

# THE PRODUCTION OF A CONTEMPORARY FAMINE IMAGE: THE IMAGE ECONOMY, INDIGENOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS AND THE CASE OF MEKANIC PHILIPPOS

D. J. CLARK\*

*Bolton Institute, Zhaoqing University, P. R. China*

---

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the photographic representation of disaster in the minority world. It argues that the international image economy has a strong influence on the content of the images produced; this is demonstrated through the analysis of Mekanik Philippos's image as published in the UK at the end of May 2003. The paper critically analyses images of a recent trip by Bob Geldof to Ethiopia in relation to the trade of photographs of the majority world in the international image economy, the photographer's ethnicity, issues of power, ethics and style and a particular public face of development. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

---

## INTRODUCTION

On Monday 26th May 2003 Sir Bob Geldof flew from London to Addis Ababa to begin a five day tour of the country. There was a drought in the horn of Africa and Ethiopia was once again dependent on food aid. Geldof's trip, facilitated by two international development agencies, was focused on using the media to persuade the G8 summit (scheduled to begin on the weekend following the visit) to discuss issues in Africa.

In this paper I will discuss photographs of Mekanik Philippos, a baby suffering from malnutrition at the Yirba therapeutic feeding centre near Aswan, taken and published worldwide in various forms by five press photographers who accompanied Geldof. The photographs of Philippos provide a good opportunity to examine a number of contemporary issues relating to the public face of development. The paper focuses on the photographic representation of disaster in the minority world<sup>1</sup> and critically analyses the images in relation to the trade of photographs of the majority world in the international image

---

\*Correspondence to: D. J. Clark, Bolton Institute, Zhaoqing University, Guangdong Province, P. R. China 526061. E-mail: dj@djlark.com

<sup>1</sup>The terms 'majority' and 'minority' world are used in this paper to refer to what have been called 'north' and 'south', or 'developed' or 'developing' (respectively) in other papers in this special issue.

economy, the photographer's ethnicity, issues of power, ethics and style and the original aims of the development organizations that organized the trip. The purpose of the paper is to identify change that is taking place in the production of famine photography and discuss the relationship between photographer and public understanding of the images produced.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section I evaluate the reasons behind a recent growth of indigenous photographers in the majority world. In section two I analyse issues of context, power, and style and make the case that the growth of indigenous photographers selling images into the international image market is being driven by economic rather than ethical forces. Using arguments from the first two sections, section three deconstructs the images of Mekanik Philipos produced by a mixture of foreign and indigenous photographers and makes the case that the photographers' ethnicity and local knowledge has no bearing on the final images produced. In this case, factors that influence image construction are dictated by the demands and expectations of the image economy.

### **THE GROWTH OF INDIGENOUS PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE MAJORITY WORLD**

In this section I will outline arguments for and against local photographers, their political standing in their own countries and the issue of photographic culture. An editor at Foto 8 comments:

A local photographer might be able to put more feelings into a picture and has better local knowledge, however a British photographer working for a British publication understands and uses the language of the readership and this leads to a clearer message. If your intention is to say, this is a local photographer and this is his viewpoint, then you need to use a local photographer (Personal interview, 12th June 2003).

An employee at Panos Pictures, which is under pressure from the Panos Institute to use more local photographers, agrees with the above statement and explains in his experience the problem is often more to do with infrastructure than quality. 'It's a question of compositional grammar, which you have to know to operate in this world. A lot of places in Africa, they just don't know the grammar' (Personal interview, 5th June 2003). However, Shahidul Alam, director of the Bangladeshi photographic agency Drik, disputes these arguments and claims there is a wealth of motivated, talented indigenous photographers who simply have not been discovered (Alam, 1994). What his photography school refers to as the 'western eye' is simply a visual language that Alam argues can be taught like English or French. Alam believes the advantages of local knowledge and language are much harder to acquire than an understanding of the intended publication market.

One of the greatest barriers to photographers in the majority world has been political influence. Images are generally regarded as secondary to text and are given little space or respect in newsprint. A former UK newspaper picture editor explains the system in Tanzania: 'You sit exams to join various professions. If you got the highest pass you became a civil servant, if you were mid stream you became a journalist and if you didn't pass any of the exams they gave you a camera' (Personal interview, 23rd May 2003). He argues that improving photography is not about training photographers but changing the attitudes of the publishers towards photography. In case studies I conducted

in Bangladesh and Ethiopia photographers held a low position in media organizations and were generally regarded by society as non-influential. The Pathshala school of photography in Dhaka is internationally renowned yet all the students I interviewed had already achieved degrees in other subjects or were studying elsewhere alongside studies at Pathshala. This they claimed was essential as locally their degree in photography had little worth.

