

# The politics of social justice: A visual and verbal analysis of *poverty* in the news

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## Abstract

In 2005, the *Make Poverty History* campaign gained media attention as an attempt to articulate the possibility of ending a form of structural and economic violence: poverty. The campaign sought to involve the public in a more active role in relation to this issue. This paper looks at how poverty was represented in the media during this campaign from a critical discourse perspective. Using Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) framework for analyzing the discursive strategies of visual images, the paper discusses how the issue of poverty was constructed and problematized in newspapers and magazines. In addition to the analysis of visual semiotics, a corpus of news articles over the same period of time was constructed and analyzed.

The analysis focused on patterns of usage of the word *poverty* using various concordance analyses. I will argue that both the visual and linguistic analysis of these texts shows how the dominant discourse of charity reinforces a traditional orientation to poverty, which is distanced and at odds with the discourse of activism. This textual problematization of poverty creates an effective barrier to looking at systemic causes and solutions, and therefore, reinforces the dominant ideology of developed countries when representing this issue in the media.

It then relates the visual and verbal semiotics of the texts to the characteristics of peace journalism (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), with respect to the representation of social actors, their relationship to the reader, the degree of contextualization and the truth-value of the reporting. The paper concludes that despite attempts to re-position the issue, the media's discursive strategies evoke a discourse of charity as opposed to the desired outcome of activism.

## 1. Introduction

The complex problems in Africa, such as poverty and disease, have typically been portrayed at once as being distant and removed from the average newspaper or magazine reader in the UK or North America, while at the same time arousing sympathy and pity through the striking visual images of starving or sick children. This type of representation has served to enforce a safe social distance from the affected areas, while simultaneously creating an emotional appeal for help from viewers in Western countries. It has positioned the issue in such a way that the causes and complexities of the problem are obfuscated behind a veneer of pity, asking for charity, rather than understanding and responsibility from the world community. As Lister & Wells (2001: 78-79) point out in their analysis of visuals from a cultural studies perspective,

...the manner in which famine is represented ignores the role of capitalism and the history of imperialism in bringing about a situation whereby African economies are crippled by long-term debt repayments, the use of fertile soil to grow cash crops for export, and dependency on short-term emergency aid.

Recently an attempt to re-position this issue in the media has been made with the *Make Poverty History* (MPH) campaign of 2005. The campaign, started by a Christian Aid Funding Coalition, was announced in late 2004 and declared the ambitious goal it was named after, for the year 2005. The campaign included a number of high profile media events in 2005, such as the selling and wearing of white wristbands for fundraising, the LiveAid concert in London, promoted by rock stars Bono and Bob Geldof to generate funds and attention, and a large protest near the G8 summit in Scotland. The MPH campaign was also actively taken up by Tony Blair as part of his agenda for the G8 summit and by the creation of the Commission on Africa to support fair trade practices, debt relief and aid. Both of these government initiatives were linked to the Millennium Development Goals set forth by the United Nations (one of which is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015) and were seen as Blair's response to these goals.

The MPH campaign aimed to constitute a fundamentally different discourse about poverty than had ever been heard before, and the high profile of all the events in the media in 2005 guaranteed that this discourse was heard by many. This discourse problematized poverty as an issue that had a solution, which could be achieved through the involvement of the public to buy and wear the wristbands, attend the concert, and make their voices heard to governments of other countries by protesting at the G8 summit. This type of active involvement from the public was different from passive appeals for charity that have characterized NGOs such as *Save the Children*. It endeavoured to involve readers in a participatory manner, as activists, in terms of achieving solutions, but in order to achieve this a different understanding of an abstract word like *poverty* needed to be discursively constructed in the media.

Abstract terms like *poverty* and *peace* represent complex social phenomena involving a myriad of social actors, relationships, causes and agendas. Yet the

construction of these issues in the news media often isolates them from the daily reality of viewers, and frames them in oversimplified ways.

The way planners, development actomaniacs and politicians living off global poverty alleviation campaigns are presenting their case, give the uninformed public a distorted impression of how the world's impoverished are living their deprivations. Not only are these people presented as incapable of doing anything intelligent by themselves, but also as preventing the modern do-gooders from helping them (Rahnema, 1992).

Contextualization is necessary to create a deeper understanding, but is often considered antithetical to immediacy, and can be construed as holding a biased position by journalists. The media's pervasive influence on how global events in distant places are conceptualized and presented is a conspicuous component in creating understanding about issues for readers, and for soliciting action. No report can tell the whole story of any event; it inevitably suppresses as much as it reveals. As Caldas-Coulthard (2003) points out, news is the recontextualization of an event. Through a series of choices including sources, perspectives, content and opinions made by reporters, photographers and editors, a cultural construct of the event is formed and communicated to the reader.

