM has started to actively seek, rather than avoid, the limelight. In the following, we complement the studies on and critical engagement with the IOM's return programmes, by shifting the attention from the IOM's operational programmes to its discursive production through analysing the new global IOM campaign, "i am a migrant". Through this, we want to shed further light on the IOM's active role in migration management through public campaigns, which have increasingly attracted scholarly attention (Andrijasevic 2007; Pécoud 2010; Basok/Piper 2012; Heller 2014; McNevin/Missbach/Mulyana 2016). After a short introduction about the history of the campaign, we will show that the campaign should be read as an instrument for managing public opinion and for legitimising the organisation. We will demonstrate that the project of providing a platform for migrants' voices is not antithetical to the IOM's mission, but rather a logical extension of it. Based on an analysis of the cases presented, we will propose that, in line with migration management and the migration-development nexus, the image of the entrepreneurial migrant as a good migrant is created and presented throughout the campaign. This is done particularly through the testimonies of returned migrants, whereby the return to the place of origin is constructed as the natural inclination for every migrant, despite there being narrative strands that challenge this logic, as will be shown.

3. The "i am a migrant" campaign

"i am a migrant" is, according to the IOM, both a campaign and platform⁷. The website offers a platform to "create a place for the personal stories of migrants" in order to "challenge the anti-migrant stereotypes and hate speech in politics and society". It invites migrants to tell their own stories, with the invitation to "create your personal i am a migrant poster to put on your wall, to send to your family and friends and to make your social media profile". It also asks non-migrants to share the captivating stories of migrants⁸. The website features the stories of people from all over the world, identifying people by a photo and their first name. Each story displays a luggage tag with the number of kilometres the migrant is removed from her/his 'country of origin'.

The campaign and platform has two ‘predecessors’. On the one hand, it grew out of IOM’s own “Migrant Heroes” campaign, which itself followed from the 2013 IOM “Migrants Contribute” campaign. The Migrants Contribute campaign was an attempt to “change the conversation about migration” by “putting the spotlight not on where migrants come from, but on what they bring”⁹. #MigrantHeroes, which was an extensive media campaign, including a film festival, sought to highlight “ordinary people [...] doing extraordinary things”, according to Rosebell Kagumire, the IOM’s social media manager at the time. As she explained in a radio interview, the campaign wanted to address the negative one-sided media coverage about migrants, where the “only story [European audiences] see about a migrant is a migrant dying to reach the country, not a migrant who has actually transformed the society”, thus affecting their perception of migrants (Kagumire 2015). Initially, it was planned that the #MigrantHeroes campaign would culminate in a public election of migrant heroes who would become IOM Goodwill Ambassadors¹⁰. The initial plan changed, as Itayi Viriri, the IOM’s Media & Communications Officer explained, and #Migrant Heroes was transformed into the “i am a migrant” campaign¹¹.

The other key forerunner of the “i am a migrant” campaign was an externally organised poster campaign called “I Am An Immigrant” (IAAI). This IAAI campaign was initiated by the national British charity Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), and was run through the Movement against Xenophobia in the lead up to the 2015 UK general election. These organisations started a hugely successful crowd-funded campaign, raising £54,101 within a three-week period to print posters in which immigrants’ contribution to and integration into society was highlighted, to counterbalance the election’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. The posters, showing 15 stories selected from submissions by immigrants themselves, were displayed at hundreds of Underground stations in London and 550 rail stations across the country. As the JCWI explains on their website, combining the IAAI and IOM’s #MigrantHeroes campaign was a “natural next step”¹²; a step they announced a few days before its global launch on December 18, 2015, International Migrants Day¹³.

According to a spokesperson for the JCWI, the IOM, which had the capacity and funding to do so, “took the idea [of the IAAI campaign] globally”¹⁴. This reflects the IOM’s (not uncontested) approach to work