Interviews conducted with the Thompson Foundation (UK), World Press Photo (Holland) and The Reuters Foundation (UK), all of which have expert knowledge in the field, report an increase in the number of photographers practising, training courses available and the quality of photography produced. An interviewee at World Press Photo noted that the 2002 chairman of the award jury and the overall winner were both from 'less developing countries' (Personal interview, 27th April 2003). It is however important to note that both these individuals have spent a good deal of time in the UK and USA respectively. In my case studies in Bangladesh and Ethiopia the most successful photographers had received training or lived for extended periods in Europe or the USA. Ironically the Marxist Derg government in Ethiopia, who drove many indigenous photographers abroad, has given the country new opportunities in the field as many have since returned with new training and a strong awareness of foreign markets.

## **CONTEXT, POWER AND STYLE**

In this section I look first at the issue of context in reference to the minority world's visual perceptions of the majority world and discuss the relationship between news and realism. I then investigate the motivations, power and political influences in the globalised image economy. I finally discuss the role played by the photographer in the construction of the image and debate questions of subject dignity, stereotypes and religious iconography.

### **Context**

In the film *One Hour Photo*, Robin Williams' character observes: 'Family photos depict smiling faces, births, weddings, holidays, children's birthday parties. People take pictures of the happy moments in their lives. Someone looking through our photo album would conclude that we had led a joyous leisurely existence, free of tragedy. No one ever takes a photograph of something they want to forget.'

In contrast to our personal use of the camera the news photographer does the exact opposite, snapping disasters, wars, famines and funerals. Anyone paging through the newspaper with no other context in which to put these events will naturally conclude that people living in these countries lead a life of misery and despair.

News presenter George Alagiah argues that the vast majority of his audience has no experience of the places in Africa from where he reported and therefore no ability to contextualize the account. However Alagiah points out 'to isolate news and expect it to do everything, to inform, to educate, establish connectivity is just too much' (Holland, 2002). An audience gains understanding of place through a fusion of history, geography and current affairs from which a more rounded understanding can be formed. In the case of the majority world, the public's understanding is dominated by news and therefore imbalanced.

Jon Madul Jok, speaking at the Dispatches from Disaster Zones conference disagrees and believes the reporting of news should include a wider context that embraces investigations into the causes and people's lived experiences (DDZ, 1998). In television this may be argued but photographers who work within a single image and a single sentence caption have little space to depict the occurrence let alone the cause.

Susan Sontag states that, 'For more than a century, photographers have been hovering about the oppressed, in attendance at scenes of violence—with a spectacularly good conscience. Social misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality that is, a reality hidden from them' (Sontag, 1979). Sean Kenny argues that this obsession with negative imagery of the majority world lies in the colonial past. Images of too much modernity in the majority world makes the relationship between 'us and them' difficult both economically and psychologically (Kenny, 2000). Alam confirms the demand for such pictures stating the most frequently requested images of Bangladesh that come to his library at Drik are those of 'floods, cyclones and slums'. The library contains a vast range of subjects on Bangladesh including, for example, people working with computer terminals which has never been requested internationally (Alam, 1994). A Panos Pictures employee reports a very different scenario there: 'In Africa there are two styles often talked about. There is Afro Romanism and there is Afro Pessimism and that is all you see . . . If you come up with something very good from Africa that isn't the romantic or pessimistic, it sells. People just don't think about doing it' (Personal interview, 5th June 2003). He went on to list his best selling stories of recent years which were all of everyday rounded subjects.

The statistics published in *Images of Africa* (Van der Gaag and Nash, 1985), and the *Live Aid Legacy* (VSO, 2001) and backed up from statements by Alam (Alam, 1994) demonstrate that the British public at all levels still associate the majority world with negative imagery. What is of particular interest is that people born after 1984 (the last major Ethiopian famine) still associate the country with famine, although they were not witness to the event or Live Aid that followed. A South African photographer explains: 'there are books and duplications, you only need to see one of these pictures one time and the name Africa written next to it and you will never forget' (Personal interview, 20th April 2003).

