

LESSON 4.4

DEVELOPMENT AND OUTRAGE PORN

There is a worldwide belief that in order to raise funds, it is necessary to play on people's emotions and therefore use images that evoke emotions (sympathy, pity, etc.). Such images promote the horrors of poverty, public sympathy, and encourage donations. Pornographic images of poverty are thus helpless, suffering victims, robbed of all dignity, especially children.



Photo source: <https://roape.net/2021/07/08/famine-and-ethiopia-colonial-legacies-and-global-power-structures/>

There is, however, a significant difference between the standards of use of the images - it would be outrageous if such undignified images were to appear in the campaigns of organisations that raise funds to help the poor in the North, while it remains standard practice to help the poor in the South, and it can be seen on various posters of major humanitarian organisations in this country too.

Now let us analyse the above photograph of Bob Geldof on one of his humanitarian expeditions. The photograph is an example of the binary division between us and them. WE (humanitarian organisations, individuals, celebrities, people of the Global North) are shown as active, big saviours, while THEY (people of the Global South, NGOs) are shown as passive recipients of aid. Bob Geldof is shown as active, powerful, with pity in his eyes. He is physically superior to all other people, who are portrayed as infantile and inferior in relation to him.

Telling someone else's story on their behalf disempowers them, and the balance of power immediately increases in favour of the narrator - the simplistic presentation of a complex situation leads to a sense of superiority and inferiority, as the global South is presented as a childish, enslaved and static country that cannot help itself, while the West is given a distinctly paternal role. The focus is on the victims of poverty, not on the political reasons that actually cause poverty.

It is therefore about depoliticising poverty - campaigns often portray poverty as a natural state of a country, as an isolated case, not as a social problem caused by power imbalances or a problem that requires a critical assessment of our own situation. The feel-good factor of donating money is a quick and easy solution for people in the Global North, it gives us a sense of agency, but it does not encourage us to reflect on our role in perpetuating poverty. They distract attention from social and human rights problems, as images and videos "evoke emotion without understanding, charity without structural change". We need to be aware that this portrayal of developing countries or the so-called Global South is only one part of the reality. If we frame only one part of the picture and show it again and again, as often as possible, in the end this part of the picture will become the only reality that influences our perception of the Global South (see recommended lit., p. 13).

Questions for reflection on the photo above:

- *Does this kind of humanitarian aid really work?*
- *Does a photo like the one above show the truth?*
- *What is the context?*
- *Who is represented in an active role and who in a passive role?*

Portraying people and situations without context in a very simplistic way is also called outrage discourse, outrage media and outrage journalism (also outrage porn). It is any type of media or narrative that is designed to use outrage to provoke strong emotional reactions for the purpose of expanding audiences, whether traditional television, radio, or print media, or in social media with increased web traffic and online attention. The term *outrage porn* was coined in 2009 by political cartoonist and essayist Tim Kreider of *The New York Times*.

FURTHER THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

- *Reframing the message*, https://www.bridge47.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/reframing_the_message.pdf (page 13)

- *Outrage porn*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outrage_porn

- Watch this [short video](#) from Médecins sans frontières / Doctors without borders, one of the leading humanitarian organizations, that explains the **importance of messages in photos and videos** used and apologises for their history of previous campaigns using "white saviour" images.

In case you signed up to the course only for Part I, we would like to congratulate you for coming to the end of module 2.

Next lessons in the module are open to read and watch but are primarily aimed at those who signed up for the whole course and will be also co-creating the stories of climate migration.