It's those decisions, above all, that control access to the information and communications and, in the process, construct the world around us. But journalism is stuck in the reality-based community of empiricism, still trying to convince us that it is 'up to' nothing more than sending reporters out with a blank page, to reflect what they see and hear. (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: xvii)

In order to better understand how complex world issues are communicated and how readers conceptualize these issues, more attention needs to be paid to how the issues are constructed in media discourse.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Poverty as structural violence**

Poverty is a form of structural violence that is the result of unjust economic and social practices. This view of poverty comes from the field of peace studies research and the definition of peace put forth by Galtung (1969) and Curle (cited in Fiske & Schellenberg 2000: 20-22), and elaborated by other scholars (Reardon, 1993). It starts with the definition of peace as having two dimensions: negative and positive. Negative peace refers to how most people use the word in their ordinary speech: the absence of war or what is known as direct, physical violence. But the absence of war is not enough to ensure that people can live in relationships that allow for equal access to resources, and support humans living to their potential with dignity. For this to occur, there also

needs to be positive peace, which is conceived of as the conditions that allow for mutually beneficial relationships for all to occur. In this expanded definition of peace, violence is then seen as any kind of intentional or avoidable harm (Reardon, 1993) and can take many forms such as: direct, structural, economic, gender, interpersonal, social and cultural. These manifest themselves in many forms such as systemic and discriminatory policies, racism and sexism. In the case of structural violence this can be seen in social practices and structures which cause harm to victims, such as the system of slavery, gender inequality or poverty.

Reardon points out that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be used as a diagnostic tool in assessing the conditions necessary for positive peace.

Positive peace requires the reduction and elimination of structural violence, the violation of life and well-being that derives from social and economic institutions. Should we need indicators of the conditions of justice and equity that comprise positive peace, we need only refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for an inventory of factors that deny human freedom and impede the fulfillment of security needs (Reardon, 1993).

It also provides an alternative framework for constructing these issues, in that they are not conceived of as natural results of 'the system' but are seen as violations of fundamental human rights. As mentioned previously, poverty and many other human rights issues are usually not constructed in this manner by the media, leaving audiences with a distorted sense of the issue. Poverty is often constructed as a natural part of modern life that involves some element of choice or will on the part of the participants. It is not seen as a systematic discrimination of human rights based on economic and social structures and practices.

## **2.2. Peace journalism**

Peace Journalism is a relatively new journalistic concept, first put forth by Galtung (1992) and recently elaborated by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). It looks at the journalistic practices and conventions which are typically used when reporting conflict and which constitute how the story is framed. It eschews classical liberal 'freedom of the press' notions of objectivity with an aim of providing more balance, fairness and accuracy to the reporting of conflict. As such it can be considered a more socially responsible approach to reporting which could be expected to include a human rights based approach when reporting structural violence such as poverty.

Based on theories of conflict analysis and transformation, peace journalism seeks to value non-violent responses to conflict by including other contextual features and framing the conflict as a multi-party situation with a variety of possible outcomes, instead of as a two-party win-lose conflict characteristic of war journalism (see Table 1 below). This journalistic model holds that the construction of conflict has consequences for how the public, and actors in the conflict, conceive future courses of action. If all reporting is in fact unbiased, then conflict coverage oriented towards non-violent and

developmental responses can be a remedy for systematic shortcomings or distortions in coverage, arising out of patterns of omission and marginalisation.

Table 1. Peace/War Journalism  
Original Johann Galtung chart, adapted by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005)

PEACE/CONFLICT JOURNALISM	WAR/VIOLENCE JOURNALISM
<p><b>I. PEACE/CONFLICT-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explores conflict <i>formation</i>, x parties, y goals, z issues</li> <li>• general ‘win, win’ orientation</li> <li>• open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture</li> <li>• making conflicts transparent</li> <li>• giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</li> <li>• see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</li> <li>• humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons</li> <li>• <i>proactive</i>: prevention before any violence/war occurs</li> <li>• focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/ culture)</li> </ul>	<p><b>I. WAR/VIOLENCE ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on conflict <i>arena</i>, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war</li> <li>• general zero-sum orientation</li> <li>• closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</li> <li>• making wars opaque/secret</li> <li>• ‘us-them’ journalism, propaganda, voice, for ‘us’</li> <li>• see ‘them’ as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</li> <li>• dehumanization of ‘them’; more so the worse the weapon</li> <li>• <i>reactive</i>: waiting for violence before reporting</li> <li>• focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</li> </ul>
<p><b>II. TRUTH-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exposes untruths on all sides / uncovers all cover-ups</li> </ul>	<p><b>II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exposes ‘their’ untruths / helps ‘our’ cover-ups/lies</li> </ul>
<p><b>III. PEOPLE-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focuses on suffering all over; on women, aged children, giving voice to voiceless</li> <li>• gives name to all evil-doers</li> <li>• focuses on people peace-makers</li> </ul>	<p><b>III. ELITE-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focuses on ‘our’ suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece</li> <li>• gives name to their evil-doers</li> <li>• focuses on elite peace-makers</li> </ul>
<p><b>IV. SOLUTION-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace = non-violence + creativity</li> <li>• Highlights peace initiatives, also to prevent more war</li> <li>• Focuses on structure, culture, the peaceful society</li> <li>• Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation</li> </ul>	<p><b>IV. VICTORY-ORIENTATED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace = victory + ceasefire</li> <li>• Conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand</li> <li>• Focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society</li> <li>• Leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again</li> </ul>

This paper will look at both the visual and verbal modes of communication, to see how the abstract issue of *poverty* is framed in print media. In particular it will focus on the period of the MPH campaign to look at patterns of usage of the word *poverty*, and accompanying news photos to better understand how the media problematized poverty during the campaign, and to what extent these representations of structural violence can be seen as consistent with the peace journalism model for the reporting of violence. This paper will focus on three questions: (1) How was poverty constructed in the news media during the campaign? (2) What visual and verbal discursive strategies were used? (3) To what extent do the discursive strategies that were used, frame the issue from a socially responsible, human rights perspective, of the kind put forth by the peace journalism model?

