MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

"GOOD" EVIDENCE: A CRITICAL LENS ON REPRESENTATIONS OF DEVELOPMENT
AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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ABSTRACT

"GOOD" EVIDENCE: A CRITICAL LENS ON REPRESENTATIONS
OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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The ethics of conventional representations of the developing world in charity

fundraising and photojournalism have been increasingly questioned. Van Leeuwen's

(2000) social semiotic model of analysis of visual racism, applied to a famine image,

reveals strategies for symbolically representing otherness that perpetuate a naturalized

"Western rescuer/developing world victim" narrative. Respondent interviews

demonstrate that such "poverty porn" produces viewer apathy, while an alternative

representation depicting self-determination evokes a charitable response. Elliott's (2003)

ethical framework is used to judge the harm of conventional representations. The results,

while tentative, suggest worth in expanding the study in light of implications for

represented persons, the viewer, and Canadian society. In the meantime, image producers

and distributors must become visually literate to avoid using harmful images.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my mother, Mary, and to my father, Waldon, who did not live to see me finish my studies,

but who watches over me.

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and the Developing World

> Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. . .
> Remember, any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the "real Africa", and you want that . . . Do not feel queasy about this: you are trying to help them to get aid from the West. (Wainaina, 2005, n.p.)

"I don't classify Buduburam as a camp because it hasn't got those kind of refugee camp features," says Aaron Nii Lamte, a youth and development worker with RESPECT Ghana. The film in which Lamte speaks shows how RESPECT Ghana fosters an environment of self-respect and dignity in Buduburam, a Liberian refugee camp in Gomoa, Ghana, with a population of over 35,000 people, a high proportion of which is youth. In its Buduburam school, staffed with administrators and teachers from the refugee community, RESPECT Ghana not only provides youth with education but also cultivates a sense of self-agency. More importantly, the organization means to change "traditional assumptions and patterns in the way refugee camps are run" (Good Evidence, n.d., The Evidence section). The film, shot by Toronto non-profit Good Evidence, raises awareness of, and encourages action on the harmful impact of forced migration on young people. More importantly, it's meant to let a Western audience see what Africa is doing for Africa.

Good Evidence is a volunteer-run organization founded in 2006 by Joanne Hodges after a visit to Ethiopia. A Canadian of Ethiopian descent, Hodges was disturbed by the "clash" between the images of Ethiopia that she had grown up with in the West and the country she experienced in person. Inspired by witnessing individuals working to change the social, economic, and environmental issues they faced in their own communities, Hodges returned to Canada and

started an organization with a mission of "challenging harmful representations" of development by sharing through film "good evidence"—or evidence of the good—of inspiring models of community-based action. The films are co-created with the community initiatives themselves.

My interest in Good Evidence began in October 2009, when I found its advertisement on WorkInCulture.ca for a volunteer research position. A year later, I offered my services as an unpaid intern to fulfill a requirement of Ryerson University's Master of Professional Communication degree. During my internship, I spent a lot of time examining Good Evidence's promotional materials (a website, and a fledgling blog and Facebook profile), and an expression seen repeatedly was "harmful representations." It appears, for example, in the organization's mission statement, and twice in its list of goals (Good Evidence, n.d., About Us section). Good Evidence defines harmful representations as "representations of the 'developing' world commonly seen in paid-programming on television requesting child sponsorship and the seemingly exclusive disaster focused articles in newspapers" that primarily depict "helplessness and destitution" (About Us section). But how are such representations harmful? And to whom?

This paper will critically examine the role some visual representations in photojournalism and charity fundraising play in perpetuating ideologies about development and the developing world,[1] ideologies that have significant implications for those represented. Questions framing the research include: What are the purposes of such imagery? How do they achieve their purposes? What messages are communicated? And what are the ethical implications? Principles of visual rhetoric and ethics will be used to analyze the graphic discourse in such imagery to evaluate

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[1] Good Evidence uses quotation marks around the terms "development" and "developing" to show its political stance towards these contested descriptors of what is now preferably called the Majority World. Although I agree that "developing world" is offensive to some, I chose to use it as it was more likely to be recognized and understood by my respondents (while being perhaps less offensive than "Third World"), and I will use it without quotation marks to aid readability.

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whether some representations are harmful to the represented persons, to the viewer, or to society.

After reviewing my theoretical framework and similar studies, I will discuss the roots of conventional development imagery in colonial discourses reinforced today, for instance, by Live Aid's legacy of famine reporting and the commodification of suffering within a global image economy. I will then apply van Leeuwen's (2000) method of identifying strategies of visual racism to an exemplar famine image and to an "alternative" image representative of the kind preferred by Good Evidence. Respondent interviews will be used to provide richer insights to the analysis. I will then discuss the practical and ethical implications of the literal and symbolic messages communicated by the images. Ultimately, the study aims to enhance awareness of the impact of development imagery and contribute to the discussion of ideology and ethics in the rhetorical choices made to represent peoples, their perspectives, and their places.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Visual Rhetoric

      In the last four decades, rhetorical scholars have reluctantly embraced the study of the visual image, but as visual rhetoricians such as Prelli argue, the "rhetorics of display are nearly ubiquitous in contemporary communication and culture and thus, have become the dominant rhetoric of our time" (2006, p. 2). Their omnipresence necessitates means to understand images, and as early as 1945, Kenneth Burke argued that rhetoric was the use of *symbols* to persuade, and in 1964, semiotician Roland Barthes (1964/1977) built on the work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to extend semiotic analysis to pictures. But inconsistency in scholars' use of the term "visual rhetoric" and an overlap between methodologies and disciplines in studying the visual has resulted in a field of research "puzzling in its breadth" (Hill & Helmers, 2004, p. ix). Cultural studies analyses the "ways in which culturally shared values and assumptions are utilized in persuasive communication, and how these shared values and assumptions influence viewer's responses to mass-produced images" (Hill, 2004, p. 26). Semiotics and rhetoric both deal with how meaning is constructed from signs and symbols—semiotics through the codes needed to understand a text, and rhetoric through attempts to persuade a specific audience (Foss, 1994). As Berger's meal metaphor explains, semioticians judge a meal by the kinds of ingredients and the meaning of their choice, while rhetoricians also consider how the ingredients were cooked for a particular meal and how they tasted to the particular "audience" (as cited in Kenney, 2002).

      Controversy remains within the study of images as to whether their symbolic meanings can be shared and understood in and of themselves. Barthes (1964/1977) argued that images on their own are ambiguous and that verbal text must enforce the visual with evidence, but more contemporary scholars posit that images can convey the same messages and meanings as text.

Critic Sonja K. Foss (2004), who has proposed a rhetorical schema to evaluate visual artifacts, acknowledges that understanding the role of the visual in rhetorical theory can be bewildering. But she believes that the evaluation of images has the potential to "challenge and question the linguistic boundaries of our rhetorical theories," providing "access to multidimensional human experiences" (Foss, p. 304). As Foss suggests, "a great many of the symbols that affect us daily" (p. 213) would be missed if "nostalgic" rhetorical critics ignored the impact of the image.

Truth or naturalization? The power of pictures. How do representational images "work to influence the beliefs, attitudes, opinions—and sometimes actions" (Hill, 2004, p. 25) of the lay viewer? To answer this question, Hill combines research on the psychological processes of vividness and emotion and the work of rhetorical theorists Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, who attribute persuasion to the concept of "presence." A good rhetor, Hill says, gives greater presence to elements most beneficial to her claim by focusing the audience's attention on them to make them "more salient and memorable" (p. 28). The greatest presence can be achieved by using vivid evidence, i.e., evidence that constructs mental images that lead to changes in belief and attitude, and, next to actual experience, images are the best evidence. It is for this reason, Hill notes, that "a picture of one starving child is more persuasively powerful than statistics citing the starvation of millions" (p. 29) and "much more likely to prompt a visceral, emotional response" (p. 30). The "suffering portrayed in the photograph carries more epistemic force than a verbal description," he says, "because the existence of the photograph proves the existence of its subject" (p. 29)—no matter what manipulation might have occurred in the darkroom. Images are not only almost as persuasive as actual experience, but also, as Borgerson and Schroeder (2002) argue of images in marketing communications, "frequently stand in for experience, especially when other sources have less prominence, and serve as a foundation for future attempts to

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comprehend and construct the world around us" (p. 259).

Their "emotional weight" (Hill, 2004, p. 35) combined with our evolutionary programming and the influence of shared cultural values can make images problematic. Although contemporary audiences understand that images are mediated, we are evolutionarily designed to "react quickly and decisively" to emotional response, without evaluating "all of the information that might be potentially relevant" (Hill, p. 34). And that is exactly what professional persuaders want us to do. Abstract cultural constructs or values such as humanitarianism and prejudice "rely on emotional responses for their power" and are, Hill argues, "largely defined" by them (p. 34). The persuader creates "associations between those images and abstract values that [she] wishes to make more present to the audience" and once the association is internalized, "the image becomes a symbol for the abstract value and can be used to trigger its associated emotions" (Hill, p. 35). The result, Hill says, is that the viewer responds "without the benefit of a sustained rational analysis, even though the emotional complex we are responding to is culturally determined" (p. 35). Thus images "contribute to the 'reality' into which contemporary consumers are socialized and often evade notions of creative interpretation and critical resistance" (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005, p. 259).

