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The Production of Humanitarian Images and Portraying the Child in Need

This paper concerns the construction of the humanitarian image. It has been argued that the rise of NGOs has brought them to the point that they are the new institutions of representation. Despite academic criticism of the often stereotypical and one-sided representations of the majority world - both in media and campaigning images of NGOs, little change has been observed during this period of ascendancy. The images NGOs use, and those forming part of the international image economy are carefully planned and produced to achieve particular representation/s. The iconography of the child is one of the powerful tools in this process.

This paper discusses some of the complex processes of production of these images. The paper also touches on the question of how to incorporate majority world voices in these representations – in particular those of children, and if indeed there is such a thing as a ‘balanced advocacy image’? Ethnographic fieldwork from Bangladesh will be presented, as will the work of majority-world photographers and their efforts through photojournalism and commissioned assignments for international organisations.