This study is exploratory in that it attempts to create linguistic indicators, through corpus and multimodal analysis, of some of the characteristics of the peace journalism framework. Peace journalism was originally conceptualized to address how direct physical violence in conflict situations was reported in the media. This study is also an exploratory use of the framework to assess the level of social responsibility in the reporting of structural violence, such as poverty, through the linguistic indicators.

### 2.3 Previous research

The linkage between how social issues and conflict are communicated has been researched in various disciplines including media, cultural and feminist studies and applied linguistics. The approach used by Lister and Wells (2001) derived from cultural studies, and looked at visual culture through photographs. It analyzed how meaning and power relations were encoded in the photographic images and included a section on images of poverty. Many studies have used Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996, 2001) framework for multimodal analysis to examine how current social issues such as political conflict, current events, suffering, war and racism are constructed in the news (Chouliraki, 2006; Machin & Jaworski, 2006; Scollon, 2003; van Leeuwen, 2000; Wells; 2007). Wodak (2006) pointed out the need for analyzing photographs and images which serve as icons in global society, from a critical discourse perspective.

Corpus analysis has also been used to look at social issues, as in Baker & McEnery's (2005) study of the discourse of refugees in newspapers, and Hamilton *et al.*'s (2007) study of the meaning of 'risk' in ordinary language. Schaffner & Wenden's book *Language and Peace* (1995) examines the issues of social discrimination, war and ideology from a discourse perspective, and Wenden's more recent work (2003) continues to identify the need for a linguistic framework, such as critical discourse analysis, that identifies how language communicates ideologies in relation to issues of peace and social justice.

Since the concept of peace journalism is relatively new, research in this area is just beginning to grow and has mainly looked at how the mainstream media exhibits peace journalism characteristics, using content analysis techniques from the field of media studies (Lynch, 2006).

The discourse of poverty has also been the topic of research, but mostly in the field of international relations where Wilkin (2002) examined it in relation to discourses

of security, and by Jefferes (2002) who identified the colonial discourses that were evoked in charity fundraising campaigns. This paper situates itself as looking at the issue of poverty as a form of structural violence, in order to better understand how the conflict reporting techniques identified in the peace journalism framework construct this type of violence. In order to do this, it relies on linguistic indicators of the peace journalism characteristics using corpus and multimodal analysis.

### 3. Data

#### 3.1 The visual texts and analysis

Images report more than just factual reality; as van Leeuwen (2000: 335) says, “If images seem to just *allude* to things and ‘never say them explicitly’, we need to make these allusions explicit”. To explore the research questions, the analytical framework that will be used is Kress and van Leeuwen’s theory of visual communication (1996, 2001) which looks at the semiotic potential for communication of various semiotic modes other than language. The semiotic modes can be seen as systems of motivated signs which “have arisen out of the interest of social groups who interact within the structures of power that define social life, and also interact across the systems produced by various groups within society” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 159)

To address the conceptualization of the issue, the modality and composition of the visuals will be considered. Modality refers to the truth-value or credibility as depicted through the degree of naturalness in the visuals. It is realized through modes such as colour, degree of background detail, and contextualization of the visual elements. Aspects of the composition such as the information value created by the placement of images, salience of elements in the images, and the framing of elements will also be considered. The nature of the relationship between the reader and the depicted people that is constructed in the text will be analyzed by looking at the degree of social distance, the nature of the social relationship and the social interaction, as realized through the modes of camera distance, camera angle, and the gaze of the depicted people.

The visual texts chosen for this project are reproduced in the following pages. They come from two genres: newspaper articles and magazine covers. This paper will first consider two front-page stories on African poverty and illness from the UK daily newspapers, *The Guardian* and the *Independent*, that appeared on the same day near the beginning of the *Make Poverty History* campaign. These will be compared with each other, and with magazine covers from *Time* and *The Economist* on the same topic.

As mentioned, modality refers to the degree of naturalness in the picture and can influence how the proposition represented visually is perceived by the reader, in terms of being real, true and immediate (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In Figure 1 (from *The Guardian*), the modality is high by the use of natural colour and sharp focus, creating a high truth value, yet there is no recognizable background or contextual features to identify the situation or problem.

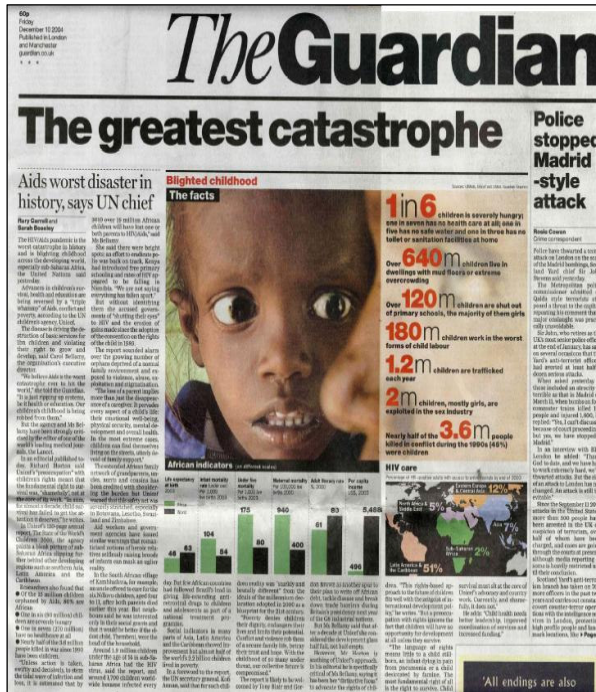


Figure 1. The Guardian Dec. 16, 2004

The image of the child is symbolically representative of the problem of poverty and illness, but is not differentiated as an individual by any name, title or other type of identification. Rather, the child is a generalized representation of a group that is defined only by the colour of their skin, and the sad expression on their face. The lack of any identifying detail in terms of clothing or background even obscures the sex of the child.