Over time, visual conventions become naturalized—that is, "we believe that they mirror nature, rather than artificially represent it" (Kostelnick & Hassett, 2003, p. 34). As Prelli (2006) writes, "much of what appears or looks to us as reality is constituted rhetorically through the multiple displays that surround us, compete for our attention, and make claims upon us" (p. 1). Hill and Helmers (2004) note that "symbols resist individual interpretation because they are overdetermined by customary usage, embedded so frequently in conventional discourse that they rarely take on a reflective, individual meaning" (p. 4). Critics, says Foss (2004), are concerned

with the effect of visual rhetoric on lay viewers,

> who do not have technical knowledge in areas such as design, art history, aesthetics, or art education. Lay viewers' responses to visual artifacts are assumed to be constructed on the basis of viewers' own experiences and knowledge, developed from living and looking in the world. (p. 306)

The role of the critic, therefore, is to intervene between the imagery and the viewer, revealing intentional or hegemonic meanings, or what goes unnoticed. As Kenneth Burke would remind us, "whatever is revealed through display simultaneously conceals alternative possibilities; therein is display's rhetorical dimension" (as cited in Prelli, p. 271). Visual rhetoric critics begin with the premise that we use and are used by images. As Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) warn, "while the camera may not lie—or not much, at any rate—those who use it and its images can and do" (p. 154).[2]

Van Leeuwen (2000) provides a useful model for evaluating how people are represented visually, as he identifies several strategies for representing people as "other,"[3] including showing them as "patients" rather than "doers." He adapts his visual discourse "grammar"[4] developed with Kress (1996) to identify strategies for symbolizing difference between the viewer and the represented person: *distanciation* represents others as "not-close-to-us," *disempowerment* represents them as "below us," and *objectivation* represents them as objects for our scrutiny (p. 339). His own earlier work in verbal discourse (1996) is adapted to identify strategies of othering

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[2] As practitioners of *social* semiotics, Kress and van Leeuwen argue see representation as a process in which the maker of a sign represents only certain aspects of an entity based on his "interest" in it, "arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign-maker produces the sign" (p. 7)

[3] The term "other" in this paper is based on the idea as articulated by Edward Said (1978), who argued in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, that the West had constructed an image of the Orient as other to justify its own imperialist agenda. Today the term (and the verb, "othering") is used by scholars who critically analyze representations that perpetuate an "us" versus "them" ideology.

[4] Kress and van Leeuwen posit that the grammar of visuals is, like the grammar of language, a socially agreed upon, and culturally and historically specific resource for meaning-making.

with regards to how people are depicted in relation to each other or to their surroundings. The strategy of *exclusion* does not represent people at all; other strategies include depiction as agents of actions held in low esteem, depiction as homogeneous groups, and negative cultural or racial (biological) categorization. Kenney and Scott (2003) agree that while persuasive intent is just as manifest in what is *missing* as what is *shown*, "*how* something is shown is as important as *what is shown*" (emphasis in original, p. 21).

Ethics: What is harm? And is causing it ever justified?

Foss (2004) believes that visual artifacts should be judged according to their *functions*, or communicative effects on their intended audiences. Functions are interpreted by the critic "reflecting on their legitimacy or soundness determined largely by the implications and consequences of those functions—perhaps, for example, whether an artifact is congruent with a particular ethical system or whether it offers emancipatory potential" (Foss, p. 309). Ethics scholar Deni Elliott (2003) provides a system for the analysis of media images from an ethical perspective,[5] enabling the critic to reveal any harm caused and to evaluate whether or not that harm is justified—although "do no harm to others" is, Elliott says, "the minimum level of morality" (p. 8) based on the past 2,000 years of Western moral philosophy. According to Elliott, harm may be direct or indirect. Direct harm obviously includes physical injury, such as killing or disabling another, but also includes, for example, depriving another of pleasure or opportunity. Harm is indirect "when the person harmed is not aware of having been harmed or the harm caused is more dilute, as is the case with deception" (p. 8). Harm is only justified, Elliott argues, when "you have what an impartial audience would judge to be a very good reason" (p. 8).

But what is a good reason for causing harm? Image creators and distributors must also

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[5] Elliott uses the terms "moral" and "ethical" synonymously.

fulfill a second tenet of Western moral philosophy: "Do your job" (Elliott, 2003, p. 9). In their

case, a good reason for causing harm might be that a message *needs* to be communicated—for

example, in order for the public to know the truth. But as Elliott cautions in *Images That*

Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media, role-related responsibilities do not absolve image

producers and distributors from their responsibility

> to recognize their power in creating viewer perception and to use that power judiciously by (1) presenting images accurately or clearly labeled as fiction, parody, or photo illustration, and (2) being responsible for the symbolic as well as the literal meaning of the image. (p. 10)

While moral analysis normally begins with a question of blameworthiness, which requires an

intention to cause harm, "any time there is a relationship with inequality in power, the more

powerful party incurs special responsibilities" (Elliott, p. 11). Borgerson and Schroeder,

proposing an ethics of visual representation in marketing communications, argue that marketers

have a responsibility to "become culturally, ethically, and visually literate in representational

conventions and semiotics" (2005, p. 272), as "drawing unreflectively upon semiotic meanings

and representing people as 'others'" (p. 266) can produce unethical images.

So how should we judge whether an image is harmful and whether any harm caused is

justified? Elliott (2003) provides a system for the ethical analysis of media images: (1) Identify

the injury, i.e., conceptualize who is being hurt by it and how we know; (2) Ask whether it is

reasonable to hold the producer/distributor morally blameworthy. Blameworthiness is greater if

evidence makes it reasonable to predict that the audience, the represented persons, or other

vulnerable people will be directly or indirectly harmed; and (3) Analyze the social function of

the medium and how an image connects to role-related responsibilities. The more questionable

the connection, or if the role-related responsibilities could be met without the use of a harmful

image, the less justified its use. As Elliott reminds us, "Publishing images that injure is a morally

questionable act. Sometimes [it] can be justified . . . sometimes it cannot" (p. 7).

The Rhetoric of Conventional Development Imagery: The "Rescue Me" Narrative

Photographic representations can shape public consciousness around the suffering of distant others. This is Dill's (2008) concern in his semiotic study of images of humanitarian emergencies in major American newspapers. These crises are often reduced to what Hammock and Charny call "scripted morality plays" (as cited in Dill, p. 15) in which humanitarian agencies are shown as "virulent and heroic" while living victims are "needy, passive and dependent" (p. 15). Local responses and aid agencies' capacity to meet basic needs are ignored, as is analysis into root causes. Dill's own visual analysis finds "undifferentiated masses are . . . shown as passive in their victimhood and helpless in bringing about significant change" (p. 20); they are "physically stuck and incapable or unwilling to uproot themselves from crisis" (p. 27). Images of suffering, Dill (2008) says, "ultimately illustrate what Sontag describes as the 'inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward' (2003: 71)—misfortune and suffering appear as difficult if not impossible to prevent as it is endemic to poor, underdeveloped settings" (p. 16).

Similarly, Kozol's (2004) study of images from NATO's war in Kosovo finds in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* [6] depictions of vulnerable, helpless "peasants in a pre-modern setting" that contribute to "rescue narratives" that ignore "the range of material resources and cultural experiences of the Albanian Kosovars" (pp. 12-13). While Kozol is primarily concerned with how media representations draw on "ideals of gender, sexuality, race, and nation" to visualize this narrative, her analysis reveals that what might have been valid documentation of ethnic cleansing is "compromised by a representational framework that simplifies or deflects attention from the historical causes of this war" (p. 5). By perpetuating

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[6] These are the three highest circulating American newsmagazines.

(what is according to Žižek) "a Western gaze at a region historically imagined as a site of pre-modern and inexplicable ethnic conflict," she says, visual representations elide (what is according to Žižek and Chomsky) "the integral role of American and European economic and political interests in the persistent instabilities in this region" (p. 5).

