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1 **Managing Migration with Stories? The ‘i am a migrant’ Campaign of the International Organisation of** 2 **Migration**

3 **Abstract** This article offers an analysis of the aim, audience, form and content of the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign
4 of the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). We suggest that the campaign manages public opinion in
5 Western ‘host countries’ and that providing a platform for migrants’ voices is not antithetical but rather a logical
6 extension of the mission of the IOM to manage migration according to a logic of productivity and rationality. We
7 further argue that the migrant narratives presented not only confirm, but also disrupt the assumed naturalness of
8 migrants’ strong ties with their countries of origin, commonly underpinning policy on the migration-
9 development nexus.

10 **Keywords:** International Organisation of Migration; migration management; development; return migration,
11 campaign; public opinion

12 **1. Introduction**

13 Since the nineties, there has been a shift from thinking migration policy in terms of (only) migration control to
14 understanding migration as something that needs to be managed. Though it is too simplistic to draw a hard line
15 between migration control and migration management, a main characteristic of migration management is that it
16 presents migration as an inevitable phenomenon, which should be pragmatically approached to make the ‘best’
17 out of it, rather than merely contained. Migration is no longer presented as a problem *per se*. Rather, the logic
18 goes, *mismanagement* of migration makes migration problematic for all involved. Migration management has
19 been considered an expression of a new form of politics and power, which goes beyond coercion and discipline
20 (Andrijasevic/Walters 2010: 980; Kalm 2010). A review of the critical literature on migration management
21 shows that a governmentality framework has emerged “as a particularly salient way to analyse the workings of
22 [...] migration management” (de Jong 2016: 352), since it can capture the soft power of persuasion, the
23 constitution of subjectivities, and the role of expert knowledge at work as technologies of government. In line
24 with a neoliberal agenda, ‘making the best out of migration’ has been defined in migration management as the
25 so-called ‘triple win’ with ‘host’ countries, countries of origin, as well as migrants themselves benefitting in
26 economic terms. This depoliticising approach negates the fact that the interests of migrants, sending and
27 receiving countries do not always align (Geiger/Pécoud 2010: 11). Proponents of migration management
28 expressly support a liberal human rights framework as guiding their policies. Critics, however, argue that
29 neoliberal migration management is in conflict with human rights oriented global migration governance, since it
30 prioritises neoliberal market interests over rights (Basok/Piper 2012). While advocates for migration
31 management position themselves as more progressive compared to approaches that seek to stop or control
32 migration, they are far removed from an open or no border politics.

33 Migration management is not just a set of policies but also a discourse, which produces a certain way of
34 understanding what migration ‘is’ and which knowledge, capacity and policies are needed to deal with migration
35 (Geiger/Pécoud 2010: 2). This article offers an analysis of the discursive production of an increasingly important

36 international actor in migration management, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). Before
37 presenting our specific case study, the IOM campaign ‘i am a migrant’, launched in December 2015, we will
38 introduce the IOM and its programmes, especially in relation to the migration-development nexus and the role of
39 return migration, as a relevant backdrop to our subsequent analysis. We depart from the assumption that
40 discursive and material practices relate to one another, though not in a straightforward manner. Therefore, this
41 article explores what at first sight might seem like a tension or discontinuity between IOM’s *operational*
42 *practices*, in particular IOM’s controversial migrant return programmes, and its *discursive work* articulated in the
43 ‘i am a migrant campaign’. Previously, Basok and Piper’s comparative study of the programmes and rhetoric of
44 International Organisations in relation to migrant women found discontinuities between the discourse of rights
45 on the one hand, and a practice of neoliberal management, on the other hand. As they state: “While at the
46 discursive level, IOM attempts to balance [a human right oriented and a neoliberal management oriented trend],
47 its specific programmes clearly privilege migration management” (2012: 53). In this article, instead of
48 *comparing* practice and rhetoric, we will look at what the IOM’s discourse as constructed in the ‘i am a migrant’
49 campaign *does* for migration management.

50 **2. The IOM and Migration Management**

51 As several accounts reveal, the IOM has become an important player and global leader in migration management
52 (Geiger/Pécoud 2014; Georgi 2010), although it is often overlooked in research (Andrijasevic/Walters 2010;
53 Ashutosh and Mountz 2011: 22). In fact its mission can be argued to epitomise the productive and rational logic
54 of migration management. As the IOM states: “IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly
55 migration benefits migrants and society”ⁱ. The IOM is an intergovernmental organisation, and since September
56 2016 a ‘Related Organization’ in the United Nations (UN) structureⁱⁱ. It was created with a precise mission,
57 namely to support states to resettle refugees produced by the Second World War. To provide services for its
58 member states is still the major task of the IOM. Increasingly, however this is conducted in the context of
59 regulating migration in general, especially through migrant return (Koch 2014).