The composition of the picture shows a strong centre-orientation made by the child's face and signifying importance. Yet the extreme and blurred close-up of a nose on the right side of the frame also becomes salient through the vector created between the child's eyes and the nose. Although there are no discernible identifying features of the nose, its size gives it a connotative value of being an adult in comparison to the child, yet without any identifying features the relationship to both the child and the overall conceptualization is unclear. If we step back from the photographic visual and consider the other three graphic elements we can see the effect of what Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 186) refer to as Given-New placement value. Elements on the left side represent the status quo, or given conditions which the viewer is familiar with, whereas those on the right represent new, unknown or possibly problematic information. In Figure 1, the child, as a generic representation of the problem and the culture it is located within, represents the current condition, but interestingly is given less prominence than the table of statistics on the right. The numbers in this table not only represent high value knowledge in our market-driven society, but are given salience through the use of the colour red, their size, and the vector created by the gaze of the child to the right side. While this chart represents new and important factual information about the problem, it also serves to dehumanize it, by its prominence in relation to the photograph on the left.



Further, the three graphic visuals form a frame that encloses the human element of the photograph. This creates a kind of compartmentalization of the human aspect of the problem and distances the reader from it. The headline 'the greatest catastrophe' completes the boxing off of the human element and further depersonalizes it by the use of abstract naming. The use of the word 'catastrophe' implies that the situation is accidental or a natural phenomenon, as opposed to being the product of systematic practices of inequity.

The relationship with the reader is realized first through social distance, and the type of camera shot, which in this case is an extreme close-up. Images which are on the same plane as the viewer reinforce a sense of alignment between the depicted persons and the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 140). The social interaction between the depicted participants and the reader is realized through either direct or indirect gaze. Gaze can function as either a "demand" through direct visual engagement or as an "offer" of information through an indirect gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 126). Although less social distance is created by the extreme close-up, and a sense of alignment with the viewer, coming from the horizontal and frontal angle of the shot, the indirect gaze of the child inscribes the viewer into the interaction as an observer, not a participant. The reader, as observer to the situation in the photograph, is "offered" information with what, in linguistic terms, would be the equivalent of a declarative sentence. This makes the relationship less personal between the reader and the problem, and further emphasizes the value of the less human aspects of the problem as represented by the numbers on the right.

The cover story on *The Independent* (Figure 2, overleaf) offers a very different conceptualization of the issue. The photograph is much higher modality, and therefore has a higher degree of naturalness or truth. This is realized through the use of colour, clear focus, the amount of background and the context that are included in the photograph. The child is again alone, so serves to generically represent the problem, but some other cultural markers such as the landscape and the skull provide contextual elements, although they are not drawn together in a clear way, and therefore provide no narrative to the photograph. This creates a feeling of confusion for the reader in terms of the disparate nature of the elements that we would expect to see with a child, and again reinforces a distance. The composition of Figure 2 shows very strong centre-orientation in the photograph itself, but is also echoed and reinforced in the layout of the entire front page. This also serves to emphasize the Top-Bottom information values which Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 193) consider to represent the ideal and real. In their framework the top corresponds to the ideal or 'what might be' and is more emotive in nature, whereas the bottom represents reality or 'what is' and tends to be more informative.



Figure 2 – *The Independent* Dec. 16, 2004

The salient elements for both the photograph and the overall front page are the white skull, made prominent by its centre placement and white colour, and the numerical figure of 1 billion also made prominent by its size, placement and colour. The number represents high information value and factuality, but because of its centre and top placement it is given a heightened position of importance and symbolizes the possibility of what might happen in the future if the problem is not tackled. It is contrasted with the reality of the current situation, symbolized by the photographic image of the isolated child with a skull. This symbolizes the reality of the deaths that have occurred. Despite the emotional and exclamatory appeal of the number and the macabre skull, the lack of meaningful context in the picture reinforces the conceptualization of the problem from a results-oriented perspective, as opposed to explicating the contextual and contributing factors. This way of focusing the problem at once simplifies and distances it from complex interdependent relationships with countries outside of the immediately affected areas.

The relationship with the viewer is again a distant and passive one in Figure 2. The long shot, from a somewhat higher angle, distances the viewer and puts them in a position of power and non-alignment with the child. The child's indirect gaze positions the viewer as an observer and constitutes an 'offer' of information, but as shown above, this information is generalized and lacks contextual relevance and complexity in terms of explaining the nature of the problem. Therefore the role of the viewer in terms of action regarding the problem is also unclear. The generalization of the problem is further echoed in the headline, which uses the passive voice to emphasize the action of 'failure' by the world, but does not offer clear ideas of what constitutes this failure. The overall conceptualization of the issue focuses on results rather than the causes of the problem, and creates an essentially passive role for the

reader as observer. A human tragedy is cut off from the contextual factors that have created it, thus reducing the level of responsibility or connection to the readers' lives.