Such "rescuer/victim" narratives in imagery can have an enormous impact on viewers' "knowledge" of others. In 2001 VSO[7] found that stereotypes of deprivation, poverty, and Western aid in the media and in the fundraising literature of charities had resulted in a 74% belief among 1,018 British media consumers surveyed that developing countries "depend on the money and knowledge of the West to progress" (p. 3). Even when knowledge about others' lives comes only from "unconsciously accumulated images," viewers feel "certainty that they have all the facts" (VSO, p. 3) when in fact they may lack basic knowledge: as one respondent stated, "Kenya, that's in the Congo isn't it?" (cited by VSO, p. 6). When presented with more facts about the developing world—positives and negatives; context and background to news stories; and everyday life, history, and culture—respondents often expressed "anger and a feeling of being conned or misled . . . [by] the media, particularly television, and occasionally development charities, who are seen as the main sources of information" (2001, p. 3). Kozol (2004) acknowledges the dilemma of the photojournalist—ignore violent conflict, or depict it and risk embodying victimization—but agrees with Koshy (1999, as cited by Kozol) that when photographs depicting suffering become the *conventional* depictions of social conflict, they preclude reporting of the multiple factors that produce it or possible solutions. Similarly, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) acknowledges the dilemma of choosing fundraising images that will establish an emotional connection with donors but may undermine

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[7] Voluntary Service Overseas

organizations' efforts to "address the root causes of global inequality and not merely its symptoms" (2008, p. 5).[8]

Despite the predominant rescue narrative, Kozol (2004) does not conclude that photographs depicting suffering "have no value or are only exploitative" (p. 32). A *New York Times* cover photo, for example, of a Palestinian father and son huddled against a wall just before the child was killed (as revealed by the caption)[9] momentarily portrayed the Palestinians as innocent victims rather than terrorists. The photo gained international attention and demonstrated, Kozol says, "the political effectiveness of depicting victims of state violence and brutality" (p. 31) via a rarely seen narrative (for this cultural group) of traumatic loss. Furthermore, Kozol states, images of suffering victims, especially children, are "powerful in effecting emotional responses that often result in support for international relief efforts and for raising donations" (Kozol, p. 32).

We know that images can be used rhetorically to stir emotion, but do images of suffering really generate donations? By selecting photographs intended to convey the "two opposing messages in the work of aid agencies"[10] (p. 439)—those showing their relief of immediate distress, such as photos of emaciated children, and those showing their long-term development work, such as a photo of a woman displaying her diploma—Radley and Kennedy (1997) elicited British viewers' responses to different degrees of dependency or empowerment. Although less

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[8] The CCIC is a coalition of Canadian voluntary sector organizations dedicated to ending global poverty and injustice within a human rights framework. See www.ccic.ca/about/index_e.php

[9] In this study, I have chosen to focus solely on the image rather than on the image and accompanying text that may clarify its meaning, as photographers have little control over any such text. As a Reuters photojournalist says, "[N]ot all news editors use my caption . . . [They] are businessmen who are trying to make money and give their political opinion. They modify reports and choose pictures according to their own agendas" (as cited in Clark, 2004, p. 698).

[10] Photos were supplied by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

concerned with which images respondents would deem more likely to generate funds as with the way this judgment was achieved, the authors found that the degree of recognizable need, as evidenced by physical condition and facial expression, corresponded to whether viewers perceived the represented persons as deserving of help. Even those who disliked the "traditional picture of emaciated children" (p. 453) thought it would "still be the picture to elicit pity (and hence money) from '*people in general*'" (emphasis added, p. 442). Nonetheless, some expressed resentment at being manipulated to feel unwanted negative emotions, and others resented repeated donation requests, meaning that successful portrayal of suffering could not guarantee that audiences would act to alleviate it.

Can "alternative ways of seeing" (Kozol, 2004, p. 30) impact photojournalism and charitable fundraising? Among better-educated respondents in the Radley and Kennedy (1997) study, the perception of need necessary to generate a charitable response did not rely on pity induced by the depiction of suffering. A photo of two girls drawing water from a pipe, for example, managed to illustrate their need (by showing the arid background) even while one girl smiled broadly and both used tools. For this audience, signifiers of self-determination (even if assumed to have been provided by the aid agency) motivated giving, while depictions of "no way forward" (p. 452) such as emaciated children did not. Similarly, photographer Paula Allen's (2001) photo essay "After the Storm" in *Mother Jones* shows that suffering can be documented within an empowerment narrative. Documenting the women of Krushe e Vogel returning to their village after Milosevic's army massacred all but six of the men, Allen shows the women's capacity to respond to trauma in local and collective ways—one image, for example, shows them happily sowing Krushe's fields. By doing so, Allen challenges "conventional narratives of victimization" and offers "a more complicated representation" (Kozol, p. 31). Nonetheless,

Kozol notes that "here too the (mis)representation of Albanians as white does nothing to complicate the racial logics promoted by the United States and NATO and unqualifiedly accepted by the news media" (p. 31). Still, by publishing Allen's work, *Mother Jones* represented "alternative spaces that expand the possibilities of documentation" (Kozol, p. 30). It is to such a space that Good Evidence (n.d.) aspires by creating "new narratives and representations" of people in developing regions (About Us section).

The literature reviewed has found that representations of the developing world in both charity literature used to raise funds and photojournalism meant to document humanitarian crises often portray represented persons as suffering, helpless, and in need of rescue by the West. This narrative relies on the viewer's emotional response; a critical analysis might question why others' self-determination is never represented and consider the causes behind the represented suffering (and Western complicity in them). Nonetheless, this narrative is challenged by alternative ways of seeing that refuse the portrayal of suffering or document it within an empowerment narrative. This paper will expand on the literature by applying van Leeuwen's (2000) social semiotic model of analysis of visual racism to reveal strategies for representing otherness that support the rescuer/victim narrative and an us/them ideology. Elliott's ethical framework will be applied to evaluate whether the use of conventional representations of development and the developing world is justified in light of any implications for the represented persons, the viewer, and Canadian society.

Methodology

Visual rhetoric and the ethical visual representation of the developing world frame this study. It analyzes, through interviews and critical rhetorical analysis, images typically found in photojournalism (such as disaster reporting) and the fundraising materials of charities. The goal is to discover how visual rhetoric represents people in the developing world, both literally and symbolically, and to articulate the ethical and social implications of relying on "conventional" images. The study incorporates a mixed theoretical approach from a multidisciplinary perspective—i.e., the formal description stage of my rhetorical analysis will draw on principles of social semiotics, which has much in common with a cultural studies approach to the visual.

To gain insight into how and to whom some representations of development and the developing world might be harmful, I first examined the "About Us" page on the Good Evidence website (a document in the public domain). Of all the pages on the site, About Us most clearly encapsulated the organization's stance and mission. From this page I gathered data detailing the organization's notion of harm that would later be compared to respondent interviews to see whether their comments supported Good Evidence's claims of harm or included any references to discourses referenced, appealed to, or challenged by the organization.

Five visual representations, all found online and thus in the public domain, were chosen as typical of those commonly seen in news media or fundraising materials from charities working in the developing world. Sources included the websites of American-based charity Shoe4Africa;[11] Swedish photographer Per-Anders Pettersson; and London photojournalists Tom Stoddart, Paul Grover, and Kate Holt. Finally, an alternative image of development representing the type of narrative Good Evidence believes should be seen more often was selected from the

[11] New York running coach Toby Tanser founded Shoe4Africa to collect used sneakers for young African runners. See www.tanser.org/about.htm

website of the International Museum of Women.

Rhetorical analysis was performed on one of the conventional images according to the four steps proposed by Kenny and Scott (2003): analysis of historical context, formal description, interpretation from a particular critical perspective, and evaluation from that perspective. The social semiotic model of analysis of van Leeuwen (2000) was applied to describe how the image's formal elements symbolically depicted the represented persons and the imaginary relationship between them and the viewer. Interpretation and evaluation were undertaken from the critical perspective, in which

> the analysis is undertaken for the purpose of exposing something about the power structure of the society. Thus, it is closely reliant on the concept of "ideology." In the tradition of Marx, "ideology" is a representation of a false belief that supports the power structure, but has become so pervasive and naturalized that it is no longer visible to the populace for what it is. (Kenney & Scott, pp. 44-45)

Van Leeuwen's model was also applied to the alternative image of development.

The final stage of data collection consisted of semi-structured respondent interviews using convenience sampling. There was no "typical" profile of consumers of the imagery under study—every charitable organization, for example, "is different and, therefore, every organization's . . . donor profile" (Burk, 2001, The Revenue Gap section)—but five respondents from 29 to 79 years old were chosen, with as equal an age and gender balance as possible. Two respondents were under 40 and three over, while three were female and two male. Although they are from relatively diverse backgrounds, all are university educated and most have exposure to the developing world. Only two respondents have any technical knowledge of design or art, but not of semiotics; the other three may be considered lay viewers.

- Paulo, M, 42, originally from Argentina, moved to Canada 15 years ago with a "mostly finished" PhD in international law and currently works for a logistics company. He has travelled extensively in South and Central America.

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- Metta, F, 79, originally from California, moved to Canada in 1971 to teach sociology. As a peace activist and researcher, she has travelled extensively in developing countries; her early research focussed on student social movements in India.

- Andreina, F, 36, originally from Venezuela, moved to Canada in 1998 with a BS in engineering and completed a BA in professional communication. She is awaiting Canadian citizenship. She has lived in Malaysia and travelled in Southeast Asia and South Africa.

- Bill, M, 42, originally from London, Ontario, holds a BA (Hons.) in History and English. He is a communications professional and art critic. Other than a brief vacation in Mexico, he has spent no time in the developing world.

- Ann, F, 29, originally from Ottawa, Ontario, is currently completing a Master's degree in professional communication (of which a graphic design course was a requirement). She has vacationed in Mexico and spent six months travelling in Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and South Africa, three of those months volunteering in the latter country.