60 The IOM is, however, more than just a service deliverer to its now 165 member nation-states. The IOM also
61 plays a significant role in constructing the ‘reality of migration’ by identifying and framing problems, which they
62 subsequently can offer to solve in a continuous competition for resources and mandates. Since the IOM only
63 recently became a ‘Related Organization’ of the UN organisation, it has needed to justify its legitimacy by
64 reference to the discourse on the growing need for global migration management (Korneev 2014: 890). The IOM
65 does not have a legal protection mandate like the UNHCR, but nevertheless wants to be considered as an
66 organisation, which protects and represents migrants and refugees. Hence, the IOM continuously, and seemingly
67 successfully, engages in constructing this image. For instance, when the IOM announced their new status as
68 ‘Related Organization’ of the UN on their website, it framed this as follows: “Through the Agreement the UN
69 recognizes IOM as an indispensable actor in the field of human mobility. This includes protection of migrants
70 and displaced people in migration-affected communities, as well as in areas of refugee resettlement and
71 voluntary returns, and incorporates migration in country development plans”ⁱⁱⁱ.

72 The IOM is a fast-growing organisation. It proudly presents on its website a range of key indicators for its
73 growth, including its increasing membership from 67 States in 1998 to 165 in 2016, its growing expenditure
74 (from USD 242.2 million in 1998 to an estimated USD 1.4 billion in 2014) and an increase in active projects
75 from 686 in 1998 to more than 2,400 in 2014. When looking at the history and development of the IOM, it can
76 be observed that the organisation is striving to extend its mission in relation to changing circumstances and that
77 their role in design and implementing migration policies and their portfolio of activities was growing over the
78 last years (Gabrielli 2016: 6; Geiger/Pécoud 2010). Simultaneously the IOM was and is also doing important
79 humanitarian work, for instance in Sri Lanka during the aftermath of the tsunami. The IOM is according to the
80 sociological perspective taken by Branett and Finnemore one of the International Organisations, which through
81 taking an embodied rational-legal authority "...gives them power independent of the states that created them"
82 (1999, 699). Following this perspective Koch argues that therefore the IOM is not just implementing so-called
83 voluntary return and integration projects or organising regional consulting processes around the world to manage
84 mobility, but has also room for manoeuvre to structure them (2014: 911f.).

85 The IOM has also managed to established itself as a trusted intermediary between states and migrants,
86 legitimising their actions and shaping public opinion through research, the World Migration Reports, journals,
87 information sheets, handbooks and flyers and thereby actively framing what migration is and how it needs to be
88 managed (Betts 2011; Geiger/Pécoud 2010). For quite some decades the IOM has supported the European Union
89 (EU) and its member states, vital donors for the IOM (Wunderlich 2013), to legitimise and implement their
90 immigration policies as part of the process of the securitisation of migration (Bigo 2002). Furthermore, as argued
91 by Ashutosh, and Mountz, the border enforcement strategies rely increasingly on the ability of the IOM to
92 operate on behalf of, yet beyond the traditional bounds of the sovereign state (2011: 22f.). At the same time,
93 however, the IOM presents itself as an important actor to protect and represent migrants and their rights and as
94 counterweight to increasingly coercive immigration and border enforcement strategies. The IOM thus "...stands
95 at the intersection of the nation-state, international human rights regimes and neo-liberal governance" (Ashutosh
96 and Mountz 2011: 22). As Fabian Georgi (2010: 65) points out, the IOM can be categorised among the "liberal
97 global migration governance" camp, which "includes progressive notions of a more humane, just and open
98 regulation of migration, while stressing that this can only be realized within a firm framework of migration
99 governance or migration management". This camp struggles to become hegemonic in global migration policy
100 against at least two other dominant political projects, the national sovereignty project and the rights-based
101 approach.

102 **2.1** *The IOM and the migration-development nexus*

103 In recent decades, IOM also played a decisive role in the process of incorporating international development into
104 migration management, in line with migration management's understanding of the migration-development nexus
105 as one of its main pillars. Lavenex and Kunz describe the IOM and ILO as actors that "adopted a broad approach
106 focusing on protecting migrant's rights and harnessing the potential development impact of their return to the
107 country of origin" in contrast to the World Bank and the IMF which took a narrow financial approach (2008:
108 449). Since the new millennium, the IOM actively addresses development issues with the aim, in its own words,
109 "...to contribute to a better understanding of the links between international migration and development in order

110 to harness the development potential of migration for the benefit of both societies and migrants and to contribute
111 to sustainable development and poverty reduction”^{iv}. This statement has to be read in the context of the
112 ‘discovery’ of remittances and the economic potential of migration, and thus the perceived developmental
113 significance of migration, migrants and their remittances, which has been especially pronounced since the
114 findings of the Global Development Finance Report of 2003 by the World Bank (Faist 2008).