## **Power**

The international image economy is now dominated by five major picture agencies, competing in news, features and stock photography. Other smaller agencies have followed suit but found niche areas of the market in which to concentrate. These agencies operate throughout the world and are producing what one picture editor and writer terms a 'globalized view' of the world (Personal interview, 27th April 2003). In this section I have argued this view is predominantly negative of the majority world. I will now discuss the forces that shape that market and how this leads to the demand for particular types of images.

As the image market has transferred from physical to digital so the capacity for images has expanded. Photographers anywhere in the world can now take a picture and load it into searchable databases for publications to consider. The act of placing the image on the market though does not guarantee a sale. An interviewee at Panos Pictures calls this 'the agenda' and makes it clear that neither he nor the photographers set the agenda. This is

done by the publications. He bemoans the fact that many of what he regards to be the best stories the agency has produced have never sold (Personal interview, 5th June 2003). Eamonn McCabe argues the case that the photographer's job is not to make decisions on what to shoot, 'photographers shoot everything they see, often not knowing a picture's significance'. It is up to the editor to make the choice of what to publish (McCabe, 2001). Photographer Simon Norfolk, who has tried to take and sell pictures of what he believes to be important issues, despairs, because America is the biggest buyer of photography; any photographer that ignores the American interest market will find it hard to survive. He belittles his success in book publishing and exhibiting claiming '7000 people will buy my book and that is a big print run, but more people will turn up to watch Oldham draw 0–0 on a Wednesday night' (Speaking at *So You Want to Change the World with Photography Conference*, Manchester, UK, February 2003). He therefore implies that in order for a photographer to succeed financially and get their photography seen by a mass audience they have to acknowledge the US-dominated global market and produce pictures for its needs.

Similarly one photographer describes the global news market as being driven by a single image that an average housewife in Detroit can understand and therefore built on American aspirations (Personal interview, 27th April 2003). Horton advises photojournalists to know and understand their market—whether it is (in terms of newspaper placement) 'A1, inside, secondary play, the feature section' (Horton, 2001). In the context of a global market such understandings are far more complex. If you are a staff photographer in the UK for the *Sun* or the *Financial Times* you will have a clear idea about who your audience is but modern day global news photographers have a universal audience. American broadcaster Ed Murrow explained the concept as 'being understood by the truck driver but not upsetting the professor's intelligence' (quoted in DFID, 2002). In the case of Ethiopia, a country which has become synonymous with famine, when there is a drought in Africa, photographers naturally gravitate to Ethiopia to tell the story. Charles Elliot, former director of Christian Aid, recalls trying to persuade journalists to go to the Sudan as early as September 1984, to cover the famine there. The response he got was, 'that's not news, Ethiopia is news. Don't tell me to go to Sudan, give me an angle on Ethiopia' (Magistad, 1985).

In Bangladesh I found that Drik retained a strong ideological standpoint and trained all its photographers in issues of globalization, visual representation, colonialism and visual anthropology etc in order to avoid negative stereotyping. However it was another Bangladeshi photographer who played the more significant role in the global representation of Bangladesh. As both a still photographer and cameraman for Reuters, this photographer's images are beamed around the world on a daily basis and published in international newspapers. He had no doubt about what he aims to file. 'Reuters want real pictures, the truth but they also want strong pictures. I know the type of picture that sells and I supply the office' (Personal interview, 20th April 2003).

At the time of my research visit to Bangladesh, the Iraq war of 2003 was still in its latter stages and I had been concerned by some of this photographer's images I had seen in the British press before leaving the UK. In particular there was one photograph of an angry Islamic fundamentalist waving a gun in Dhaka. I visited a similar demonstration after I arrived in Bangladesh and saw the same character in the front row with thousands of peaceful protesters behind him. I showed the photographer the image and asked why his picture focused on an individual and did not represent the whole crowd in context.

I know this man, he has turned up to every anti American protest for the last 6–7 years, but the gun is a toy, I know as I have been very close. He always makes a very strong picture but I am clear in the caption that the gun is a toy. The problem is not all news editors use my caption and the meaning gets lost. News is news, it happens, positive and negative I do not control the news or the way the final picture is used, I just try to tell the truth. You have to remember that newspaper editors are businessmen who are trying to make money and give their political opinion. They modify reports and choose pictures according to their own agendas (Personal interview, 20th April 2003).