All interviews but one were conducted face to face in Toronto, Canada. Andreina, the only respondent living outside Toronto (in Victoria, British Columbia), was interviewed via Skype.[12] Interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes, and were recorded with respondents' permission. In keeping with respondent interview traditions, the interview protocol was designed to elicit subjective perceptions of each of the six development images chosen. Before respondents were shown any images, they were asked to think about development and the developing world and describe any images that came to mind. They were then shown the six photographs, and were asked several open-ended questions such as "What are your first impressions of the images?," "What is going on in each picture" (on a literal level)?" and "What is your opinion about the

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[12] Skype[TM] is a software application used to make voice calls over the Internet. The call with Andreina was recorded using MP3 Skype Recorder.

kinds of emotions that are being appealed to?"[13] Finally, respondents were asked for their final

impressions to confirm and validate their overall impressions, and were given the opportunity to

suggest overlooked questions and to ask questions of the researcher. Interview transcripts were

analyzed according to grounded theory methodology to identify emerging themes, including any

evidence of harm inherent in some representations as claimed by Good Evidence.

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[13] Andreina viewed the photos on Facebook^{TM}, where they had been uploaded to a private photo
album accessed by a link emailed to her after she answered the first question.

Results and Discussion

Visual analysis and interviews provided overlapping insights into how a representation of the developing world or development might be harmful and to whom. Respondents demonstrated a perception of the developing world influenced by the conventional images from media and charities that have dominated since the Live Aid period. Both photojournalists competing within a global image economy and charities competing for donor dollars have resorted to relying on constructed and naturalized realities dependent on an emotional, rather than analytical, viewer response. Social semiotic analysis of a conventional famine image revealed several strategies of othering that reflect colonial discourse and negate documentation. Furthermore, interviews showed that strong negative emotions evoked by the image undermined its use as a tool for charitable fundraising. Analysis of an "alternative" representation, on the other hand, revealed an empowerment narrative visible to both the critic and to the viewer, and that evoked a charitable response based on a portrayal of hope and self-sufficiency rather than physical need or suffering. I begin by discussing how images portraying people as passive victims have affected viewers' perceptions of the developing world.

"She's Sitting Down, She's Not In Action, She's Waiting"

Conventional visual representations of the developing world have depicted people as other using what van Leeuwen (2000) calls "the strategy of depicting people as the agents of actions which are held in low esteem or regarded as subservient, deviant, criminal or evil" (p. 349). Not only are the things represented persons do or have done to them of importance, he says, but also "which of the things they may in reality do or have done to them [that] are *not* shown" (emphasis in original, p. 342). The role a represented person is depicted performing is an ideological choice—that is, of all the roles a person may perform in a day, or a lifetime, why is

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this role depicted rather than another? By defining the roles of represented persons,

representations symbolically exclude them from others. Aid recipients in particular are rarely

shown as agents of any action other than "waiting" in representations that ignore any personal or

community agency or capacity. The persons depicted in Figures 1, 2 (see both in appendix), and

3 (below) were all described as "waiting"; on viewing Figure 1, for example, Metta said:

> I think they're waiting for help . . . she's certainly not in the position of these women [Figure 4, below] who are on top of the situation. I mean this is a person who needs assistance. I think she's sitting down, she's not in action, she's waiting. And she doesn't seem to have any clothes on.

> Even before respondents were asked to view conventional representations, their

comments when asked to think about the developing world proved that the images that had

become "more salient and memorable" (Hill, 2004, p. 28) to them were those depicting themes

of helplessness and destitution. Metta said aid meant "I see Western people wearing uniforms of

some kind and poking the distended belly of some black child who's starving." And Bill saw

> mainly television images, really, and advertisements for starving children and things like that . . . Those are the types of images, either starving baby images or Red Cross or military-type people at work, trying to provide aid.

Good Evidence (n.d.) argues that such "'conventional' representations of development"

contribute to "common perceptions of 'development'" and of "the 'developing' world" that are

not based on a whole truth (About Us section). Asked what sort of perception he has of the

developing world based on the images he spoke of, Bill replied,

> That it is a disorganized *mess*. And anybody who is trying to do something, you respect them. You kind of just get the impression that the problem seems so insurmountable . . . it's important that something be done, but it also really makes it feel really insurmountable.

When magazines he reads cover the developing world, they usually support the "subservient,

deviant, criminal or evil" narrative:

> There tends to be a lot of images of the military or dictatorships rerouting the aid. Or

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images of the Red Cross or people like that or soldiers trying to get stuff to people who actually need it. In zones that are actually quite dangerous.

My respondents' comments confirm that when viewers' perceptions of the developing world are formed from representations in the media and sometimes from charity fundraising materials, they do not reflect a whole picture. Effective, local community response, for example, is rarely shown because, Fernando (2010) says, chaos sells better. Especially in times of disaster, reporting local response "is not nearly as romantic (or easy) as focusing on huge international rescue efforts and fundraising" (Fernando, p. 4). Godwin (1994) asserts that our lack of background information about the developing world leads us to accept such representations as the whole truth, whereas if a riot, for example, breaks out in a city in an industrialized country, we know that it is "a separate, unusual incident" and "does not mean that the whole city, or the whole country" has fallen apart (p. 47). As Fernando reminds us, even disasters "do not completely dismantle or make ineffective all pre-disaster social, economic and political structures" (p. 4). Furthermore, as representations photographs define roles for those represented; Lister and Wells (2001) urge the viewer to "consider that before and after the moment of the photographic exposure . . . the subject's expression and position might have been different and less culturally or symbolically expressive of distress" (p. 80).

In this section I have shown that the literal message communicated to my respondents by conventional development representations is in sync with the "rescue narrative" discussed in the literature review (VSO, 2001; Kozol, 2004; Dill, 2008). In the next section I will look for symbolic meanings that may go unnoticed by the lay viewer.

"Starving Children and Things Like That": Deconstruction of a Conventional Image

According to Kenney and Scott (2003) "a full-blown exercise in rhetorical criticism" consists of four steps: analysis of historical context, formal description, interpretation from a

particular critical perspective, and evaluation from that perspective (p. 32). In this section I will apply these basic principles of rhetorical criticism to a conventional famine image that exemplifies the "starving children" genre. I will analyze the image's form using van Leeuwen's social semiotic method for identifying visual racism, interpret it from a critical perspective by looking for evidence of its effect in respondent interviews, and evaluate the image's intent as both documentation and a vehicle for fundraising. To begin, I will briefly document the historical context that led to the prevalence of "victim" images and their use as rhetorical tools.

The "Live Aid legacy" and the global image economy. In the mid-1980s, Ethiopia was devastated by a famine caused by drought and conflict. It affected close to 8 million people and was the country's "worst in living memory" (BBC, 1984). The crisis came to the world's attention largely through BBC reporter Michael Buerk and Kenyan photojournalist Mohammed Amin. On July 13, 1985, an estimated 2 billion viewers in 60 countries watched the Live Aid fundraising concerts broadcast from London and Philadelphia. Sixteen years later, VSO (2001) discovered that stereotypical images of drought and famine from Ethiopia and, in 1998, Sudan had resulted in what they labelled "the Live Aid legacy": that many UK media consumers had "an essentially one-dimensional view of developing countries" (p. 15). Even people born after the famine and Live Aid still associate Ethiopia with famine (Clark, 2004).

Why did these stereotypical images prevail? New technologies have brought documentary photographers new opportunities, such as the ability to upload their images to searchable databases from which publications and charities may purchase them. On the other hand, the simultaneity of electronic culture and the emergence of 24-hour, live television news broadcasting has left photojournalists scrambling to compete. Competition and its resulting tight budgets has replaced accuracy with a need for speed and catering to a global audience within a

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reality of "visual globalization" (Clark, 2004, p. 703). Faced with such constraints, photographers turn to "the stock concerns of those who dispatched them" (Campbell et al., 2005, p. 19)—war, famine and poverty—or try to "cover up for their lack of knowledge" (Clark, p. 698) by falling back on "learnt visual strategies" such as emphasizing the dramatic,[14] thereby "allowing the demands of the economy to directly affect the content of the image" (Clark, p. 703). Renowned South African photographer Guy Tillim admits,[15] "There is a cliche of war and famine in Africa. I believe I try and avoid it, not that I always have, I have been bought by western media as anyone else" (2009, n.p.). Charitable organizations also compete with each other for our attention. Of Canadian non-governmental organizations soliciting public donations, the three largest are child-sponsorship organizations, generating over 10 times the donations of the three largest non-sponsorship organizations (Plewes & Stuart, 2007). A proliferation of new agencies worldwide means stiffer competition, increasing the temptation to lower standards in the way images are used (Gidley, 2004).

As Tillim notes, the "endless repetition" of the iconography of suffering is "a currency that is traded just like anything else" (2009, n.p.). Media profit, as do international development agencies and charitable organizations, from an often inter-dependent relationship: media need a rescue effort to make news, and a rescue effort needs coverage to bring in the dollars to fund it. As this paper was being written,[16] the United Nations declared a drought in the Horn of Africa the worst in 60 years and officially declared a famine in southern Somalia. International media

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[14] Cultural critic and theorist Mieke Bal (2006) distinguishes between "documentation, journalism or critical writing" (p. 103) and the "aestheticizing" of suffering that blurs the line between documentary and art. For a critique of the "aestheticization-of-suffering critique" of Bal and other scholars, see Strauss, 2007.