Figures 3 and 4 consider how another genre, magazine covers, approaches the issue of poverty in contrasting ways. In terms of modality, both covers are low modality but achieve this differently. The *Time* magazine cover (Figure 3) is black and white, but the focus is clear and it includes a fair amount of background as context. Although this detail enhances the photo's truth-value, the colour abstracts it from the world of the reader, and creates a distancing effect. *The Economist* cover (Figure 4), provides clear and naturalistic colour images, but they are completely decontextualized with no natural background included. This portrayal renders an abstract conceptualization of the problem that is not related to the reader's world or to the context in which the situation occurs.

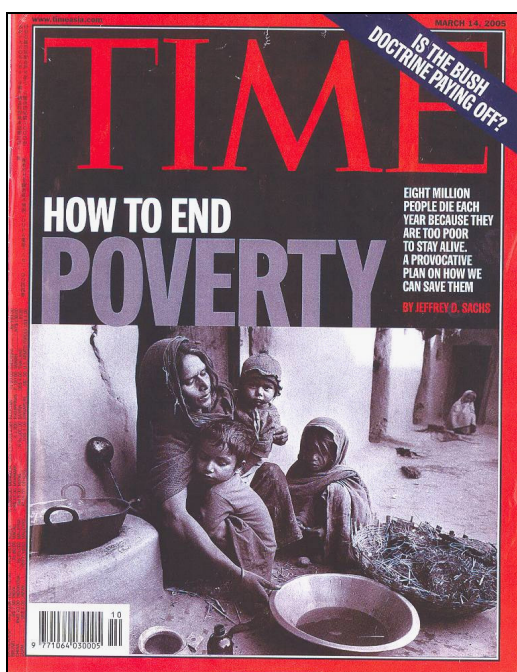


Figure 3. *Time* March 14, 2005

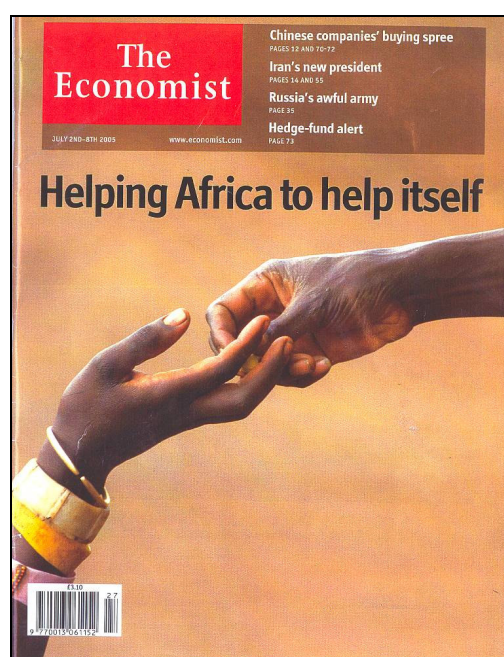


Figure 4. *The Economist* July 2, 2005

In terms of composition, Figure 3 again shows a centre-oriented composition, which, coupled with the use of black and white, gives an old-fashioned mood to the picture. This tends to reinforce the problem as being part of a backward country or area, and symbolically associates this notion with developing countries. The most salient aspect is the word 'poverty' because of its size and tight positioning over the photo. The grey colour causes it to blend into the picture and the strong vertical lines make it seem like it is part of the buildings in the picture. Its tight placement over the heads of the people in the photograph has an oppressive quality, since it does not allow for any 'head room'. Its dominance in terms of positioning and salience can also be read as symbolizing the superiority of literary skills over the lifestyle depicted in the photograph. Also of salience is the woman in the picture, because of the lighter tone of her skin and the fact that the letter 'V' points down towards her. She is also not distinguished as an individual, but as a generic representative of the problem.

However, the inclusion of background elements such as the buildings, bowls and other children create a narrative rather than symbolic representation of the issue.

The most striking aspect of Figure 3 is how the overall distant and removed impression of the issue, as shown above, is coupled with the text. The headlines 'How we can save them' and 'How to end poverty' are reminiscent of the genre of self-help literature, and construct a place of involvement for the reader, not through a command, but through a declarative statement which will provide the knowledge to remedy the problem. The use of 'we' is conspicuous in the sense of who is actually included. *Time* is aimed at upper middle-class, educated readers, presumably many of which would be involved in business. The 'we' that the magazine itself represents could be construed to mean the American publisher, advertizers and perhaps by extension, right leaning viewpoints which are represented by the magazine. This group of elite international business leaders represented by 'we' is clearly positioned in a dominant role over the image at the bottom. The bottom image represents the reality of the poverty, but is distanced and framed in a disconnected manner from the rest of the world community. The verbal text represents the superiority of knowledge and education, and informs of its ability to solve the problem. This presents an idealized solution through the top placement, as opposed to the helplessness as represented by the bottom image of the weakest members of society: women and children. The separation between 'we' and 'them' is further reinforced by the cause given for the problem in the headline on the right. In ascribing the reason for poverty to the victims themselves by '...they are too poor to stay alive' (Figure 3) it denies any responsibility for this situation to anyone outside the group constituted by 'they'.

The relationship between the depicted participants and the reader is one of distance where the reader is inscribed as an observer to the situation. The social distance is achieved through the use of a high-angle long shot, which positions the reader in a distant position of power towards the participants. The gazes of the participants are all indirect, which creates a visual 'offer' of information about the situation for the reader, but enforces the distant observational position. Only the smallest child in the middle of the image appears to be looking directly at the camera, which creates a 'demand' for help. Although the centre placement of the child gives it prominence, the relative size of the participant compared to other elements in the frame provides only minimal impact on the reader.