through partnerships with NGOs and the private sector (Pécoud 2010). The IOM used the concept of the original JCWI campaign, and extended its focus by including emigration, and therefore renaming the campaign “i am a migrant” to encompass both emigration and immigration. Currently, there are thus two websites that coexist alongside each other: www.iaman-immigrant.net from the JCWI, and the IOM’s www.iamamigrant.org, with portraits on the JCWI website also featuring on the IOM’s website with basically the same format, style and story¹⁵. The “i am a migrant” campaign clearly bears the traces both of its internal IOM predecessors in its focus on stories, and of its external JCWI forerunner in its explicit denouncement of “anti migrant stereotypes and hate speech in politics and society”¹⁶. The collaboration between the IOM and the JCWI continued when the JCWI launched the “I am a refugee” campaign for Refugee Week 2016, displaying plaques with the stories of refugees, with the IOM introducing a web-based “I am a refugee” campaign, together with the UNHCR¹⁷. The “i am a migrant” website is constantly growing, and is also dynamic in responding to new developments and emerging political agendas, as is illustrated in the increased attention to refugees, recently for instance featuring testimonies of Syrian refugees in Turkey who are presented as beneficiaries of various IOM programmes¹⁸.

In September 2016, there were around 500 individual stories¹⁹ featured on the website covering more or less an equal number of men and women. Most of the migrants and refugees who present themselves or are being presented by the IOM and their partners, are currently residing in Europe, particularly in Germany, the UK, Ireland, Italy, and Switzerland, as well as in the United States and Canada. This is supplemented by stories of migrants and refugees who now live in, for instance the Ukraine, Thailand, Paraguay, Albania and Mauritania, but these are fewer in numbers. While the Western clustering with regard to the countries of current *residence* is striking, with regard to the countries of so-called *origin* of those portrayed on the website, the picture is much more diverse. The website leaves the strong impression that migrants and refugees residing in the so-called western developed countries are privileged in the sense that they have the possibility to articulate themselves, and thus have agency, whereas migrants in the countries of the so-called global South hardly seem to have a voice.

While the first impression of the “i am a migrant” website suggests that the majority of the stories are uploaded by individual migrants themselves, the origin of the testimonies is more complex. Some stories can be traced back to earlier IOM publications, as well as to external sources, such as BBC news. There are a number of instances where this is made explicit with reference to the original source, such as “This story was provided by i am a migrant’s partner, One Young World”. At other times, when a seemingly autobiographical narrative ends with a line of information about the migrant featured, the identity of the narrator is more ambiguous: “Shanika was able to seek assistance and reside in a shelter run by the Government of Kuwait.”²⁰. This raises the question as to how much “narrative authority” (Malkki 1996: 398) migrants had over ‘their’ stories and the selection of the tagline, which accompanies each feature. The prominent role of the IOM as a supporting organisation in many of the testimonies (such as in facilitating return and providing settlement services for Syrian refugees in Turkey), also suggests that while the overt agenda of the website is the foregrounding of the stories of migrants, the platform is also used as a strategic showcase of the IOM’s work.

In the following sections, we present three angles that we consider instructive in analysing the IOM “i am a migrant” campaign. We first focus on the goal and audience of the campaign, then on its form, and finally on a selection of its content.

3.1 The management of public opinion

A useful starting point to analyse the aim and audience of the “i am a migrant” campaign is Antoine Pécoud’s study (2010) of the IOM’s information campaigns for would-be migrants, in particular his insights about the important role attributed to information, and about governance through partnerships and persuasion. The information campaigns warned aspiring migrants of the dangers of migration, working under the assumption that once people are well informed, they will act according to a rational logic, and hence will be deterred (cf. Heller 2014). Seeking to affect the conduct of people through persuasion rather than force, these campaigns are a good example of governmentality. The IOM’s coalition with civil society organisations, which underpinned the campaigns, managed to diffuse the locus of power.

We suggest that juxtaposing Pécoud's analysis of previous IOM campaigns with the "i am a migrant" campaign also reveals some significant and rapid shifts in the IOM's strategy. Pécoud (2010) found two paradoxes when comparing the global policy *rhetoric* of migration management and the *practice* of information campaigns. First, at the level of global policy, migration is presented as something positive, but the information campaigns he looked at emphasised the dark side of migration, and were thus still caught in the logic of migration control rather than productive management. Second, Pécoud (2010: 193) found another gap between action and rhetoric, as there were no "initiatives that would promote the usefulness of migration among the population of destination countries", even though policy documents articulated that "anti-immigrant feelings are fuelled by the ignorance of the public regarding migrants' usefulness" (ibid.: 186). Policy documents also proposed to address this "not only [as] a matter of increasing the acceptance of immigrants, but also of enabling governments to design more open migration policies", because "ignorant public opinions would [...] block much-needed policy reforms" (ibid.: 187).