[15] Tillim started his career as a war photographer in the 1980s, when international anti-Apartheid movements were growing.

[16] This paper was completed in August 2010.

and aid organizations sprang to action, bringing the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya to the world's attention after 20 years of its being "the place that the world forgot" (CBC, 2011, n.p.). But AlertNet correspondent Katy Migiro (2011), based in Nairobi, states that for several months already, Kenyan media had been reporting that people were dying in the arid north. The deaths became worth sending reporters to the BBC, for example, only after the famine declaration—and UK aid organizations could launch appeals only once regular media reports would ensure a steady flow of donations. As Migiro concludes, "The real untold story is that the skinny babies are always there. It's just that there are a few less of them" (n.p.)

In the next section, I will apply social semiotic analysis to a famine image to demonstrate how colonial discourse is perpetuated in representations that show others as *not like us*.

Social semiotic analysis: "They look African to me." Whether intended by the photographer or not, "Starving child in Sudan" (Figure 3, below), taken in 1998 by British photojournalist Paul Grover,[17] exemplifies several strategies identified by van Leeuwen (2000) as visually representing persons as other. Applying van Leeuwen's adaptation of his work with Kress (1996) reveals three strategies of representing people as "not-like-us" (p. 339), all concerning the "imaginary relationship between depicted people and viewers" (p. 333). In pictures as in real life, *interpersonal relationships* are communicated by distance, and here, depicting the children at "public distance" from the viewer achieves the strategy of *distanciation*, or representing people as "not-close-to-us" (p. 339). *Social relationships* are communicated by the angle from which we view the represented persons. Here, the high vertical angle from which we look down on the children symbolically expresses a power imbalance, achieving the strategy of *disempowerment*, or representing persons as "below us" or "downtrodden." Finally, *social*

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[17] Grover has been working as a photographer for the *Daily Telegraph* since 1991, covering news, sports, and features, including civil wars and famine. See www.paulgroverphotos.co.uk

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interaction is communicated by whether or not represented persons look at us. Only one child among the many looks directly at the camera, creating a visual representation that realizes what van Leeuwen calls the strategy of symbolic *objectivation*: "If they do not look at us they are as it were offered to our gaze as a spectacle for our dispassionate scrutiny" (p. 339). Nonetheless, the one child returning our gaze creates what Lister and Wells (2001) call "a rupturing of the documentary rhetoric," meaning that

> [o]ur position as voyeurs (seeing but not being seen) and the power of the camera to scrutinize (without its operation itself being scrutinized) is revealed. "We" are seen and our gaze is returned . . . the photographer is, in a sense, caught in the act of constructing . . . a statement about what is before him. (p. 83)

Figure 3. "Starving child in Sudan" illustrates several strategies for representing persons as other. Reprinted from Paul Grover Photos, by P. Grover, 1998, Retrieved from www.paulgroverphotos.co.uk/galleries/war-and-conflict/. Copyright 1998 by Paul Grover.

More strategies of constructing otherness can be identified by applying van Leeuwen's adaptation of his work on verbal discourse (1996) to analyze how social actors are depicted in relation to each other or to their surroundings. First of all, sometimes they are not depicted at all "in contexts, where, in reality, they are present" (van Leeuwen, 2010, p. 349), a strategy of

symbolic social *exclusion*, which like the strategy of disempowerment represents persons as

"below us." Here, parents are excluded, connoting that they do not care, or are incapable of

caring, for their children. As Paulo said,

> They look like abandoned children to me . . . They don't have any kind of clothes on, and
> the weight of their bodies make them look abandoned. Nobody was taking care of them,
> only way a child can look like that. That's what I see.

The children, although depicted, are subject to the "strategy of showing people as homogeneous

groups and thereby denying them individual characteristics and differences" (p. 349). Despite the

photo's title, nothing (other than the one returned gaze, and perhaps positioning within the

frame) differentiates any one child from the mass depicted; the cropping of many of their eyes

and faces drastically diminishes individual differences. As van Leeuwen argues, when the

members of groups are depicted as all similar to each other, "the 'they're all the same', 'you

can't tell them apart' principle can be applied" (p. 345); the children can thus more easily

"represent a vast horde not photographed who also stand in need" (McKee, 2003, p. 163). When

asked to describe what she thought was happening, Metta too noted the exclusion of parents and

identified the children as "African":

> I presume they're waiting for help 'cause they're obviously put together. There's no
> natural social situation in which they'd congregate naked and looking like this . . . I think
> they're all boys 'cause I see a hell of a lot of penises . . . It's unusual though to see so
> many small children without their parents. I would think if they're waiting for food they
> would ordinarily be waiting with their mothers, wouldn't you? I assume these are Africa
> [*sic*], I wouldn't know if they were from someplace else but they look African to me.

Her words underscore two more problems in the depiction. First, what symbolic roles are

available to these represented children? The converging lines of the photograph do suggest that

the children have been lined up to wait for handouts from the West, as in so many conventional

photos of "starving African children." Second, "when people are photographed as desirable

models"—in this case, of the starving African—"their individuality can seem to disappear

behind what *categorises* people" (emphasis in original, van Leeuwen, 2000, p. 343). Cultural

categorization is signified by attributes standardly used to categorize a group and that connote

"the negative or positive values and associations attached to a particular socio-cultural group by

the socio-cultural group for whom the representation is in the first place produced" (van

Leeuwen, p. 346); here, the "starving African" is signified as culturally other by his nakedness.

As noted by Pete Davis of Oxfam GB[18], "Picture editors would usually think at least three times

before publishing photographs of naked children, unless they were African famine victims" (as

cited by ACIC, n.d., p. 3). Good Evidence (2010) questions "why naked children from

developing countries represent poverty" (n.p.) while Canadian children, 15 percent of whom live

in poverty, are left clothed in visual representations used by news media and charities. One might

also question why African children in particular represent poverty. As Bill points out,

> You couldn't tell from these pictures where exactly they are . . . You're saying
> developing world, so I'm assuming they're in Africa or something. But for all you know,
> just looking at it, 5 [Figure 5, in appendix] could be in the United States. She could be,
> you know, 'cause there's problems there as well. She could have been in New Orleans.[19]

The origins of negative imagery of the developing world lie in the racist discourse of the

imperialist and colonialist past,[20] when people in the colonies were viewed as the primitive other

and Africa as the "Dark Continent." Benjamin deplored the message of the medium, i.e., its

"disengaging the visual aspect of people, places and things from their time and place" (Kress &

van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 91). Photography enticed with its power of decontextualization—"ornate

stereoscapes [*sic*] . . . brought pictures of exotic places into people's homes, so that all could join

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[18] Oxfam Great Britain

[19] The respondent is referencing Hurricane Katrina's flooding of New Orleans in 2005.

[20] Edward Said distinguishes "imperialism" as "the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" and "colonialism" as the "implanting of settlements on a distant territory"; Robert Young suggests that the first is an ideological concept, the second, a practice (both as cited in Gilmartin, 2008, p.116).

in the spirit of Imperialism" (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 91). Instead of fostering a promised "new consciousness," photography allowed us to "learn about the power of appearances, of judging people, places and things by what they *look* like" (emphasis in original, Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 91). Images of colonialist territories joined discourses on differences in a system of representation (Hall, 1996) that made others "manipulable . . . and controllable" (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 91). As Hall states, "The Europeans stood, vis-à-vis the Others, in positions of dominant power. This influenced what they saw and how they saw it, as well as what they did not see" (p. 204).

In the next section, I will complete the rhetorical analysis by interpreting the image through its communicative effect on viewers and evaluating its intent considering the implications and consequences of those effects.

Evaluation and viewer interpretation. What was the photographer's intent in constructing this representation? One may argue that as a photojournalist Grover intended only to document the famine to evoke a compassionate response. As Ann said when asked to describe it, "It looks like a journalistic-style photo that is captured to show what's happening. So if it's just to show the dire strait it's okay." Respondents confirmed that the image successfully communicated the message that humanitarian aid was needed. As Paulo said:

> It's a very, very shocking picture and can be used for showing how a disaster area looks, and my feeling is like, okay it's an emergency, these people need help right away, you cannot delay not even for a minute, the help has to be sent now. Whatever you're going to do, if you decide to do it, you have to do it now.

The image also successfully evoked compassion. Ann said, "It's such a sad picture," and Andreina admitted, "I could easily cry right now." Metta noted that "these poor little guys are obviously in [sighing deeply] very bad shape physically and emotionally" and added quietly, "I feel real sympathy and sadness." She concluded, "If you walk away from that and don't feel like

doing something for these kids there's something wrong with you."

But while Metta didn't mind being exposed to the image—"the one that distressed me the most"—because "that's life, I know that there are people in these situations," other respondents had negative emotional reactions with implications for raising funds to provide the international assistance that is actually necessary in the case of disasters such as famine. Paulo felt the image was "kind of aggressive,"

> because it's making me feel responsible for that. We know that things like that are real, but it's a very strong picture . . . even when they reflect what is going on in those places, it makes me feel responsible and I don't like that feeling.