A senior staff member of the national institute of mass communication in Dhaka argues that Muslim bashing is currently a saleable commodity and photographers working within the international market are therefore looking for those images. He concedes Islamic fundamentalism is a problem in Bangladesh but only represents 4–5 per cent of the population. The ratio of images depicting this that come out of Bangladesh is far higher (Personal interview, 21st April 2003).

## Style

If market forces and political interference are the factors that dictate what images are sold, this implies the photographer plays no part in the process of representation. However the photographer makes many decisions in the process of capturing and editing a picture. Brett Rodgers, British council photography director explains:

A critical stream of theoretical work, arising from post-structuralist insights found in the works of Baudrillard to Barthes, Foucault and Sontag has led to a wide-spread rejection of the idea that acts of looking or recording can ever be neutral or disinterested, but are embedded in relationships of power and control. Just as two different people from the same family never have the identical memories of the same family event, two different photographers produce entirely distinct images in front of the same scene, because they bring their own personal assumptions, background and experience to the situation (Brett Rodgers, 2003).

The emergence of 24 hour TV news has challenged photographers to find new ways of representing hard news stories. By the time an average newspaper reader picks up their paper, it is likely they have already seen TV reports of the stories they are about to read. This has changed the news photographers' role from one of reporter to commentator. Photographers use learnt visual strategies to construct a working methodology which if successful they repeat on different assignments. One photographer argues that many contemporary strategies derive from the art world and can often leave the viewer more confused than enlightened. With an emphasis on aesthetics, photographers can cover up for their lack of knowledge and leave the reader with a feeling '... of somewhere in black Africa . . . Chaotic, fractured, complex, blur, out of focus images tend to make places look like that. They make places look mad, chaotic where nothing can be solved and when you apply that to Sierra Leone or Palestine for example the viewer assumes these places are beyond help' (Personal interview, 27th April 2003).

Alam, writing a few years earlier describes similar strategies but using a different format of wide angle, black and white, grainy, high contrast images (Alam, 1994). An

employee at Panos Pictures claims that some photographers now openly admit to setting pictures up to accentuate the drama leading to formalistic images made to order (Personal interview, 5th June 2003). Given that stock libraries now operate within the same database as news this appears to be the first indication of traditional markets beginning to merge.

Another common but repeated photographer's trait is what a former UK newspaper picture editor refers to as the 'Casablanca Option, that is, rounding up all the usual suspects' (The name is taken from a line in the film *Casablanca*, when a crime has been committed the lazy Police chief, tells his subordinates to 'round up the usual suspects' rather than investigating the crime) (Personal interview, 23rd May 2003). When in Sierra Leone it was presumed he would want to visit the amputee camp, in Beirut he was offered a trip to Shatila but preferred to look for more positive stories. More commonly referred to as the 'stereotype' this has been lambasted by most writers on the issue of photographic representation and has led to the word having negative connotations. However the use of familiar (stereotypical) images in advertising has long been common practice to reinforce the quality of products and services and is only seen as negative in this case because of the unconstructive associations. Photographers are accused of looking to find familiar images without investigating the true situation.

George Alagiah, in his presentation at the *Dispatches from Disaster Zones* conference, May 1998, describes such familiar coverage as 'template reporting'. In the case of famine this involves a set formula that includes 'the emaciated child, preferably crying; you've got to have a feeding centre, where mothers with shrunken breasts are trying to calm their children; you've got to have an aid worker, usually white, usually a woman who is working against the odds'. This image translates directly to still photography where similar unwritten templates exist. Peter Stalker agrees recalling his experience as a photojournalist covering famine.

There was no point, say, in showing families eating—however meagre the meal—otherwise they would not appear hungry. And they should not be smiling at the camera, even though it is quite possible to smile and be hungry at the same time. It was better also to concentrate on children since hungry adults who are listless because tired or anaemic can come across in a photograph as lazy or irresponsible. (Stalker, 1998)

Like the stereotype the question of the subject's dignity is another theme frequently discussed. Nash and Van Der Gaag refer to the imagery from the 1984 famine as being 'truly pornographic' and ask whether the subject's permission to photograph had been granted or not. They suggest even if the subjects did object they were not in an emotional or physical state to make their protest known. *The Images of Africa* report concludes the photographic practice had been predatory and demeaning and that images of Ethiopians had been used to sell newspapers and raise funds without regard for the dignity of those pictured. Photographers preyed on women and children as these made a more dramatic image (Nash and Van Der Gaag, 1987). This issue is frequently raised but without the resources to question those photographed.