In 2015, Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General of the IOM, uncannily echoed Pécoud's findings: "There is a long history of using information campaigns in the migration field. [...] A new type of information campaign is needed today *targeting the general public in destination countries*" (Thompson 2015: 7; italics added). Whether Pécoud's publication has been read by the IOM as an invaluable piece of PR advice (at affordable academic rather than consultancy rates), or whether there was an internal recognition of these contradictions, remains a matter of speculation. What is clear is that the "i am a migrant" campaign is precisely closing the initially observed gap between discourse and practice, reaching out to populations with the aim of addressing xenophobia. As the campaign states: "The negative memes about migration that fill our media are usually based on prejudice and *misinformation*."²¹ Moreover, as will be discussed in more detail below, the representation of migration is not simply negative anymore. That means that Pécoud's (2010: 193) observation concerning the earlier information campaigns, namely that they articulate that "migration is an option only for the losers, clever and hard-working people stay at home", no longer holds true today.

Other important sources to help understand the aim and audience of the “i am a migrant” campaign are the 2011 World Migration Report: “Communicating Effectively About Migration”, and the IOM’s 2015 report “How The World Views Migration”. These reports drew on the analysis of two questions on migration from the Gallup World Poll, the largest globally comparable data set: one asked the respondent to evaluate the current level of migration in their country, the other to consider whether immigrants worked in jobs unwanted or wanted by citizens of the country (IOM 2015). As the IOM states in an announcement of the report, they found that the perception of migration is generally more positive than media coverage suggests, but the perception in *receiving countries* is more negative. Without referring to the “i am a migrant” campaign, the concluding remarks of this six-page announcement describe neatly describe its rationale:

“Negative public perceptions of migration restrict the ability of policy-makers to manage migration effectively. There is a risk that migration policies in such countries will be increasingly shaped by fears and misconceptions rather than evidence. (...) We need to continue to monitor on a regular basis public perception of migration (...) This type of information is essential for policy-makers and practitioners who seek to influence public opinion. Such data can also contribute to the design of more effective information campaigns which seek to combat negative public perceptions of migration. Given the limited funds available to implement such campaigns, it is important that efforts to influence public attitudes are targeted at the right groups in society.” (IOM 2015: 6)

In summary, the IOM holds that there is an objectively optimal way to manage migration, securing the economic benefits for all parties concerned. Fear of public backlash might prevent those ‘in the know’, such as policy makers, to pursue this optimum. With the correct information, the ignorant and misinformed would, it is argued, shed their xenophobia. In order to present them this correct information in the most efficient way, the IOM wants to know who and where these people are, to steer them towards recognising the true value of migration. As the IOM writes, the “IOM understands that migration is inevitable, necessary and desirable – if well governed”: its necessity lies in the challenge to meet “labour demands and ensure the availability of skills and the vibrancy of economies and

societies”, which is desirable for migrants and receiving societies “when governed humanely and fairly as a path to the realisation of human potential”²². Following this logic, the IOM sees it as its task to enlighten the general public in order to recognise the truth. In other words, migration management and the remit of the IOM now encompass the management of public opinion, or in Heller’s (2014: 304) terms, it engages in “perception management”.

The language options of the “i am a migrant” website (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) indeed reveal that the primary audience is exactly those European host country populations, especially in Southern Europe, which the survey found to be most negative concerning migration. Hence, non-migrant visitors from the so-called global South, especially Asia and Africa, are not the main target audience of the campaign. This could also explain why migrants living in Asian countries are hardly present on the platform, although Asia hosts the largest number of migrants after Europe (see the latest report by UN 2015²³). Although the ILO had already, in 2011, underlined the need for a campaign to change the public attitude towards migrants in Asia, the regional strategy of the IOM for Asia and Pacific²⁴ focusses primarily on so-called vulnerable migrants, and thus the ‘shadow side’ of migration. For instance, a recent IOM campaign in Indonesia sponsored by the Australian state focussed on discouraging fishermen from ‘smuggling’ migrants (McNevin et al. 2016)

3.2 The role of testimonies

It might initially seem puzzling that the IOM, which attributes much weight to information as evidence, coordinates a campaign that largely features people’s personal stories. Their Migrants Contribute campaign had already presented “moving stories”, similar to the ones presented on the “i am a migrant” website, but also featured a tab called “Reality versus Perception”, where the IOM contrasted popular discourse with data which corrected erroneous assumptions²⁵. While there remains a factual information component on the “i am a migrant” website (an interactive graph of global migration flows), personal testimonies play an even more prominent role.