Andreina agreed that the image was meant to create "some sense of responsibility with society," but questioned whether creating some other emotions—"It's making me sick"—would defeat an image's purpose:

> Humans, we block those things. People don't like to see it. Lots of people, they skip that part of the newspaper 'cause they don't want to feel sad, they don't want to see the reality, so if you are not impacting those people [they won't act]. It's not that people don't want to help, it's just that it's so hard to see those things.

As Ann concluded, the children looked "too far gone" for help to be useful—"it just feels hopeless," she said.

The respondents' apathy is in keeping with McKee's (2003) argument that although "some children are victims" of malnourishment, war, and even neglect, apathy is the result "when it is the *only* way children of some world regions are photographed and depicted" (p. 164). The viewer is either too overwhelmed, like Ann, to believe anything can change, or desensitized to the horror depicted—as Andreina said when she first viewed Figure 3, "It doesn't even look real. It looks like it's from a horror movie." If an image results in viewer apathy while perpetuating negative stereotypes, then only the photojournalist benefits from the photograph's capture and sale in the short term. Even if the photographer did not intend to cause harm, as

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Elliott (2003) and Borgerson and Schroeder (2005) have posited, the power the media have to form public perceptions of others makes photojournalists responsible for both the literal and symbolic meanings of the images they construct, even if the symbolic meanings cannot be recognized by the lay viewer. Just as documentation of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was compromised by representations perpetuating a Western gaze while ignoring Western interest in instability in the region (Kozol, 2004), documentation of the 1998 famine in Sudan is here compromised by a representation that symbolically portrays the children as "other" and, combined with the literal "helper/victim" message predominant in representations of the developing world, supports an "us/them" ideology.

Although this famine image from 1998 is offered as an extreme example of the victim narrative to demonstrate van Leeuwen's identified strategies, and many photojournalists and charities have since moved towards using less shocking imagery, competition means the temptation always exists to fall back on imagery of this kind. Plewes and Stuart (2007) report that it is still used in disaster and child-sponsorship fundraising.[21] In the next section, I will apply the principles of rhetorical analysis to a contemporary alternative representation.

An Alternative Narrative: "There isn't the Bunch of Westerners, or Whatever, There"

Images of "desperate, starving people, especially children" (Plewes & Stuart, 2007, p. 29) may still be considered persuasive, but the ethics of using them have been increasingly questioned over the past decade. Plewes and Stuart acknowledge that many agencies have "made an effort to show more positive images and have replaced the pictures of desperate people with images of smiling women and children" (p. 29). Unfortunately, many of these supposed "alternative" representations have not escaped the traps of "stereotyping, lack of portrayal of the

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[21] Betty Plewes is the former president-CEO of CCIC, and Rieky Stuart is the former executive director of Oxfam Canada. Both are international development consultants.

broader context, and perpetuation of attitudes of Northern superiority" (CCIC, 2008, p. 7). As

noted by the CCIC, these people

> may be smiling, but they are still rather passive—still needing to be "helped" by
> foreigners. There is still little acknowledgement of the role played by local communities,
> and little indication of the larger context of people's lives. The overall message—that
> only you, the foreign donor, can make a difference—remains the same. (p. 7)

A representation by indigenous photographer Husain Akbar (Figure 4, below), however, shows

"people working in their communit[y] to overcome serious barriers to social justice" (Plewes &

Stuart, p. 29). The New Delhi photographer captured "Women repairing a hand pump" at India's

Barefoot College, a grassroots non-profit in Tilonia, Rajasthan, where rural men and women are

educated to address the needs of their communities. The image symbolizes both the power

students gain from taking their learning back into their families and villages, and the positive

change in the villagers' perceptions towards social issues.

Figure 4. "Women repairing a hand pump" represents people as "like us," with symbolic power, and as agents of a role that could be held in high esteem. Reprinted from Museum Pick: The Barefoot Approach, by H. Akbar, 1998, Retrieved from www.imow.org/economica/stories/ viewStory?storyId=4525. Copyright 2011 by International Museum of Women.

Applying van Leeuwen's (2000) model of assessment reveals a drastically different

representation than that of "Starving child in Sudan" (Figure 3). First, the women are

photographed from far *personal* distance, symbolizing an imaginary interpersonal relationship

between them and the viewer. Second, the low camera angle represents their symbolic power;

these women, unlike the "starving Africans" of the famine image, are not looked down upon.

They are neither beneath us nor downtrodden. And third, although the women do not look at us,

they are not offered as a spectacle for scrutiny; they are shown deeply involved in their role—

they are "involved in some action" (van Leeuwen, p. 342), and it is not "waiting" for rescue.

These three strategies represent the women as "like us" rather than other. Finally, by depicting

them as "women performing roles that challenge traditional notions," Akbar avoids a generic

depiction that prompts categorization, either racially or culturally. In fact, the women's challenge

of tradition has produced, said filmmaker Sumithra Prasanna after a visit to the campus,[22] "a

visible change in the attitudes of men towards women, and women towards men" (International

Museum of Women, 2011, n.p.). Ann liked the depiction of women:

> It's usually children you see. But women are generally the better source of aid or money
> or education or whatever. With women, you're helping them elevate their community or
> you know their family will benefit from it . . . [T]hey generally are able to come together
> more and do more co-ops and do more things rather than one individual or one child.

Ann found the image "quite hopeful" and believed that people are "more willing or likely

to engage" when they see hope:

> If I saw one of these images and it would inspire me to want to get involved, I think it
> would be [Figure] 4. There's a possibility that my help would actually be useful. That one
> looks like if you were able to give money, or were to volunteer your time or actually go,
> it's easier to picture yourself—or myself—in that situation and able to make a change.

Paulo too felt hopeful, saying, "If I make any donation for them, they're going to make the best

of it because they really want to make things better. That's a good feeling." And Metta said, "I

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[22] Prasanna is filming a documentary about The Barefoot College.

would feel like giving them money because, if I could help, they're doing so well and I want to

encourage them." Andreina saw an example of a solution that she would want to support:

> You need to help in a way that will create impact. These women learned something and
> have a skill forever. If you ask me what would I do in a developing country if I could, I
> would do that, I would create something permanent, not just give something away.

Bill felt that, unlike the other images viewed, this one appealed less on an emotional than rational

level. Like image 1, he said, it shows a result, but in a more nuanced, and practical, way: this is

"where you want to get people." Even if it relied less on a strong emotional reaction, it still lived

up to the potential of its genre by motivating the change in the audience desired by the rhetor

(Foss, 2004, p. 310).

The language used on Good Evidence's website illustrates the ways in which it wishes to

position itself in relation to conventional development discourse. Phrases such as

"community-based action," "work realized in their communities," "individuals taking action,"

and "people working towards local change" highlight Good Evidence's goal of creating "new

narratives and representations" (Good Evidence, n.d., About Us section). When Paulo discussed

Figure 4, his language reflected Good Evidence's empowerment narrative:

> This is a group of women trying to do something together, trying to make something
> work, and it's kind of a positive thing. And I like it. I like it. Probably they need help,
> they need support, but they have ideas, they are already moving on by themselves. They
> feel like they can do something, not just receive.

Andreina agreed:

> There's an expression in Spanish, "*Si del cielo te caen limones, aprende ser limonada*"—
> if lemons are falling from the sky, you have to learn to make lemonade. This picture
> reflects exactly that. It's a good one. They look like they're working with all the things
> they have, they're co-operating, they're collaborating with each other. I see them as this
> is their life, this is what they do. I can see them as being okay.

As did Bill:

> It feels more like the people have been empowered to make change on their own. There
> isn't the bunch of Westerners, or whatever, there. You get the impression that these

people are doing it themselves, and perhaps even they've been brought to this point, but now they're on their own and doing it on their own . . . you get a sense from this that they're more self-sufficient, teaching each other, learning together.

Nonetheless, the fact that Bill wondered whether the represented persons had "been brought to this point" (the College, is, in fact, a grassroots community development initiative) proves the naturalization of the ideology that developing countries need Western intervention, even to help themselves. There is, obviously, still a long way to go in changing the conventional development discourse, making Good Evidence's work to "facilitate communication towards breaking down binaries and harmful representations" (Good Evidence, n.d., About Us section) essential. This "dichotomy between us and them" is also problematic for Ann, who has spent time travelling and volunteering in South Africa. "I think the biggest thing about development is that it's 'us helping them,'" she said. "Number 4 I find the least offensive [of the images viewed] because it doesn't seem like you're looking in or you're outside." Promisingly, Metta's interpretation of the image broke free of the conventional discourse and recognized the women's power:

> I'm glad for these ladies. They look like successful village women who are having a good time doing just what they are supposed to be doing. They could be successful business women, you know. They look competent, they look really on top of things—good for them! I would say this is the way development ought to work."

"Women repairing a hand pump" exemplifies Elliott's (2003) assertion that if a medium's social function and content producers' role-related responsibilities can be met without the use of a harmful image, the less justified, and therefore less ethical, the use of a harmful image. In this case, the photographer constructed a representation that, if used for fundraising purposes, would still motivate viewers to donate while avoiding literal or symbolic stereotypes and challenging the predominant rescue narrative of conventional development representations.