The final issue to discuss in this section is that of the 'aestheticization of poverty' (Rodgers, 2003) through Christian iconography. Biblical images of the Madonna and child, Christ on the cross, Christ the healer, the mighty famines are replicated by photographers every time disaster strikes and justified through the Christian tradition of imaging suffering. Nash and Van Der Gaag demonstrate this through statistical percentages of

woman and child images in the media reports from Korem, but fail to give details of the gender makeup of the camp. A media consultant who took many of the journalists to Korem claims: 'there were very few men at the camp as they would go and search for work, it is also not in these people's culture for the man to hold the baby and therefore images of man and child would have been hard to find' (Personal interview, 25th June 2003).

I have argued that imaging the poor and oppressed is a tradition of photography that goes back to its invention. This practice is regarded acceptable as long as those images are viewed in context with a rounded understanding of the issues and culture in which the events occur. In the case of the majority world an imbalance has been created by dominance in news, leading to a largely negative view. The recent developments in the image economy (outlined in Section 1) have led to a globalized photography market that is currently driven by dominant world economic and political forces. This has simplified the photographers' outlook and led to a greater reliability on familiar imagery. Influence from the art world and the stock library market has also led to an increase in imagery relying on artistic interpretation that in turn has clouded the photographers' understanding of the issues at hand.

## **THE GREEN FAMINE AND THE IMAGE OF MEKANIC PHILIPOS**

Bob Geldof's May 2003 trip to Ethiopia came to be represented through an image that embodied many of the issues discussed to this point. If we divide Ethiopia into north and south (with Addis Ababa in the centre) we can say that the north, which is historically prone to famine and the site of the 1984 disaster, has built an efficient infrastructure of predicting food shortages and distributing before people go hungry. Geldof's trip was arranged by an international development agency who worked in the north. They wanted to use the publicity Geldof would bring to get the message across that through their work this region of Ethiopia was dealing successfully with food shortages.

In contrast the south of Ethiopia, renowned for its lush vegetation, had a nutritional problem caused by the rains coming at the wrong time. Destruction of the staple food (a type of banana) was brought on by a combination of this bad timing and disease. As a result of this series of events there was food in the lush environment (hence the term 'green famine') but also a nutritional imbalance which meant many babies did not get the foods they needed to grow. Another international development agency employed an expert nutritionist to devise a 21-day feeding programme to correct this imbalance through therapeutic feeding centres (TFCs) in the affected areas. In 1984 such skills and infrastructure was not available and many of the affected children would have died. The message this development agency wished to convey was that there was a problem with malnutrition (albeit lack of food rather the wrong food) but in 97 per cent of cases their system was returning affected babies to normal health within the three week programme. As such, the publicity that was required needed to represent something other than the stereotypical images and template reporting of famine familiar from the Live Aid period.

### **The Photographers and the Photograph**

Many images were published during Geldof's five-day tour but the most used photograph in the international press was that of Geldof handing baby Mekanik Philipos back to his

mother in the Yirba TFC on Wednesday 28th May 2003. All the photographers took a picture of this event, and I have seen four versions. The following accounts describe what happened.

An Addis Ababa based staff member of one of the organizations recounts:

Well we got to this site and it was late in the day, not late but late to file stories. I had forgotten about the fact these people needed to file everyday and the urgency of that process. Geldof wanted to be in the paper everyday so it was important for us to respect this. This place is 3½ hours south of Addis so we got there and the journalists wanted to work quick so they could file. They kept saying we don't have time to waste. So we got to this place where there are three tents [three phases] so this first one was the acute phase one, where children are admitted when they first arrive. Basically it is a large tent, about 25–30 metres long, like one of those army tents with women hanging around on the mattresses . . . There were five journalists, five photographers and no one wanted to leave before their competition. So I end up shouting more and the whole thing was very fraught. So we tried to interchange between TV and the print and photographers in this tent . . . [One Photographer] kept saying, these pictures aren't dramatic enough, my office wants dramatic pictures. He wanted me to take him to places where livestock were dying, and when I said there was no such places, he replied 'there is no story for me then' (Personal interview, 20th June 2003).