By contrast, Figure 4 in *The Independent* approaches the problem in a less oppressive manner. As mentioned above, the modality is higher because of the use of natural colour, but the absence of any background or context also creates a feeling of distance and a lack of connectedness between the issues of Africa and the rest of the world. The horizontal angle brings the reader into alignment with the issue, but the lack of detail makes this alignment seem more like a position of solidarity rather than responsibility for either the causes or solutions of the problem. The point where the hands touch is made salient through its centre-placement, and the lighter pink colour of the inside of the hands. Interestingly, the hands do not approach this meeting from equal positions, symbolizing a power difference between them. The absence of contextual details prevents an interpretation of that difference, and the images function as symbolic representations of the problem; however, a generalized cultural marker is

presented by the inclusion of the bracelets on the left side. From a Western perspective, the bracelets could be considered feminine, thus representing a correspondence between the lower, and weaker, left hand with bracelets as opposed to the more powerful, presumably male, right hand. The cultural marker could also be considered negative in another way, since it may be seen as being representative of primitive cultures. This undercuts the use of natural colour to create a more truthful and natural conceptualization of the issue, and ultimately achieves a similar effect to the use of black and white in reinforcing backward and primitive images of developing countries where poverty occurs.

Also, despite an effort to create an atmosphere of self-sufficiency for Africa by the propositional content of the headline and the choice of two black hands in the image, this is also undermined. The headline omits the subject of the sentence, which would presumably be 'we are'. There is an implication of another party's involvement that would be doing the 'helping'. The absence of this party being named directly does not negate its influence, nor minimize its position as being related to the resolution, but not the creation of the problem. By the same token, the text is placed in a dominant position over the image, as was seen in Figure 4, reinforcing the superiority of the agent doing the 'helping' as described in the headline. Because of the lack of any background detail, the verbal text in a sense speaks for the image in describing the significance of the image and what it is meant to symbolize. However, at the same time it reinforces a superior and literate ability, represented by the text and by extension the 'we' that is implied, over the image, which does not have words to speak for itself.

The relationship with the reader shows a decreased social distance by the use of a close up shot that it on the same plane as the reader. These two aspects of the image bring the reader close to the participants. However this is undermined significantly because there are no faces shown, so the reader is again 'offered' information as only an observer to the situation.

### 3.2 The corpus data

The corpus used for this analysis consisted of newspaper and magazine articles from three sources: *The Guardian* newspaper, *Time* and *The Economist* magazines. All of these publications devoted cover stories and other articles to the issue of poverty during the period when the MPH campaign was announced in December 2004, and leading up to the LiveAid concert and G8 summit in July 2005. These articles were collected from the three publications from December 10, 2004 until roughly July 10, 2005. Using the internet-based database *Proquest*, articles in these three publications were searched for, using the key word *poverty*, and then were included in the corpus. In this sense this is a specialized corpus dealing with *poverty*, since a pre-selection of material was used. Because of the large number of articles that included this word, it is inevitable that some of them were not dealing with the issue of African poverty. The corpus represents a sampling of print media discourse on the issue of *poverty* published during that time period and, as Baker (2006) points out, can provide only a broad overview of how the issue was discussed at that time. Various journalists with varying

viewpoints wrote the articles that were used, so the corpus cannot be considered to represent a coherent ideological viewpoint from any of the three publications.

Collocations and concordances will be analyzed in the news-poverty corpus to investigate and interpret various patterns of usage and what implications these might have for how readers interact with the issue of poverty through media texts.

### 3.3 The corpus analysis

The corpus of 192,811 words was analyzed using *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott, 1998). A quantitative collocation analysis was carried out on the news-poverty corpus to see what types of words were frequently associated with *poverty*, and if the associations tended to be negative or positive in nature (Table 2). The words most frequently used with *poverty* to the left tend to fall into two groups: those that are adjectives and describe types of poverty (*extreme, world, child, global, African*); and those that are verbs in the progressive tense (*eradicating, reducing, fighting, tackling, ending*), describing a process involving getting rid of poverty. Despite the fact that all of the verbs connote movement towards ending poverty, they are also somewhat extreme in nature and signify by their intensity that this is a difficult problem to deal with and to overcome. Some of the verbs such as *fighting, tackling and eradicating*, with *against*, also convey a sense of a battle.

Table 2. Collocates with *poverty* from news-poverty corpus

<i>Word one place to the left (#)</i>		<i>Word one place To the right(#)</i>
extreme (65)	poverty	
global (16)	poverty	
child (16)	poverty	
world (16)	poverty	
reducing (13)	poverty	
fighting (11)	poverty	
against (10)	poverty	
African (7)	poverty	
ending (7)	poverty	
reduce (7)	poverty	
eradicating (5)	poverty	
tackling (5)	poverty	
	poverty	reduction (26)
	poverty	line (6)
	poverty	alleviation (5)

Various concordance analyses were carried out in order to examine patterns of usage of the word *poverty* that would indicate how the issue is conceptualized. This type of qualitative analysis allows for a closer examination of how words are used in context (Baker, 2006). The concordances were cleaned, by eliminating any repetitions of text that had occurred when the corpus was compiled, leaving a total of 628 lines. The



corpus was then sorted in various ways to the right and left of the word *poverty* to investigate the contextual occurrences found in the collocations.