Conclusion: The Problem with the Rescue Narrative

If, as Foss (1994) posits, images should be judged by their communicative effects, then my social semiotic analysis and interviews have demonstrated that some visual representations of the developing world are indeed "harmful"—whether they achieve their purposes or not—because they perpetuate colonial discourse by representing others as not like us. But to truly reflect, as Foss suggests, on the communicative effects' "legitimacy or soundness determined largely by the implications and consequences of those functions" (p. 309), then it is necessary to evaluate the ethical and political implications of relying on "conventional" images.

Photojournalists argue that they have a responsibility to document. It is important not to deny that some people are in need, and that this message needs to be communicated. But journalists also have a responsibility to tell the truth. By only showing one narrative, the truth can be denied, the viewer misled by omission. Disaster images, for example, rarely show local people helping each other. Is this truth? The ACIC[23] cites former Oxfam emergency program coordinator and *The Selfish Altruist* author Tony Vaux, who claims that

> Ninety percent of the people saved are saved by their neighbours and family, 10 percent by people who rush in from round and about, and about 0.01 percent by people who come in from the other side of the world. (as cited by ACIC, n.d, p. 4)

Western media and charities have deprived viewers of accurate information of the developing world by not providing a balance in the representations they produce and disseminate. VSO (2001) proved that conventional images had led to one-dimensional thinking, and my pilot study showed that for the most part respondents had a "helpless victim" perception of the developing world. Allen's (2001) photographs of Krushe e Vogel showed it is possible to document suffering without depicting it at all, instead depicting the collective capacity and action of its

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[23] Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

"victims." And the *Times* photo referenced by Kozol (2004) showed it is possible to document violence while replacing a stereotypical narrative (Palestinian as terrorist) with one rarely seen (Palestinian as father or child)." As Elliott (2003) argues, if a role-related responsibility can be accomplished without the use of a harmful image, its use is unjustified and thus unethical.

It is just as important not to deny that some people are in need, and that funds are needed to help them, but, again, it has been shown that the use of harmful images for fundraising purposes may not be justified. Radley and Kennedy (1997) found that, at least for an educated audience, it was possible to communicate need without depicting suffering, while my study found that need does not have to be depicted at all to elicit a charitable response. Four of my five respondents would donate to the women depicted at The Barefoot College; as in Radley and Kennedy's study, signifiers of self-determination motivated giving for some viewers. The larger charitable organizations have claimed that they use images of helplessness and suffering because they raise more money, but Radley and Kennedy's results and mine show that such images sometimes result in resentment, and worse, apathy. In addition, the viewer is directly harmed by other negative emotions that they are rhetorically manipulated to feel, including, for my respondents, sadness, despair, and anger.

Charities also argue that they have a responsibility to send as much money as possible to the developing world, and therefore raising money is more important than the dignity of represented persons. Plewes and Stuart (2007) disagree, and furthermore argue that any additional funds raised via "victim" images are not worth the long-term consequence of their use to the eradication of poverty. Conventional images, Plewes and Stuart argue,

> undermine NGO's efforts to create a broader understanding of the underlying structures that cause poverty and injustice. They ignore Northern complicity in creating inequality. At the very least these images convey a limited picture of life in Southern countries. At their worst, they reinforce racist stereotypes. (p. 24).

Any one image on its own is not necessarily harmful, but images become problematic when together they tell only one story. When asked what ideas of the developing world were portrayed by the images in front of him, Paulo described children living "without infrastructure," often with "nothing," sometimes with "no hope," but always in need, usually of "everything." Only Figure 4 communicated otherwise. Furthermore, the study confirmed that the prevalence and naturalization of this narrative does create a limited picture of the developing world. Even Paulo, who is from a developing country, while noting that "there's more to Africa," such as cities and natural resources, cited resource exploitation by "corrupt governments." Others perceived the developing world as a "dangerous" and "disorganized mess," where starving "black" children "with distended bellies" are rescued by Western aid organizations or militaries, their efforts hampered by "dictatorships" and militias. The real harm in this perception is that viewers are not even conscious that this "knowledge" is both incomplete and a construction.

Rhetorical persuasion relies on an emotional, rather than analytical, response, triggered by the use of a symbol for an abstract value (Hill, 2004). Conventional images of suffering used by disaster photojournalists and for fundraising by charities espousing what Plewes and Stuart (2007) call a "hand-out" rather than "a hand-up" model evoke compassion based on a shared cultural value of humanitarianism. But Lister and Wells (2001) remind us that while we may identify with the represented person on some level, e.g., as a woman or mother in the case of Figure 1, "our position is as virtual tourist, Western outsider, as onlooker" (p. 86). A more insidious value they argue is symbolized by these images is "the reassurance of otherness and our safer social and political location" (p. 86) through the symbolic positioning of the represented person as clearly "not-like-us" (van Leeuwen, 2000, p. 339), a positioning confirmed in my visual analysis. Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano suggests that images of poverty

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offer the privileged

> a source of morbid pleasure . . . at the sight of the dark-skinned wretched, forsaken by God and pissed on by dogs, anybody who is nobody confidentially congratulates himself: life hasn't done too badly by me, in comparison. Hell serves to confirm the virtues of paradise. (as cited in Strauss, 2003, pp. 6-7)

As van Leeuwen (2000) argues, placing people in roles symbolically excludes them from others, and while subservient or negative roles are not necessarily racist, "as soon as *racially* categorised people are shown in roles of this kind it becomes racist and realises the specific themes of racist discourses" (emphasis in original, p. 343). Application of van Leeuwen's model of analysis to "Starving child in Sudan" confirmed documentation compromised by visual racism reflecting the legacy of the racist discourse of imperialism: colonized peoples were other, Africa the Dark Continent. Racist representations may even "cast a demeaning light upon [represented persons'] . . . ontological status as human beings" (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005, p. 262). Dr. David Keen of the Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, states that "if the only thing you get is the negative stories, you become inured and people seem less human—they are either emaciated victims or violent and evil" (as cited in VSO, 2001, p. 11). Andreina confirmed that the children in "Starving child in Sudan" *looked* less human: "They don't look human, they don't look human, it's just—so sad."

While respondents may not have recognized racist stereotyping specifically or its effect on their own perceptions, we should not assume that represented persons do not recognize "having been harmed" (Elliott, 2003, p. 8). Fernando (2010) reminds us that "people in disaster-stricken communities also watch international news, and they see how they are portrayed" (p. 4). The result, he says, may be invoked memories of colonialism, for example, or a fuelling of well-placed anti-Western sentiment "in ways detrimental to positive international assistance efforts" (Fernando, p. 4). Canadians of African descent also see how Africa is

portrayed in the media, and know that the persistence of negative images of Africa "may fuel

racist attitudes not only towards Africans, but towards Canadians of African origin" (CCIC,

2008, p. 3). Although Canada has an official policy of multiculturalism, Zambian-born

sociologist Omega Bula (2002) says that even within these seemingly inclusive "power

structures," African-Canadians who are contributing to Canada face stereotyping created largely

by negative media representations.[24] The result, she says, is

> serious dysfunction for people of African ancestry, including immigrants, academics,
> business people, students and especially women. The implications of the media
> stereotypes are serious and affect race relations, education, employment, equal
> opportunity policies and laws and the image of African peoples living in Canada. (n.p.)

Just as racist stereotypes threaten Canada's multicultural ideal, they also threaten efforts

to foster critical awareness and to create "an engaged and active citizenry committed over the

long term to effective strategies for poverty reduction and social justice" (Plewes & Stuart, 2007,

p. 36). Plewes and Stuart argue that "despite more than thirty years of action, and some progress,

the public still has little understanding of the issues, urgencies, and realities of international

development" (p. 36). Simplified representations such as images of people as helpless victims

"perpetuate a myth that development problems can only be solved by Northern charity" (CCIC,

2008, p. 5). Furthermore, by denying the diversity and complexity of situations—ongoing crises

cannot be documented in all their complexity by the photographer flown in on a one- or two-day

assignment—they promote supposedly simple solutions rather than systemic ones. As one

respondent said of Figure 6 (see appendix), "It seems like now that Angelina Jolie's there they'll

be saved," and another of Figure 5, "The message it's conveying is that 'You too can'—when I

say this I'm probably quoting something I heard, but—'You too can bring a smile to a child's

face.'" CIDA's 2004 study of Canadians' attitudes toward development assistance found that

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[24] Bula works with the United Church of Canada on racial justice.

"seventy-seven percent of Canadians feel that giving money to international or Canadian organizations working in poor countries are [*sic*] the most effective ways for Canada to help people in poor countries" (p. 5).[25] Another "17 percent believe that giving money directly to governments or organizations in poor countries would be effective" (CIDA, p. 5). Elliott (2003) argues that direct harm can include depriving another of opportunity, and the helpless victim narrative perpetuates the "hand-out" rather than "hand-up" model that supports community development initiatives with emancipatory potential. Furthermore, society is harmed when stereotypes perpetuate an imbalance in world power structures by undermining long-term change. The only way to eliminate poverty, Plewes and Stuart argue, is understanding and transformation of "global political and economic relationships" (p. 36).