An Ethiopian Photographer working for one of the international press agencies comments:

I was instructed to follow Bob Geldof, everywhere he went and everything he did. We were looking to capture that moment. There were other people from [the press agency the photographer worked for] with us who gave us instructions. It was mad. Lots of photographers and TV news people pushing each other, sitting or standing in the way of my lens . . . This baby was very badly malnourished and [one of the international development agency] guides brought him [Geldof] across to see the baby. The guide picked the baby up and handed him to Geldof who handed him back to his mother. This was the picture. He did not pick up any other babies on the trip, just stroked them but the reason this picture was so strong is the fact the baby is much worse than others we saw . . . there was a lot of competition between [two of the international press agencies]. Our advantage was we had our own car and did not travel with [the international development agency that organized the event], so we could go at any time we liked. So we could have the advantage of being able to send first (Personal interview, 19th June 2003).

An emergency manager working for one of the facilitating organizations, also based in Ethiopia, says:

There was a lot of pressure from London. They were all in communication with their sat [satellite] phones. In particular [one news channel] who were doing live broadcasts and the print media were immediately under pressure to cover the same issues. That is [this channel] would interview Clare Short or Tony Blair and then go live to Ethiopia. The print media would be talking to their offices in London who were watching the [channel's] broadcast and getting instructions to concentrate on the same issues . . . there was no desire to include or explain the problem they were just

focused on going straight to a TFC and getting pictures of babies (Personal interview, 24th June 2003).

### Analysis of the Philipos Photograph

The image of the baby Philipos correlates almost exactly to the Alagiah template, enforcing a familiar message of famine in Ethiopia while replacing the white aid worker with Geldof. The above accounts of the circumstances in which the image was made confirm theories of orders being sent to photographers from editors watching live television broadcasts. Competition between agencies leads to speed and drama becoming the driving force behind the photographers approach to the subject rather than a need for accuracy. For those filing to global audiences deadlines occur every hour as the timeline moves across the world. Missing the Paris or London 10:00 PM deadline would often mean the image was never published as 24 hours is a long time in news. This also led to a very similar image being filed by all the photographers. There were no attempts made to contextualise the image. Audiences in the UK who looked at this image were left with the impression that this baby was starving, this baby was going to die, and this baby was representative of thousands of Ethiopian children, none of which were true. Text in *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* (which cropped the mother out) reinforced these messages.

The image does not however appear to use noticeable visual strategies. The picture is very literal and simply composed. The religious symbolism is strong with Geldof, the Christ figure reaching out to heal the child held in the mother's arms. An image the average 'housewife in Detroit' would have no problem in comprehending.

In his first visit to Ethiopia in 1984 Geldof had 'refused . . . to be photographed with a starving child' (Harrison and Palmer, 1986). For the 2003 visit Geldof changed his approach and was now looking for malnourished children to be photographed with. The reason for this change was the need to generate publicity in advance of the G8 summit, and Geldof claimed the trip was successful in bringing Africa into the agenda for the conference (*The Ethiopian Reporter*, 4 June 2003). However the G8 declaration makes little mention of Africa and two of the aid workers I interviewed who helped facilitate Geldof's visit were disappointed with the outcome. Conversely both the international development agencies expressed delight at the outcome of Geldof's visit, reporting financial and political gains that would not have come otherwise. One agency argued that similar trips made by Princess Anne and Michael Buerk earlier in the year had little effect compared with Geldof's well photographed visit.

Was the presence and work of indigenous photographers important in creating a different perspective from the Geldof trip? The answer is probably no. Images taken by the Ethiopian photographer previously quoted show equal quality and skill to the others on the trip but no alternative perspective. His expense form was no doubt much shorter than the other photographers and his local knowledge and car meant that he had a slight time advantage but other than that he conformed to the visual image expected by and delivered to the international image consumers.