115

116 The hype around the migration-development nexus has been accompanied by debates,
117 policies and strategies on how governments and international organisations in collaboration
118 with each other can cultivate the positive relationships between migration and economic and
119 social development (Gamlen 2014: 582). One example of this cooperation is the agreement
120 between the IOM and the European Union which was released in 2011 by the European
121 Commission Press: “The EU and IOM work together on a daily basis on projects which
122 promote international cooperation in areas such as legal migration, irregular migration and
123 development. This new agreement will [...] make our work together much more efficient”^v.
124 This meant for example that Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)
125 programmes, which have a long history, are getting increasingly integrated in the field of
126 development cooperation and presented and framed as a strategy to foster social and
127 economic development in the countries of migrant’s origin. Project components with the aim
128 to assist migrants in setting up businesses in their countries of origins or vocational trainings
129 can be interpreted in that line, since they aim, according to the IOM, to link return to local
130 development^{vi}. These new projects have to be understood in light of the fact that earlier
131 promises of the migration and development nexus and the initiated activities, like promoting
132 diaspora engagement, have not led to the results anticipated by national and international
133 policy offices (Vammen/Bronden 2012: 34; Sinatti/Horst 2014). This explains the enthusiasm
134 for return migration as a possibility to keep migration and development on the international
135 agenda, yet with an emphasis on migrants’ and returnees’ agency. Connecting return
136 migration and post-return reintegration assistance to development and embedding the projects
137 in the international human rights regime, as the IOM does or calling return programs
138 ‘development’ as national governments such as the Netherlands and Great Britain do
139 (Vammen/Bronden 2012: 38), increases the social and political acceptability of state induced-
140 migrant return.

141

142 This acceptability is, however, widely challenged by academics and international and national NGOs like
143 Amnesty International or Human Watch (Koch 2014: 911). Whereas Koser for example states that there is a fine
144 line between facilitating return and encouraging it (2015: 15), others focus more on IOM’s definition of
145 voluntarism and criticise its practice (see f.ex. Noll 1999; Dünnwald 2014; Koch 2014). While the

146 aforementioned criticisms of the IOM remain on the terrain of “legalistic points and a rights-based approach”,
147 others offer what Georgi and Schatral consider a much needed radical critique of the premises of the IOM, by
148 underlining that “migration controls *as such* can never be fair and just and adequate to the ideal of humans as
149 free and equal beings” (2012: 213). As Georgi writes elsewhere, this radical critique does not preclude
150 recognising that “on an individual basis, IOM has benefited many refugees and migrants by providing food,
151 shelter, medical aid, advice or transport services (and) on an individual level most IOM staff members genuinely
152 want to ‘help’ migrants” (2010: 67).

153

154 Between 2001 and 2003, the IOM, including its return programmes, was the subject of a
155 critical counter-campaign led by the NoBorder network under the name ‘Stop IOM! Freedom
156 of Movement versus Global Migration Management’ (Noborder Network; IRR 2002; Georgi
157 2010). When the IOM opened its first London office in 2002, the British Institute of Race
158 Relations (IRR) featured a critical article on the IOM, inspired by the work of the European
159 NoBorder network, asking “should NGOs be co-operating with the IOM?”. It noted that
160 return schemes require co-operation with partners such as academics and NGOs, some of
161 which have a history of supporting migrants and warned that while IOM’s programmes
162 “appear perfectly worthy”, there are reasons for “alarm bells” to ring (CARF 1 Oct 2002). At
163 the occasion of the opening of IOM’s Manchester office, Manchester No Borders’s website
164 featured an article on the “shadowy organisation” IOM in which they describe its return
165 programmes as follows: “If forced removals are so costly and cause a lot of fuss, the logic
166 goes, why not do it another way, while pretending to be compassionate and humane. If
167 detention is the stick, the IOM are the carrot. Both are part of the same system of migration
168 management.” (Manchester No Borders 13 October 2008). In response to these public attacks,
169 IOM “avoided the spotlight” (Georgi 2010: 45).

170

171 More recently, arguably, the IOM started to actively seek, rather than avoid the limelight. In
172 the following, we complement the studies on and critical engagement with IOM’s return
173 programmes, by shifting the attention from IOM’s operational programmes to its discursive
174 production by analysing the new global IOM campaign ‘i am a migrant’. With this, we want
175 to shed further light on IOM’s active role in migration management through public
176 campaigns, which have increasingly attracted scholarly attention (Andrijasevic 2007; Pécoud
177 2010; Basok/Piper 2012; Heller 2014; McNevin/Missbach/Mulyana 2016). After a short
178 introduction about the history of the campaign, we will show that the campaign should be
179 read as an instrument to manage public opinion and to legitimise the organisation. We will
180 demonstrate that the project of providing a platform for migrants’ voices is not antithetical to
181 the IOM’s mission, but rather a logical extension of it. Based on analysis of the cases

182 presented we will propose that in line with migration management and the migration-
183 development nexus, the entrepreneurial migrant as a good migrant is created and presented
184 throughout the campaign. This is done especially through the testimonies of returned migrants
185 whereby return to the place of origin is constructed as the natural inclination for every
186 migrant, despite there being narrative strands that challenge this logic, as will be shown.