To investigate the *processes* that were found in the collocations (Figure 5a), the corpus was sorted by 1 place to the left and then 2 places to the left. As noted previously the use of the progressive tense gives the sense of an incomplete process that is being undertaken with regards to *poverty*. However another interesting feature is that all of the words that are used such as *eradicating, tackling, ending, and fighting* are words that would be used when discussing sicknesses or illnesses such as cancer or AIDS. A check of the BNC revealed that the most common collocates for *eradicating* includes diseases such as malaria, tumours and liver disease. The use of these types of words with *poverty* creates an image of it as a naturally occurring phenomenon, not a product of economic policies and practices. In this sense the causes are subsumed in the notion of needing to work hard to find a 'cure'. This essentially forward focus on the problem disavows liability for its genesis, and serves to disconnect it from the reader and their daily lives.

N	Concordance
71	ch will focus on tackling poverty, especially in Afr
72	eir promizes on tackling poverty in Africa." Christ
73	ct" methods of tackling poverty, such as subsidi
74	arshall plan" for tackling poverty and debt in Afric
102	was spent on reducing poverty. If Zambia is to
103	as focused on reducing poverty among children
105	declaration on reducing poverty and improving ed
106	e "miracles" in reducing poverty have occurred al
110	k of interest in reducing poverty and inequality. T
113	rship aimed at reducing poverty in Africa by enco
114	prove better at reducing poverty than despotism
363	lopment goals of halving poverty, heavy investme
364	s hence--include halving poverty and hunger, arre
406	evoting 2005 to fighting poverty, and has made
407	d committed to fighting poverty and championing

Figure 5a. Concordance of *poverty* sorted 1 and 2 places to the left – *Process*

Similarly, Figure 5b, which was also sorted one place to the left and 2 places to the left, shows how the metaphor of war and battle is revealed in the use of words like *war on, fight, beat* and *targets*. By positioning poverty as a natural enemy that is to be fought against, like a disease, it absolves society from identifying or accepting responsibility for the causes of the problem. The issue is seen as a natural enemy that must be conquered like *disease* in line 420, and as tenacious an enemy as *terrorism* in line 419.

N	Concordance
136	countries wage war on poverty and despair. We
137	ow to pay for the war on poverty. As well as the f
138	ht be won in the war on poverty in 2005. Some
139	ing up the global war on poverty in response to a
140	t is right to wage war on poverty and hardship as
141	lso announced a war on poverty and despair in th
144	nch a direct assault on poverty and unemploym
418	ocratic--it wants to fight poverty, not a false phil
419	ould join forces to fight poverty, terrorism and dr
420	issionaries there to fight poverty and disease, sta
421	eighbors, and also fight poverty in the places wh
503	big ideas for eliminating poverty and oversaw a h
548	irepower needed to beat poverty. In rich countries
553	such crucial targets as poverty, ill-health, educa
599	finance the fight against poverty. This would not
600	shed in the fight against poverty. In order to "ma

Figure 5b. Concordance of *poverty* sorted 1 and 2 places to the left – *Battle*

Poverty is also conceptualized as something that can be quantified according to some kind of measure or scale that does not reveal itself as being numeric. As shown in Figure 5c, which was again sorted one place to the left and 2 places to the left, various words are used to measure and quantify poverty, such as *extreme*, *absolute*, *relative*, *abject*, *relentless*, and *dire*. These seem to indicate levels of poverty, but are also very abstract terms so that the classification system remains elusive and interpretive according to the reader.

Although some of these modifiers, such as *extreme*, do refer to a specific index of poverty, this would probably not be known or clearly understood to the average reader. By being imprecise in its measurement, this system of classification serves to distance the reader and also to dehumanize the issue through the use of abstract modifiers that are typically used with other abstract ideas like *danger* or *fear*. This also brings a negative association to the issue.



N	Concordance	
91	g, abject and relentless	poverty and we have had
92	g, abject and relentless	poverty". He also promi
93	like moderate or relative	poverty, extreme poverty
94	like moderate or relative	poverty, extreme poverty
96	barely. Being in relative	poverty, defined by a ho
98	e their lives. But relative	poverty at home is not
182	composite measure of	poverty, ill health and b
185	shocked by the level of	poverty he saw. "We tak
202	ere are three degrees of	poverty: extreme (or abs
368	ians still live in grinding	poverty, making it the c
369	aving families in greater	poverty because of the l
426	cut the world's extreme	poverty in half by 2015,
427	n Africa, where extreme	poverty is concentrated.
428	bring an end to extreme	poverty and look forward
432	sia in reducing extreme	poverty between 1990 an
433	relative poverty. Extreme	poverty, defined by the
467	task of ending extreme	poverty is a collective on
472	choose to end extreme	poverty by the year 2025
475	e can describe extreme	poverty as "the poverty t
482	n of alleviating extreme	poverty and the reality:
508	e and this person's dire	poverty. If you sent it ba
509	grets. I know about dire	poverty. I saw it in Niger
515	s a recipe for deepening	poverty. Brown's only co
520	he Philippines' crushing	poverty. But these chan
619	y: extreme (or absolute)	poverty, moderate povert
620	opians living in absolute	poverty has fallen only sl
621	tic policy from absolute	poverty (now a rarity) to
625	break the grip of abject	poverty and avoidable su
626	people can live in abject	poverty with more dignity

Figure 5c. Concordance of *poverty* sorted 1 and 2 places to the left – *Quantity*

Poverty has an abstract spatial quality, as seen in how it is measured, and in that it seems to take up an area that people need to get *out of*. Figure 5d, which was also sorted one place to the left and 2 places to the left, shows that this idea of escaping some sort of container can apply to people or countries.