The IOM’s interest in telling migrants’ stories extends beyond the “i am a migrant” campaign: IOM Director General William Lacy Swing

wrote an Op-Ed in the Bangkok Post, entitled “See the World Through Migrants’ Eyes”²⁶ (2015) and IOM UK participated in the 2016 Migration Museum exhibition “Call me by my name – Stories from Calais and beyond”. Different from the earlier myth-busting and factual approach, these initiatives introduce a strong affective dimension, both in “the *essence* of [migrants’] testimony [as] emotional rather than analytical” and in “that what is *produced* by the testimony (the public’s compassion)” (Fassin 2008: 537, 539; italics added). While the “i am a migrant” campaign still presents stories to ‘correct’ what the IOM considers a skewed negative media discourse, its focus on testimonies is arguably a shift away from the technocratic, depoliticised approach commonly associated with migration management. The emphasis on individual personal stories, rather than on structural power relations in migration regimes, can be seen as depoliticising. Seemingly paradoxically, “both the singularity of individual trajectories and situations and the specificity of collective processes and issues are effaced” (Fassin 2008: 552).

However, the fact that the campaign grew out of the deeply political initiative of the JCWI as a response to the UK election and that ‘giving voice’ has a long progressive political history, make the “i am a migrant” campaign politically ambivalent. There has been a recent upsurge of political solidarity expressed through “I am ...” epitaphs, from “Je Suis Charlie” to “I am Eric Garner”²⁷. While these statements have come under critique, they have arguably also led to the formation of new collective identities. A similar political impulse of identification, while in excess of the intention of the “i am a migrant” campaign, is not unimaginable. As McNevin, Missbach and Mulyana state in their recent analysis of a public IOM campaign in Indonesia, “governing rationalities at stake in the campaign break down, shift, and mutate in ways that generate unpredictable disruptions to technocratic control” (2016: 225).

We also propose that it is useful to situate the “i am a migrant” campaign in relation to international development initiatives that preceded it. Critical development scholarship has a longstanding engagement with analysing development testimonies, the most famous of which is the World Bank’s Voices of the Poor project in 2000. For this project, the World Bank approached the UK Institute of Development Studies with a proposal to widely consult the poor. Robert Chambers (2013: 8),

who led the project, revealed recently that he and his colleagues struggled over the following issues: “Were we being coopted? Was this exercise merely cosmetic?”. Chambers’ questions were echoed more recently by researcher and film maker Charles Heller (2014: 304), who recounts that “his [activist artistic] practice encountered a moment of deep crisis” after he found that the IOM produced similar images of migrants’ suffering as he had done in his own films, but with the expressed contrary purpose, namely to govern migrants’ mobility, not to criticise migration regimes. These questions about co-optation are also pertinent for the partnerships between the IOM and civil society in the “i am a migrant” campaign.

The judgment of John Pender²⁸, who condemned the use of soundbites and quotations out of context in the Voices of the Poor project, is relevant for the “i am a migrant” campaign, which also uses single strap lines to accompany each story. Moreover, the focus on the stories of ‘others’ could facilitate “comfortable diversion and evasion, looking away from where we should be looking”, as Chambers (2013: 17) warned. Drawing on Kalpana Wilson’s (2011: 329) analysis of contemporary visual representations in development, we can also see that even if the “i am a migrant” campaign presents migrants’ agency, rather than their victimhood, this agency might still be “limited to the ‘rational self-interested’ individual”. Also, the recognition of this agency remains dependent on the benevolent non-migrant visitor to the “i am a migrant” website. Moving from the format of the campaign to its content, we will now analyse selected featured stories in relation to the migration-development nexus.

3.3 The migrants’ narratives

As we have discussed above, the academic literature on transnational migration from the first decade of the new millennium, which proposed that migrants can contribute to the development of their countries of origin through transnational activities (see for example Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002), fuelled an optimism in international and national policy-makers’ circles that migrants and their remittances (financial and social) could have a major impact on the economic and social development of countries of origin (Vammen/Bonden 2012). More recently however, the academic literature can be divided into studies that observe positive effects on development and other research that finds a rather negative relation

between migration and development (de Haas 2012). The latter, more critical, studies range from criticising the neoliberal orientation, with its strong focus on individual agency in the current policy papers and strategies, to questioning the categories used, as well as pointing to the lack of empirical evidence. Moreover, this research argues that migrants' own visions and ideas about development, and as such the role migration may play in social change and the shaping of contemporary societies, is rarely taken into account (Dannecker 2009; Raghuram 2009).