187

188 **3. The ‘i am a migrant’ Campaign**

189 ‘i am a migrant’ is, according to the IOM, both a campaign and platform^{vii}. The website offers
190 a platform to “create a place for the personal stories of migrants” in order to “challenge the
191 anti-migrant stereotypes and hate speech in politics and society”. It invites migrants to tell
192 their own stories, with the invitation to “create your personal i am a migrant poster to put on
193 your wall, to send to your family and friends and to make your social media profile”. It also
194 asks non-migrants to share the captivating stories of migrants^{viii}. The website features the
195 stories of people from all over the world, identifying people by a photo and their first name.
196 Each story displays a luggage tag with the number of kilometres the migrant is removed from
197 her/his ‘country of origin’.

198

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

213

214 The other key forerunner of the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign was an externally organised poster
215 campaign called ‘I Am An Immigrant’ (IAAI). This IAAI campaign was initiated by the

216 national British charity Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), and run through
217 the Movement against Xenophobia in the lead up to the 2015 UK general election. These
218 organisations started a hugely successful crowd-funded campaign, raising £54,101 within a
219 three-week period to print posters in which immigrants' contribution to and integration in
220 society was highlighted, to counterbalance the election's anti-immigrant rhetoric. The posters,
221 showing 15 stories selected from submissions by immigrants themselves, were displayed at
222 hundreds of Underground stations in London and 550 rail stations across the country. As the
223 JCWI explains on their website, combining the IAAI and IOM's #MigrantHeroes campaign
224 was a "natural next step"^{xii}; a step they announced a few days before its global launch on
225 Friday 18th December 2015, International Migrants Day^{xiii}.

226

227 According to a spokesperson of JCWI, IOM, which had the capacity and funding to do so,
228 "took the idea [of the IAAI campaign] globally"^{xiv}. This reflects IOM's general (not
229 uncontested) approach to work through partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, as well as
230 the UNHCR (Pécoud 2010). The IOM used the concept of the original JCWI campaign, and
231 extended its focus by including emigration, and therefore renaming the campaign 'i am a
232 migrant' to encompass both emigration and immigration. Currently, there are therefore two
233 websites that coexist alongside each other: www.iamanimmigrant.net by JCWI and IOM's
234 www.iamamigrant.org, with portraits on the JCWI website also featuring on the IOM's
235 website with basically the same format, style and story^{xv}. The 'i am a migrant' campaign
236 clearly bears the traces both of its internal IOM predecessors in its focus on stories and of its
237 external JCWI forerunner in its explicit denouncement of "anti migrant stereotypes and hate
238 speech in politics and society"^{xvi}. The collaboration between JCWI continued when JCWI
239 launched the 'I am a refugee' campaign for Refugee Week 2016, displaying plaques with the
240 stories of refugees, with the IOM introducing a web-based 'I am a refugee' campaign,
241 together with UNHCR^{xvii}. The 'i am a migrant' website is consistently growing, and also
242 dynamic in responding to new developments and emerging political agendas, as is illustrated
243 in the increased attention to refugees, recently for instance featuring testimonies of Syrian
244 refugees in Turkey who are presented as beneficiaries of various IOM programmes^{xviii}.

245

246 In September 2016, there were around 500 individual stories^{xix} featured on the website
247 covering more or less an equal number of men and women. Most of the migrants and refugees
248 who present themselves or are being presented by the IOM and their partners, are currently
249 residing in Europe, especially Germany, the UK, Ireland, Italy Switzerland, and the United
250 States and Canada. This is supplemented by stories of migrants and refugees who now live in,

251 for instance, the Ukraine, Thailand, Paraguay, Albania and Mauritania, but these are fewer in
252 numbers. While the Western clustering with regard to the countries of current *residence* is
253 striking, with regard to the countries of so-called *origin* of those portrayed on the website, the
254 picture is much more diverse. The website leaves the strong impression that migrants and
255 refugees residing in the so-called western developed countries are privileged in the sense that
256 they have the possibility to articulate themselves, thus have agency, whereas migrants in the
257 countries of the so-called global South hardly seem to have a voice.

258

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

274

275 In the following sections, we present three angles that we consider instructive in analysing the
276 IOM ‘i am a migrant’ campaign. We first focus on the goal and audience of the campaign,
277 then on its form, and lastly on a selection of its content.

278

279 **3.1 The Management of Public Opinion**

280

281 A useful starting point to analyse the aim and audience of the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign is
282 Antoine Pécoud’s study of IOM’s information campaigns for would-be migrants (2010), in
283 particular his insights about the important role attributed to information, and about
284 governance through partnerships and coaxing. The information campaigns warned aspiring

285 migrants of the dangers of migration, working under the assumption that once people are well
286 informed, they will act according to a rational logic, and hence be deterred (cf. Heller 2014).
287 Seeking to affect the conduct of people through persuasion rather than force, these campaigns
288 are a good example of governmentality. IOM's coalition with civil society organisations,
289 underpinning the campaigns, managed to diffuse the locus of power.