N	Concordance
159	a million children out of poverty - but not a singl
160	e. That is the way out of poverty and illness. That
166	ould take millions out of poverty. "Politics is abo
167	signed to lift them out of poverty." The company
168	00 million people out of poverty. These industria
170	very poor country out of poverty. But this is cert
172	easants to break out of poverty. They may accu
177	ocessing and get out of poverty as a result." Thi
179	uld help lift Africa out of poverty. The theory is t

Table 5d. Concordance of *poverty* sorted 1 and 2 places to the left – *Spatial*

A sorting of the concordances 1 place to the right and 2 places to the right of the word *poverty* revealed spatial classifications of the word *poverty* either as a *line* or a *trap* (Figure 5e). The use of the word *trap* connotes some form of agency in terms of how it was set, and the presumed effort that would be required to get out. Traps are not naturally occurring and connote intentionality. *Line* is a seemingly more neutral term in that it only signifies a dividing point; however, how the dividing point is assessed and by whom is conspicuous, and needs to be considered. In both cases, unspecified agents or forces have responsibility for the condition of poverty, but these are obfuscated from the readers' conceptualization of the issue through this indirect representation of the phenomenon. This has a distancing effect on how the issue is conceptualized by limiting any associations with how the situation has been created.

N	Concordance
28	ical Africa is caught in a poverty trap. Simply put,
29	ce Africa in a desperate poverty trap. Escaping w
192	pulation lives below the poverty line. U.N. High C
193	ians who live below the poverty line. Pessimists
194	lightly above the Bank's poverty line--remains a w
195	f people living below the poverty line, one-half in
196	rty (56% lived under the poverty line in 1993 com
197	ad been lifted above the poverty line already. The

Figure 5e. Concordance of *poverty* sorted 1 and 2 places to the right - *Line/trap*

## 4. Conclusion

Despite the increased focus on the issue of poverty in the media in an attempt to mobilize global awareness and action, the manner in which the problem is constructed can be seen as one of charity evoking discourses of colonialization. The problem is conceptualized in terms of its results, and makes no effort to link these with the daily living conditions of the reader, or of those affected. Although it is a human problem in terms of results, the economic conditions which cause it are not alluded to in these representations. The images foreground the results in terms of human suffering, but this suffering is seen as symbolic of backward cultures that lack skills and knowledge. The participants are generalized members of the affected communities, but they are effectively isolated and distanced from the readers of these publications, so that the readers' relationship to the problem is one of observer. This serves to diminish the possibility of illuminating complexities and interdependencies that involve developed countries in the problem. The continuing portrayal of the problems of poverty as distant regional issues, rather than as the effects of global economic inequalities, maintains the reader's position as observer, not activist, and maintains a safe social distance for the reader.

The social relationship with the participants that is depicted reinforces this distance by continually portraying the participants out of context and as icons of suffering, rather than as people living in regions where the economic realities are related to the global community. The distanced relationship with the readers as observers casts them in a more powerful position, giving them the ability to *help* the situation and the depicted people. Through both communicative modes, a colonial view of the issue is created that does not allude to global and historical responsibility, nor exhibit any possibilities for alternative ways of understanding or being involved in the issue.

This distancing effect is reinforced in the verbal analysis, by the construction of poverty as an enemy or disease which needs to be controlled. Poverty is made a problem that is separate from the reader by portraying it as 'the other' or an enemy, and agency or causality are not pursued. The increased use of war metaphors further emphasizes this construction.

The use of verbs in the progressive tense in the news-poverty corpus seems to be designed to involve the reader in the process of attacking poverty. Despite the place that is constructed for the reader by this feature, the conceptualization of the issue continues to lack specificity, and therefore does not allow the reader to make connections between poverty and aspects of their own daily lives. Abstract naming devices and quantifiers obfuscate clearer and more relevant explanations of the complexities of the issue.

Overall this construction of poverty does not frame it from a socially responsible perspective, in that it does not reflect a human rights approach to the problem. A human rights approach to the issue of poverty would acknowledge the denial of human dignity to those affected. Yet by verbally casting it as natural enemy this connection is not made, in the sense that it is not seen as a problem created by humans, or as the result of systemic inequalities. This is further achieved through a

lack of context, and the iconization of suffering that is seen in the visual images. The problem is represented largely in the here and now, with little reference to historic factors that have contributed to the inequalities. This limited time and space aspect of the problem focuses on the human results of the problem while at the same time largely removing the human causes. By doing so it objectifies those that it represents, which dehumanizes them and denies them a voice.

These characteristics of the reporting, which focus on only the visible effects of structural violence, and locate it within the closed time and space of the here and now, are consistent with what Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) identify as war journalism techniques (Table 1). Thus, despite the efforts to reposition the issue of poverty through the MPH campaign, it is still constructed as a distant yet, natural enemy that is removed from the lives' of readers and as such has much in common with the war journalism reporting techniques that are typically used when reporting the enemy as "the other" in conflict situations of direct violence.

This study can be considered exploratory both in terms of using linguistic indicators to describe the discursive characteristics of the peace journalism model, and in that it addresses the reporting of structural violence, within that framework. The multimodal and corpus analysis can give some insights into how this issue is discursively constructed, but further research would also need to involve close text analysis, and develop linguistic indicators for other aspects of the framework, to more fully explore and compliment these initial findings.

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