Interestingly, the individual stories on the IOM platform support the latter sceptical views with regard to the expected development of the so-called countries of origin through migration: hardly any migrant or refugee featured on the "i am a migrant" website defines his or her main task as 'developing' his or her country of origin. There are few accounts of activities, such as remittances, which correspond to the taken for granted meaning of development, (re)produced by international organisations as well as national development actors through the migration and development discourse. Instead, most migrants and refugees describe their individual contributions to the 'development' of their current societies of residence. Sentences like "So many of us are contributing", "For the past years I have been contributing to the biggest infrastructure projects in UK", "I am a legal aid lawyer and proud of my contribution to this country", "I am [a] cleaner and I help to organise hundreds of workers and create a safe environment for thousands of students", "I am an immigrant and I have created more than 200 jobs in the UK", "For five years I have been committed to protecting you, the public, and reducing prisoner reoffending", "Despite the difficulties faced by Syrians everywhere, they are able to prove their abilities and contribute to the development of host societies" or "I have helped so many people in need here" are just some examples from the 71 stories of migrants living in the UK.

Furthermore, in many instances 'development' refers to 'self-development': "I got the opportunity to study here", "But once you get to know them, you realize that they just take longer to open up to people, you need to understand that", or "Learning the language was essential to find my way". The testimonies affirm that, through mobility, the way people belong or relate to places is changing. The places most of the migrants refer to is first of all the place of current residency, although every photo-

graph has a yellow luggage label indicating the number of kilometres the person is away from 'home'. "I feel Indian but I feel British too. UK is my main home, India is my former home", "Home is where my heart is" or "My dad is Indian, My mum is Kenyan, Most of my family are immigrants. We're all Londoners and this is our home". Thus, the individual stories challenge the discursive stereotype (re-)produced about the 'natural' link between migrants and their countries of origin and the notion of migrants as important development actors and its translation into political strategies. While the individual stories are just snapshots, and many of the migrants presenting themselves might support their families in the so-called countries of origin in one way or the other, the 'natural' urge, and thus the assumption of the inevitability of these ties, as put forward by many development actors and organisations, gets partly questioned through the stories and the coexistence of several 'homes'. This also has the effect of putting into question the envisioned optimum of migration management, namely to benefit all three parties, including the so-called countries of origin. This questioning of the triple win effect, especially with regard to the 'home' countries, seems to get compensated by a reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the bottom of each testimony, which the IOM only added in autumn 2016. The SDGs do, at least on a conceptual level, challenge the idea of development as a transfer of models and standards from North to South and the goals should, at least theoretically, apply to every nation. The references to the SDGs and their goals thus can be read not only as the IOM's commitment to the new global framework, but furthermore highlights the migrants' contribution to 'achieving' the goals. This is in contrast to other actors' (especially states) failure to move from political declarations to action.

As Berg and Rodriguez (2013: 653) have noted in the case of the discourse around migrants from the Americas: "One might even say that migrants are the most ideal transnational neoliberal subjects because they are highly responsible, and self-motivated individuals who not only sustain their families at home but they also sustain themselves abroad". The narrative of productivity features strongly in the campaign in relation to the countries of residence. Testimonies like "It is our duty to do whatever it takes to show the government how productive we, the immigrants, can be. Moreover, there are many people who still can give more and more

to make a great difference in the British Community”, or “This is my home now and I am proud to be part of this diverse and tolerant culture” provide insights not only into the relationship between the narrators of the stories and broader society, but more importantly into how the discourse on migration management is framing their experiences in a normative yet depoliticised way. This representation of the ‘ideal migrant’ as productive has normative implications not only for the campaign’s primary audience, the so-called ‘host communities’, but also for migrants as readers of and contributors to the website.