290

291 We suggest that juxtaposing Pécoud's analysis of previous IOM campaigns with the 'i am a
292 migrant' campaign also reveals some significant and rapid shifts in IOM's strategy. Pécoud
293 (2010) still found two paradoxes when comparing the global policy *rhetoric* of migration
294 management and the *practice* of information campaigns. First, at the level of global policy,
295 migration is presented as something positive, but the information campaigns he looked at,
296 emphasised the dark side of migration, still caught in the logic of migration control rather than
297 productive management. Second, Pécoud found another gap between action and rhetoric as
298 there were no "initiatives that would promote the usefulness of migration among the
299 population of destination countries" (2010: 193), even though policy documents articulated
300 that "anti-immigrant feelings are fuelled by the ignorance of the public regarding migrants'
301 usefulness" (2010: 186). Policy documents also proposed to address this "not only [as] a
302 matter of increasing the acceptance of immigrants, but also of enabling governments to design
303 more open migration policies", because "ignorant public opinions would [...] block much-
304 needed policy reforms" (2010: 187).

305

306 In 2015 Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General of the IOM, uncannily echoes Pécoud's
307 findings: "There is a long history of using information campaigns in the migration field. [...]
308 A new type of information campaign is needed today *targeting the general public in*
309 *destination countries*" (2015: 7 italics added). Whether Pécoud's publication has been read by
310 the IOM as invaluable PR advice (at affordable academic rather than consultancy rate) or
311 whether there was internal recognition of these contradictions, remains speculation. What is
312 clear is that the 'i am a migrant' campaign is exactly closing the initially observed gap
313 between discourse and practice, reaching out to populations with the aim to address
314 xenophobia. As the campaign states: "The negative memes about migration that fill our media
315 are usually based on prejudice and *misinformation*."^{xxi} Moreover, as will be discussed in
316 more detail below, the representation of migration is not merely negative anymore. That
317 means that Pécoud's observation concerning the earlier information campaigns that they

318 articulate that “migration is an option only for the losers, clever and hard-working people stay
319 at home” (2010: 193), holds no longer true today.

320

321 Other important sources to help to understand the aim and audience of the ‘i am a migrant’
322 campaign are the 2011 World Migration Report: Communicating Effectively About Migration
323 and IOM’s 2015 report ‘How The World Views Migration’. These reports drew on analysis of
324 two questions on migration from the Gallup World Poll, the largest globally comparable data
325 set: one asked the respondent to evaluate the current level of migration in their country, the
326 other to consider whether immigrants worked in jobs undesired or desired by citizens in the
327 country (IOM 2015). As the IOM states in an announcement of the report, they found that the
328 perception about migration is generally more positive than media coverage suggests, but the
329 perception in *receiving countries* is more negative. Without referring to the ‘i am a migrant’
330 campaign, the concluding remarks of this 6-page announcement describe neatly its rationale:

331

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

342

343 In summary, the IOM holds that there is an objectively optimum way to manage migration,
344 bringing out the economic benefits for all parties concerned. Fear of public backlash might
345 prevent those ‘in the know’, such as policy makers, to pursue this optimum. With the correct
346 information, the ignorant and misinformed will shed their xenophobia. In order to feed them
347 this correct information in the most efficient way, IOM wants to know who and where these
348 people are, to steer them towards recognising the true value of migration. As they write, the
349 “IOM understands that migration is inevitable, necessary and desirable – if well governed”:
350 its necessity lies in the challenge to meet “labour demands and ensure the availability of skills
351 and the vibrancy of economies and societies”, which is desirable for migrants and receiving

352 societies “when governed humanely and fairly as a path to the realisation of human
353 potential”^{xxii}. Following this logic, IOM sees it as their task to enlighten the general public to
354 recognise the truth. In other words, migration management and the remit of the IOM now
355 encompass the management of public opinion, or in Heller’s terms, engages in “perception
356 management” (2014: 304).

357
358 The language options of the ‘i am a migrant’ website (English, French, German, Italian and
359 Spanish) indeed reveal that the primary audience is exactly those European host country
360 populations, especially in Southern Europe, which the survey found to be most negative
361 concerning migration. Hence, non-migrant visitors from the so-called global South, especially
362 Asia and Africa, are not the main target audience of the campaign. This could also explain
363 why migrants living in Asian countries are hardly present on the platform, although Asia hosts
364 the largest number of migrants after Europe (see the latest report by UN 2015^{xxiii}). Although
365 the ILO underlined already in 2011 the need for a campaign to change the public attitude
366 towards migrants in Asia, the regional strategy of the IOM for Asia and Pacific^{xxiv} focusses
367 primarily on so-called vulnerable migrants, thus the ‘shadow side’ of migration. For instance,
368 a recent IOM campaign in Indonesia sponsored by the Australian state focussed on
369 discouraging fishermen from ‘smuggling’ migrants (McNevin/Missbach/Mulyana 2016)

370

371 **3.2 The Role of Testimonies**

372 It might initially seem puzzling that the IOM, which attributes much weight to information as
373 evidence, coordinates a campaign that largely features people’s personal stories. Their
374 Migrants Contribute campaign already presented ‘moving stories’, similar to the ones
375 presented on the ‘i am a migrant’ website, but also featured a tab called ‘Reality versus
376 perception’, where the IOM contrasted popular discourse with data correcting erroneous
377 assumptions^{xxv}. While there remains a factual information component on the ‘i am a migrant’
378 website (an interactive graph of global migration flows), personal testimonies play an even
379 more prominent role.