Finally, there is the question of the mother's dignity in the moment of photographing her child. A paediatrician at the Yirba TFC, explained that in his opinion the visit and photographs were seen as a great privilege by those involved. He estimated that 4000 local villagers had turned up to watch the proceedings and there was a lot of excitement. He also noted that the caption that ran with the image in *The Daily Mirror* (but not in the *Herald*

and *Tribune*) had exaggerated the figure of babies treated from 400 to 4000 (Personal interview, 24th June 2003). I interviewed the mother four weeks after the event and on the day before her baby was released, fit and healthy, from the Beshuto Health centre, Awasa (where the baby had been transferred for specialist treatment):

**Clark:** What is your opinion of this picture?

**Mother:** I give thanks to God for this picture because it helped save the life of my son.

**Clark:** Were you aware of the picture being taken and that it might be published worldwide?

**Mother:** Yes I knew, because they explained to us before they came to visit us what would happen.

**Clark:** Do you feel embarrassed by this picture at all?

**Mother:** No I don't feel embarrassed, why should I?

(Personal interview, 24th June 2003)

The mother clearly felt that having her picture taken contributed to the wellbeing of her son and therefore happily obliged. Given that the two international development agencies concerned benefited from the coverage, and were responsible for her son's medical treatment, this appears to be justified. The contact sheet of the event by the Ethiopian photographer discussed above shows a variation of facial expressions including her smiling, but all those published show a look of despair. The mother was not troubled by this and asked for a copy of the published image to put in her home.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have described the growth of visual globalization by allowing the demands of the economy to directly affect the content of the image. This argument is demonstrated through the analysis of Mekanik Philipos's image as published in the UK at the end of May 2003.

I have looked in detail at the issue of indigenous photographers and their relationship to the international image economy and argued that although there are clear signs of growing numbers of photographers in the majority world trading in the picture economy, they are not taking control of the photographic representation of their country but rather conforming to the globalized perspective. This is still dominated by minority world buying power and therefore continues to reflect a Euro/American understanding of the world. Economic pressures and competition with alternative news dissemination is creating a broader spectrum of photographers and a better quality of photography from the majority world but this has not yet been repeated in feature and stock image markets.

The Mekanik Philipos case study also demonstrates issues of subject dignity are not as clear as Nash and Van der Gaag argue. In *Images of Africa* Nash and Van der Gaag are horrified by the 'pornographic' imagery that preyed on the weak and suffering in 1984 and implied that those photographed were horrified at the imaging experience. While it is not possible to generalize from this single event to Africa as a whole, Philipos' mother nonetheless saw the imaging experience as her way of helping her child. This is a

conclusion accepted by the facilitating international development agencies, who argue that such images, though horrific and even stereotypical, bring real changes through their work in these areas. As a result, the case of Mekanik Philipos both reinforces and challenges a number of conventional views about photographs of famine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article has benefited greatly from the critical comments, readings and suggestions provided by David Campbell. For providing the travel that made this research possible, I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Trust for the award of a Travelling Fellowship in 2003. I am also very grateful for the time given by all those interviewed.

## REFERENCES

- Alam S. 1994. The visual representation of developing countries by developmental agencies and western media. *Zone Zero* [Online] Version. Available from <http://zonezero.com:16080/magazine/indexen.html>, [Accessed April 2003].
- DDZ. 1998. *Dispatches from Disaster Zones: The Reporting of Humanitarian Emergencies*. DDZ: London.
- DFID. 2002. *Making Sense of the World*. DFID: London.
- Harrison P, Palmer R. 1986. *News out of Africa*. Shipman: London.
- Holland F. 2002. *The Full Picture Orbit*, 82. VSO: London.
- Horton 2001. *Guide to Photojournalism*. Associated Press: New York.
- Kenny S. 2000. *News Style*. Lightbox, 5, BAPLA, London.
- Magistad M. 1985. The Ethiopian bandwagon: the relationship between news media coverage and British foreign policy toward the 1984–1985 Ethiopian famine. *Sussex theses*; M 471.
- McCabe E. 2001. Why we must show the dead. *Media Guardian* (19th November 2001) The Guardian: London.
- Rodgers B. 2003. *Whose Image is it Anyway Conference*. The Barbican, London, UK, [22nd March 2003].
- Sontag S. 1979. *On Photography*. Penguin: Harmondsworth.
- Stalker P (ed.). 1998. Can I take your picture? *New Internationalist*, July 1998. New Internationalist, Oxford.
- Van Der Gaag N, Nash C. 1995. *Images of Africa*. The UK Report: Mimeo.
- VSO. 2001. *The Live Aid Legacy: The Developing World Through British Eyes—A Research Report*. VSO: London.