Whereas most migrants who present themselves on the website are indeed these ideal ‘migrants’, responsible, able to sustain themselves and contributing to the societies they reside in, and even meeting the goals of the SDGs, the IOM presents a number of returned migrants in the campaign. Most of the approximately 70 stories are either taken from earlier IOM publications such as “Seventeen Return Stories” (2014) or collected from other organisations²⁹. All photographs of the returned migrants have a yellow luggage tag saying “back home” (instead of providing the distance to ‘home’). All the stories presented are ‘success’ stories, thanks to hard work, an entrepreneurial spirit and the financial support of the IOM. These read as follows: “This is why the reintegration support of IOM is so important for us, it gave us the first push, it gave us the confidence to begin a new life in Albania”; “IOM’s support helped me to feel more useful at home and more participative to my community”; or, “IOM has helped Ilir and his family to open and manage a coffee bar through the payment of the rent and the purchase of some furniture. After the start-up period, the income is now sufficient to cover the café’s operating expenses and ensure a fix and solid revenue to the family.”

As Lietaert, Broekart and Derluyn (2016: 13) have noted for the Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes in Belgium, “reintegration support is now increasingly used as a governmental tool for managing and controlling migration flows, in line with the broader move towards ‘migration management’”. Return migration is not only presented as a success, but also as a ‘natural’ and ‘obvious’ end of the migration circle, especially if the narratives feature illegalised mobility: “I don’t know if Europe is really a paradise or not. But I know that if reaching that paradise means losing what I lost, suffering what I suffered, seeing what I saw, enduring what I

endured, then I would much rather be home.” This underlines the paradox in the logic of migration management: on the one hand, it emphasises the complexity of migration, while on the other hand migration management programmes work with a simplistic distinction between legal and illegal migration, with the former referring to “any movement of persons regarded as productive, efficient and framed as a lawful act” and the latter to “any mobility which deviates from the norm” (Oelgemöller 2011: 409). As such, the individual stories trace a line from a place of departure to a place of arrival in a country of destination and back to the former through return (Sinatti/Horst 2014: 14). Through integrating these cases into the campaign, the pervasive dichotomy of voluntary versus forced return gets blurred. However, as the following quotes reveal, not all presented returned migrants define return as a natural inclination (Black/Koser 1999), in contrast to what the tag ‘back home’ implies and constructs: “Most of my family lives in the Netherlands, so I knew it would be difficult to start a life on my own”, or “I had no savings, no family, and no contacts left in Russia after being away for such a long time”, or “I returned to Ukraine because I had no other choice”. However, through the returnees’ individual success stories, the economic macro forces, which set the framework for migration as well as for return, are either obscured or presented as mitigated through entrepreneurship.

4. Conclusion

The “i am a migrant” campaign, which provides a platform for the stories of migrants, might at first sight appear inconsistent with regards to the IOM’s operational programmes, in particular in light of the by now well-established critique of the IOM’s migrant return programmes. In this article, we have offered an analysis of the campaign on the level of aim and audience, as well as form and selected content, to show that the campaign’s aim of addressing xenophobia should not necessarily be understood as expressing a concern with migrants’ welfare or rights, which motivated the original IAAI campaign, and on which “i am a migrant” builds. Rather, we have argued, it needs to be interpreted in light of the IOM’s own existential concern with its legitimacy, which is tied to migration, and, more specifi-

cally, in the context of the productive and rational migration management it espouses. In this logic, the campaign is a necessary intervention to optimise the potential gains of migration, responding to fears that politicians make irrational anti-migration decisions when faced with xenophobic publics, thereby potentially jeopardising the desired ‘triple win’, which includes achieving the SDGs. Since affect is considered a crucial mechanism to change public opinion, this campaign foregrounds testimonies and narratives over evidence and expertise, which are genres, which have been more classically associated with migration management.

A more detailed analysis of the content revealed that some migrants’ narratives ‘escape’ the discursive format of the campaign – such as the luggage tag indicating the number of kilometres that migrants are ‘away’ from ‘their’ country of origin – which thus disrupt common assumptions in development interventions linked to migration management about the ‘natural’ link between migrants and their country of origin. The affective dimension has the potential to exceed the managerial governmentality of the “i am a migrant” campaign, for instance by inspiring political solidarities. This complicates assessing the partnership that is behind the campaign, which included a British charity, the UNHCR, corporate partners, as well as an activist crowdfunding initiative, in terms of co-optation.