380

381 IOM’s interest in telling migrants’ stories extends beyond the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign:
382 IOM Director General William Lacy Swing wrote an Op-Ed in the Bangkok Post, entitled
383 ‘See the World Through Migrants’ Eyes’^{xxvi} (2015) and IOM UK participates in the 2016
384 Migration Museum exhibition ‘Call me by my name - Stories from Calais and beyond’.
385 Different from the earlier myth busting and factual approach, these initiatives introduce a

386 strong affective dimension, both in “the *essence* of [migrants’] testimony [a]s emotional rather
387 than analytical” and in “that what is *produced* by the testimony (the public’s compassion)”
388 (Fassin 2008: 537, 539 italics added). While the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign still present stories
389 to ‘correct’ what the IOM considers a skewed negative media discourse, its focus on
390 testimonies is arguably a shift away from the technocratic, depoliticised approach commonly
391 associated with migration management. The emphasis on individual personal stories, rather
392 than on structural power relations in migration regimes, can be seen as depoliticising.
393 Seemingly paradoxically, “both the singularity of individual trajectories and situations and the
394 specificity of collective processes and issues are effaced” (Fassin 2008: 552).

395

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

406

407 We also propose that it is useful to situate the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign in relation to
408 international development initiatives that preceded it. Critical development scholarship has a
409 longstanding engagement with analysing development testimonies, the most famous of which
410 is the Voices of the Poor project by the World Bank in 2000. For this project, the World Bank
411 approached the UK Institute of Development Studies with a proposal to widely consult the
412 poor. Robert Chambers, who led the project, revealed recently that he and his colleagues
413 struggled over the following issues: “Were we being coopted? Was this exercise merely
414 cosmetic?” (2013: 8). Chambers’ questions were echoed more recently by researcher and film
415 maker Charles Heller who describes that “his [activist artistic] practice encountered a moment
416 of deep crisis” after he found that the IOM produced similar images of migrants’ suffering as
417 he had done in his own films, but with the expressed opposite purpose, namely to govern
418 migrants’ mobility, not to criticise migration regimes (2014: 304). These questions about co-

419 optation are also pertinent for the partnerships between the IOM and civil society in the ‘i am
420 a migrant’ campaign.

421
422 The judgment of John Pender^{xxviii}, who condemned the use of soundbites and quotations out
423 of context in the Voices of the Poor project, bears relevance for the ‘i am a migrant’
424 campaign, which also uses single strap lines to accompany each story. Moreover, the focus on
425 the stories of ‘others’ could facilitate “comfortable diversion and evasion, looking away from
426 where we should be looking”, as Chambers warned (2013: 17). Drawing on Kalpana Wilson’s
427 analysis of contemporary visual representation in development, we can also see that even if
428 the ‘i am a migrant’ campaign presents migrants’ agency, rather than their victimhood, this
429 agency might still be “limited to the ‘rational self-interested’ individual” (2011: 329). Also,
430 the recognition of this agency remains dependent on the benevolent non-migrant visitor of the
431 ‘i am a migrant’ website. Moving from the format of the campaign to its content, we will now
432 analyse selected featured stories in relation to the migration-development nexus.

433

434

435 **3.3 The Migrants’ Narratives**

436

437 As we have discussed above, the academic literature on transnational migration from the first
438 decade of the new millennium, which proposed that migrants can contribute to the
439 development of their countries of origin through transnational activities (see f.ex. Nyberg-
440 Sorensen et al. 2002), fuelled an optimism in international and national policymakers’ circles
441 that migrants and their remittances (financial and social) could have a major impact on the
442 economic and social development of countries of origin (Vammen/Bonden 2012). More
443 recently, however, the academic literature can be divided in studies that observe positive
444 effects on development and other research that finds a rather negative relation between
445 migration and development (de Haas 2012). The latter more critical studies range from
446 criticising the neoliberal orientation with its strong focus on individual agency in the current
447 policy papers and strategies, to questioning the categories used as well as pointing to the lack
448 of empirical evidence. Moreover, this research argues that migrants’ own visions and ideas
449 about development and as such the role migration may play in social change and the shaping
450 of contemporary societies is hardly taken into account (Dannecker 2009; Raghuram 2009).