Plewes and Stuart (2007) have further criticized some development organizations' "clashing approaches": education, policy, and advocacy work that challenges the structures causing inequality while fundraising with harmful images that perpetuate the helpless narrative. My respondents' comments reflected that dichotomy, showing on one hand, the naturalization of the "people in need" narrative of harmful imagery, and on the other, some understanding that all is not well with the hand-out charitable model. One concluded that

> these people need help right now, right away, but you have to go to the root of the problem. If you're not doing that, it's a solution for today, but next week it's gonna be the same. And next generation. It's not right. You're not doing the right job. To do that you have to go to the next level. You have to talk with government, with the multinationals. Shouldn't charity, non-profit organizations go to that point too?

Another wondered how to be "most helpful":

> There's nothing in these pictures that say what to do for them. These do not give me a sense that development is a simple matter, that it's working—with the exception of number 4. If we could say that donating money would work, we oughtta all be donating

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[25] The government-supported Canadian International Development Agency engages in policy development in Canada and internationally. See www.acdi-cida.gc.ca

money, and dignity or no dignity, you do what can to keep people alive. But trouble is, it doesn't usually work. And that I don't have answers for.

This study did not set out to address that dilemma. Instead, it sought to discover what messages are communicated by conventional representations of development and the developing world, and how, and whether those messages might make some representations "harmful" as argued by Good Evidence. The results, while tentative, provide evidence that makes it reasonable to predict that the audience, the represented persons, and society will be directly or indirectly harmed by the use of images that perpetuate negative and racist stereotypes. And according to Elliott's (2003) framework, that makes any producer or distributor of such imagery "morally blameworthy" (p. 14) for the harm caused. If media and hand-out charitable organizations have their own agendas of selling chaos and need for marketing, financial, or "the public needs to know" ends—all morally irrelevant, Elliott says—then it is left to organizations who truly want to eradicate poverty to research alternatives that work and that encourage long-term donors.

Furthermore, this study sought to denaturalize what is unproblematically accepted by the public, and to politicize the problematic. Simplified representations of poverty and suffering elide "real-world politics such as violence, war, terror, domestic coercion, famine" (Bal, 2006, p. 103), and by doing so, they

> may elicit pity, sorrow, or guilt in their viewers, but they will never provide information for change. They only work to reinforce the construction of the center and the periphery; north and south, rich and poor, superior and inferior. It cannot be otherwise. (Strauss, 2003, p. 45)

Only by showing a more complex truth can representations of the developing world "bring about shifts in public awareness and understanding, both intellectually and affectively, of political issues" (Bal, p. 101). As Paulo concludes, "They have to get closer to the real picture of what's going on. It's not always the same. There are different needs, and different circumstances, and different kinds of people too."

Implications

The results of the current study, while tentative due to its scope and limitations—e.g., the small sample size, the use of convenience sampling, and respondents' tertiary education and developing world experience—nonetheless have implications for photojournalism and for charity fundraising. Respondents' comments confirmed that conventional images of the developing world often deny the agency of represented persons by perpetuating a rescue narrative, and visual analysis showed that such images can also communicate symbolic messages of othering. Although respondents may not be conscious of these symbolic messages, analysis of interview transcripts identified themes of othering. The worst representations such as "Starving child in Sudan" may even result in viewer apathy, negating their effectiveness as fundraising tools. "Women repairing a hand pump," an alternative representation of the type that Good Evidence argues can challenge the helplessness and destitution narrative, was viewed positively by all respondents; promisingly, four out of five said they would donate money if the image was used in a fundraising capacity.

Plewes and Stuart (2007) note that while many charitable organizations have moved away from what they call "the pornography of poverty," it is still used, "especially for disaster relief and child sponsorship" (p. 29) fundraising and especially by the larger organizations that have the financial resources to advertise on television and in newspapers.[26] Unfortunately, as proved by VSO's (2001) respondents, its impact on public perception in these media is considerable. Child-sponsorship organizations, which generate the most revenue from the public, also have the financial means to invest in research into the effectiveness of alternatives to

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[26] Also known as "poverty porn" or "poornography"; a derogatory term development practitioners use for "the worst of images that exploit the poor for little more than voyeuristic ends and where people are portrayed as helpless, passive objects" (Plewes & Stuart, 2007, p. 23).

poverty porn, but, say Plewes and Stuart,

> They tell us that these images of misery and passive victimization generate much more in donations than alternatives they have tested and that it is vital to raise large amounts of money to be able to carry out their relief and development work. (p. 30)

Plewes and Stuart report, however, that several organizations participating in a CCIC working group of fundraising professionals have noted that poverty porn may generate "one-off contributions" (p. 36), but these do not convert to long-term donors. If this is the case, surely it is in the long-term interest—and, as Elliott (2003) would argue, the ethical responsibility—of even the largest organizations to look at alternatives, especially if viewer apathy and ever-increasing competition may also lead to lost revenue.

McKee (2003) suggests that the way to prevent "the response of turning the page or flipping the channel to avoid dealing with the real issues" (p. 164) is to find different ways to show the truth, jarring the viewer into a more active reading. Andreina, who plans to work as a communications professional in the non-profit sector, was "sure these big, big organizations have people studying how people get impacted" by different kinds of images:

> That would be very interesting, to work for an organization and try to find what are the things that people really get impacted by. What would work more? Would they get very compassionate about a picture and they will help, or will they just look, feel sad and not do anything, will they just not care?

Non-sponsorship organizations do not have the revenue of sponsorship agencies, and thus cannot devote resources towards researching alternatives to poverty porn; Plewes and Stuart (2007) suggest that these smaller organizations pool their resources to do so. The results of my pilot study indicate that it is possible for alternatives to "show the truth" and motivate viewers to take action, making it worthwhile for an organization or group of organizations to expand the study, possibly incorporating insights from social marketing research.

In the meantime, van Leeuwen's (2000) model of analysis provides a useful "vocabulary"

for journalists and for the communications and fundraising staff of charitable organizations, especially those coming from the private sector (Gidley, 2004). The visual analysis component of this study has demonstrated that unfamiliarity with semiotic meanings can compromise both valid documentation and fundraising efforts, meaning that visual literacy "will begin to be a matter of survival . . . in the workplace" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 3). As also demonstrated, it can produce harmful representations, and as Kress and van Leeuwen warn, "not being 'visually literate' will begin to attract social sanctions" as visual communication becomes "less and less the domain of specialists, and more and more crucial in the domains of public communication" (p. 3). Professional rhetors and photojournalists have a responsibility to become not only visually, but ethically, literate and to understand the implications of the images they use. As Tillim (2009) reminds us, representation is never neutral. It "involves an act of interpretation," the usefulness of which is dictated not by the subject matter but by "a question of character" (n.p.).

Appendix: Images Referenced

The image titles below were gleaned from viewer responses and exemplify conventional categories of representations associated with disaster reporting or charitable fundraising (especially by child-sponsorship organizations).

Figure 1. The "art shot" (or, per Bal, "the aestheticization of suffering"), Sudan, 1998. Reprinted from *iWITNESS* by T. Stoddart, 2004, London: Trolley Books. Retrieved from www.tomstoddart.com/iwitness.html. Copyright 2006 by Tom Stoddart.

Figure 2. The "sad child," taken for NGO ActionAid in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2004. Reprinted from Kate Holt Photojournalist, by K. Holt, 2004, Retrieved from www.kateholt.com/galleries/ngo/action-aid. Copyright 2004 by Kate Holt.
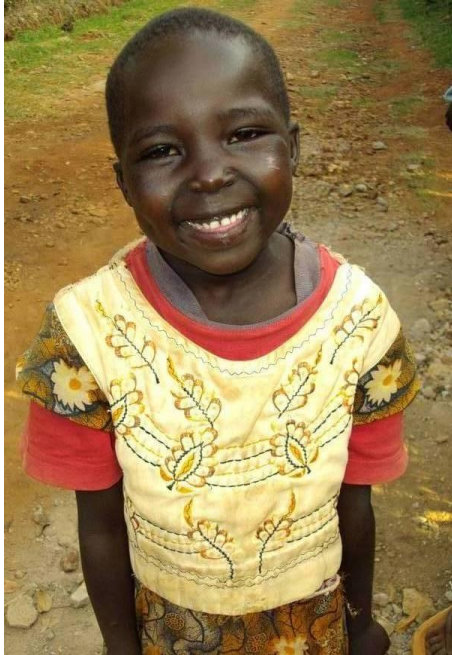
Figure 5. The "smiling child," found on Toby Tanser's website, a vehicle to collect used shoes for his Shoe4Africa charity, 2010. Reprinted from Tanser.Org, Photographer unknown, 2010, Retrieved from www.tanser.org/smileyfaces2010.jpg. Copyright 2010 by Toby Tanser.

Figure 6. The "celebrity saviour," a.k.a. UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie, visits Oure Cassoni refugee camp, Chad, 2007. Reprinted from Photography by Per-Anders Petterson, by P.-A. Pettersson, 2007, Retrieved from www.peranderspettersson.com/#/on-assignment/darfur-refugees/RPChad001. Copyright 2009 by Per-Anders Petterson.

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