Fifteen years after No Border’s “Stop IOM!” campaign, a period in which the IOM expanded significantly and xenophobia has been rising, questions around whether the IOM’s reaching out to NGOs for collaboration should be considered co-optation or movement success, are more relevant than ever. Our argument that the campaign takes the management of migration to a new level, by extending it to the management of public opinion in Western ‘host countries’ and by ‘using’ migrants to further illustrate and construct the ‘ideal migrant’ figure, underlines the relevance of a governmentality framework, with its attention to persuasion and the constitution of subjectivities, for understanding migration management. Our analysis has furthermore demonstrated the importance of the systematic investigation of concrete programmes, projects and campaigns, in light of the development, versatility and flexibility of migration management, which allows the mapping of both its consistencies and contradictions.

- 1 <https://www.iom.int/mission> (italics added)
- 2 Press Release 25 July 2016, "IOM Becomes a Related Organization to the UN." <http://www.iom.int/news/iom-becomes-related-organization-un>
- 3 Press Release, 25 July 2016, "IOM Becomes a Related Organization to the UN." <http://www.iom.int/news/iom-becomes-related-organization-un>
- 4 <https://www.iom.int/migration-and-development>
- 5 European Commission Press Release, 8 November 2011, "The European Commission and the International Organization for Migration Streamline their Cooperation." http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-1313_en.htm.
- 6 <https://www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration>
- 7 <http://iamamigrant.org/about>
- 8 <http://iamamigrant.org/about>
- 9 <http://www.migrantscontribute.com/#/>.
- 10 <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/migrant-heroes>
- 11 Email correspondence by the authors with Itavi Viriri (27.06.2016), conducted in the context of the research.
- 12 <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/i-am-immigrant-poster-campaign>
- 13 <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/blog/2015/12/16/i-am-migrant-global-campaign-launches-uk-dispel-myths-and-combat-negative-rhetoric>
- 14 Phone conversation by the authors with JCWI staff (07.09.2016), conducted in the context of the research.
- 15 The only difference is that the IOM leaves out the surnames of the portrayed migrants.
- 16 <http://iamamigrant.org/about>
- 17 <http://refugeesmigrants.org/>
- 18 As part of a new development, the website can now be searched by 'tag', one of which is #iamarefugee. Since this function was added after completion of our analysis, a detailed discussion on how refugees versus how migrants are featured lies outside of the scope of this paper.
- 19 The number of stories is changing on a daily basis with new stories added and others deleted.
- 20 <http://iamamigrant.org/stories/kuwait/shanika>
- 21 <http://iamamigrant.org/> (italics added)
- 22 <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/migrant-heroes>
- 23 http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf
- 24 <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/AUP00548-RO-Bangkok-Regional-Strategy.pdf>
- 25 <http://www.migrantscontribute.com/#/what-migrants-bring/understanding-bigger-picture>
- 26 <https://www.iom.int/oped/see-world-through-migrants-eyes>
- 27 <http://www.msnbc.com/the-ed-show/watch/protestors---i-am-eric-garner--367374915571>
- 28 <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/11674#.V9VRkYVXHnA>

- 29 The IOM Norway has an interactive website where visitors can read return stories by choosing a country from the map presented; however, none of these stories appear on the “I am a migrant” website. See: <http://www.iomstoriesofreturnnorway.com/p/home>

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ABSTRACT *Der Beitrag analysiert die Zielsetzung, das Format, die AdressatInnen und den Inhalt der „i am a migrant“-Kampagne der Internationalen Organisation für Migration (IOM). Wir argumentieren, dass die Kampagne Einfluss auf die öffentliche Meinung in westlichen ‚Aufnahmeländern‘ nimmt und ihr Ziel, Migrantinnen und Migranten eine ‚Stimme‘ zu geben und ihre Sichtbarkeit zu erhöhen, nicht der Logik des Migrationsmanagements widerspricht. Im Gegenteil, die Kampagne stellt aus unserer Sicht eine logische Erweiterung der Agenda der IOM dar, die unter anderem darin besteht, den ökonomischen, sozialen und gesellschaftlichen ‚Nutzen‘ von Migration durch und über die individuellen Beiträge und Leistungen von Migranten und Migrantinnen zu zeigen, und das nicht nur in Bezug auf die sogenannten Aufnahme-, sondern auch auf die Herkunftsländer. In der Analyse wird darüber hinaus deutlich, dass die Annahme einer selbstverständlich starken Bindung von MigrantInnen zu ihren ‚Herkunftskontexten‘ – die auch der Diskussion des Migrations-Entwicklungsnexus als Grundlage dient – in den migrantischen Narrativen der Kampagne nicht nur bestätigt, sondern auch kritisch in Frage gestellt wird.*

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