451

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

469
470 Furthermore, in many instances ‘development’ refers to ‘self-development’: ‘*I got the*
471 *opportunity to study here*’, ‘*But once you get to know them, you realize that they just take*
472 *longer to open up to people, you need to understand that*’ or ‘*Learning the language was*
473 *essential to find my way*’. The testimonies affirm that through mobility the way people belong
474 or relate to places is changing. The places most of the migrants refer to, is first of all the place
475 of current residency although every photograph has a yellow luggage label indicating the
476 number of kilometres the person is away from ‘home’. ‘*I feel Indian but I feel British too. UK*
477 *is my main home, India is my former home*’, ‘*Home is where my heart is*’ or ‘*My dad is*
478 *Indian, My mum is Kenyan, Most of my family are immigrants. We're all Londoners and this*
479 *is our home*’. Thus the individual stories challenge the discursive stereotype (re-)produced
480 about the ‘natural’ link between migrants and their countries of origin and the image of
481 migrants as important development actors and its translation into political strategies. While
482 the individual stories are just snapshots and many of the migrants presenting themselves
483 might support their families in the so-called countries of origin in one or the other way, the
484 ‘natural’ urge and thus the assumption of the inevitability of these ties, as put forward by
485 many development actors and organisations, gets partly questioned through the stories and the

486 coexistence of several ‘homes’. This also has the effect of questioning the envisioned
487 optimum of migration management, namely to bring out benefits for all three parties,
488 including the so-called countries of origin. This questioning of the triple win effect, especially
489 with regard to the ‘home’ countries, seems to get compensated by a reference to the
490 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the IOM only added in autumn 2016 at the
491 bottom of each testimony. The SDGs do, at least on a conceptual level, challenge the idea of
492 development as a transfer of models and standards from North to South and the goals should,
493 at least theoretically, apply to every nation. The references to the SDGs and its goals thus can
494 be read not only as the IOM’s commitment to the new global framework but furthermore
495 highlights the migrants’ contribution to ‘achieving’ the goals (in contrast to other actors,
496 especially states, which have not yet moved from naming symptoms to action).

497

498 As Berg and Rodriguez have noted for the discourse around migrants from the Americas:
499 “One might even say that migrants are the most ideal transnational neoliberal subjects because
500 they are highly responsible, and self-motivated individuals who not only sustain their families
501 at home but they also sustain themselves abroad” (2013: 653). The narrative of productivity
502 features strongly in the campaign in relation to the countries of residence. Testimonies like *‘It*
503 *is our duty to do whatever it takes to show the government how productive we, the*
504 *immigrants, can be. Moreover, there are many people who still can give more and more to*
505 *make a great difference in the British Community’* or *‘This is my home now and I am proud to*
506 *be part of this diverse and tolerant culture’* provide insights not merely into the relationship
507 between the narrators of the stories and broader society, but primarily into how the discourse
508 on migration management is framing their experiences in a normative yet depoliticised way.
509 This representation of the ‘ideal migrant’ as productive, has normative implications not only
510 for the campaign’s primary audience, the so-called ‘host communities’, but also for migrants
511 as readers of and contributors to the website.

512

513 Whereas most migrants who present themselves on the website are indeed these ideal
514 ‘migrants’, responsible, able to sustain themselves and contributing to the societies they reside
515 in and even addressing the goals of the SDGs, the IOM presents a number of returned
516 migrants in the campaign. Most of the approximately 70 stories are either taken from earlier
517 IOM publications such as ‘Seventeen Return Stories’ (2014) or collected through other
518 organisations^{xxix}. All photographs of the returned migrants have a yellow luggage tag saying
519 ‘back home’ (instead of providing the distance to ‘home’). All the stories presented are

520 ‘success’ stories, thanks to hard work, an entrepreneurial spirit and the financial support by
521 IOM. These read as follows: *‘This is why the reintegration support of IOM is so important for
522 us, it gave us the first push, it gave us the confidence to begin a new life in Albania’, ‘IOM’s
523 support helped me to feel more useful at home and more participative to my community, or
524 ‘IOM has helped Ilir and his family to open and manage a coffee bar through the payment of
525 the rent and the purchase of some furniture. After the start-up period, the income is now
526 sufficient to cover the café’s operating expenses and ensure a fix and solid revenue to the
527 family’.*

528

529 As Lietaert, Broekart and Derluyn have noted for the Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes
530 in Belgium, “reintegration support is now increasingly used as a governmental tool for
531 managing and controlling migration flows, in line with the broader move towards ‘migration
532 management’” (2016: 13). Return migration is not only presented as a success but also as a
533 ‘natural’ and ‘obvious’ phenomenon of the ending migration circle, especially if the narratives
534 feature illegalised mobility: *“I don’t know if Europe is really a paradise or not. But I know
535 that if reaching that paradise means losing what I lost, suffering what I suffered, seeing what
536 I saw, enduring what I endured, then I would much rather be home.”* This underlines the
537 paradox in the logic of migration management: on the one hand, it emphasises the complexity
538 of migration, while on the other hand migration management programmes work with a
539 simplistic distinction between legal and illegal migration, with the former referring to “any
540 movement of persons regarded as productive, efficient and framed as a lawful act” and the
541 latter “any mobility which deviates from the norm” (Oelgemöller 2011: 409). As such the
542 individual stories trace a line from a place of departure to a place of arrival in a country of
543 destination and back to the former through return (Sinatti/Horst 2014: 14). Through
544 integrating these cases into the campaign the pervasive dichotomy voluntary versus forced
545 return gets blurred. However, as the following quotes reveal, not all presented returned
546 migrants define return as a natural inclination (Black/Koser 1999), in contrast to what the tag
547 ‘back home’ implies and constructs: *‘Most of my family lives in the Netherlands, so I knew it
548 would be difficult to start a life on my own’ or ‘I had no savings, no family, and no contacts
549 left in Russia after being away for such a long time’ or ‘I returned to Ukraine because I had
550 no other choice’.* However, through the returnees’ individual success stories, the economic
551 macro forces, which set the framework for migration as well as for return, are either obscured
552 or presented as mitigated through entrepreneurship.

553

554 **4. Conclusion**

555 The 'i am a migrant' campaign, which provides a platform for the stories of migrants, might at
556 first sight appear inconsistent with regards to IOM's operational programmes, in particular in
557 light of the by now well-established critique against IOM's migrant return programmes. In
558 this article, we have offered an analysis of the campaign on the level of aim and audience,
559 form and selected content to show that the campaign's aim to address xenophobia should not
560 necessarily be understood as expressing a concern with migrants' welfare or rights, which
561 motivated the original IAAI campaign, which 'i am a migrant' builds on. Rather, we have
562 argued, it needs to be interpreted in light of IOM's own existential concern with its
563 legitimacy, which is tied to migration, and, more specifically, in the context of productive and
564 rational migration management it espouses. In this logic, the campaign is a necessary
565 intervention to optimise the potential gains of migration, responding to fears that politicians
566 make irrational anti-migration decisions when faced with xenophobic publics, potentially
567 jeopardising the desired 'triple win', including achieving the SDGs. Since affect is considered
568 a crucial mechanism to change public opinion, this campaign foregrounds testimonies and
569 narratives over evidence and expertise, which are genres which have been more classically
570 associated with migration management.

571
572 A more detailed analysis of the content revealed that some migrants' narratives 'escape' the
573 discursive format of the campaign - such as the luggage tag indicating the number of
574 kilometres that migrants are 'away' from 'their' country of origin - which disrupts common
575 assumptions in development interventions linked to migration management about the 'natural'
576 link between migrants and their country of origin. The affective dimension has the potential to
577 exceed the managerial governmentality of the 'i am a migrant' campaign, for instance by
578 inspiring political solidarities. This complicates assessing the partnership that is behind the
579 campaign, which included a British charity, the UNHCR, corporate partners, as well as an
580 activist crowdfunding initiative, in terms of co-optation.

581
582 Fifteen years after No Border's 'Stop IOM!' campaign, a period in which the IOM expanded
583 significantly and xenophobia has been rising, questions around whether IOM reaching out to
584 NGOs for collaboration should be considered co-optation or movement success, are more
585 relevant than ever. Our argument that the campaign takes the management of migration to a
586 new level, by extending it to the management of public opinion in Western 'host countries'
587 and by 'using' migrants to further illustrate and construct the 'ideal migrant' figure,
588 underlines the relevance of a governmentality framework, with its attention to persuasion and

589 the constitution of subjectivities, for understanding migration management. Our analysis has
590 furthermore demonstrated the importance of systematic investigation of concrete
591 programmes, projects and campaigns, in light of the development, versatility and flexibility of
592 migration management, which allows the mapping of both its consistencies and
593 contradictions.

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- ix <http://www.migrantscontribute.com/#/>.
- x <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/migrant-heroes>
- xi Email correspondence by the authors with Itavi Viriri (27.06.2016), conducted in the context of the
research.
- xii <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/i-am-immigrant-poster-campaign>
- xiii <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/blog/2015/12/16/i-am-migrant-global-campaign-launches-uk-dispel-myths-and-combat-negative-rhetoric>
- xiv Phone conversation by the authors with JCWI staff (07.092016), conducted in the context of
the research.
- xv The only difference is that the IOM leaves out the surnames of the portrayed migrants.
- xvi <http://iamamigrant.org/about>
- xvii <http://refugeesmigrants.org/>
- xviii 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.
- xix The number of stories is changing on a daily basis with new stories added and others deleted.
- xx <http://iamamigrant.org/stories/kuwait/shanika>
- xxi <http://iamamigrant.org/> (italics added)
- xxii <http://www.iamanimmigrant.net/migrant-heroes>
- xxiii http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf
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- xxviii <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/11674#.V9VRkYVXHnA>

^{xxix} 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>