

Dogra, N. (2012). *Representations of global poverty: Aid, development and international NGOs*. London: I. B. Tauris. 233 pages. ISBN 978-1-84885-891.

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Global poverty, wealth concentration among fewer and fewer people, and associated structural inequities comprise a nexus of interconnected global problems that are getting worse. Responses to these issues in psychology are sporadic at best. We need to acknowledge efforts, such as the global special issue series on poverty organised by Professor Stuart Carr, and this very special issue edited by David Fryer with Cathy McCormack. However, much more needs to be done. Critics have argued that the emphasis in psychology on individual responsibility, the lack of focus on history and context, and an unwillingness to engage in political action outside of a few sub-disciplinary domains are all part of the problem. Moreover, the dominant Anglo-American variant of psychology offers a technology of the self that is itself central to colonialism, neoliberalism, globalisation and new forms of imperialism.

Insights for developing a more sustained response in psychology to poverty can be gained from recent works in the broader social sciences, such as Dogra (2012). In exploring the representational politics surrounding poverty and appeals for charitable aid, this book offers useful review of interdisciplinary literature regarding international aid and development, orientalism, Africanism and colonialism. The author successfully communicates the complexities around the prejudices and ambiguities central to public images of poverty in the 'Majority World'. Psychologists are often naive about the complexities of mediated communication, and

usually opt for a narrow focus on establishing crude short-term effects from highly contrived situations that lack external validity and critical plausibility. Conversely, Dogra explores production processes central to actual message construction; the resulting representational field into which campaigns are injected and actual audience responses to campaign messages. Although not directly acknowledging the theoretical basis for such work in the Glasgow Media Group's *Circuit of Mass Communication* (Miller, Kitzinger, Williams & Beharrell, 1998), Dogra offers readers insights into the dynamic interrelationships between production, representation and audience levels of mass mediated communication.

Of utmost importance to this reader was the way in which this book showcases the need for historical work in order to understand relationships between societies that continue to shape the extent, and our understandings of, poverty today. The author clearly articulates links to slavery, colonialism and imperialism that have been central to wealth generation for European and North American nations and the impoverishment of many other parts of the world. Readers are provided with a useful account of how the Anglo-American world came to dominate global economic relations and representational politics so as to be in a position to 'give' charitable support to overly indebted and impoverished countries from which they continue to extract wealth.

A key focal point for the book is the deconstruction of tensions between *difference* and *oneness* in 'Developed World' charity representations of poor people from 'Majority World' countries. The author proposes that this dualistic framing is central to her challenging the depoliticising of poverty, and suppression of ambiguities and historical complexities. Dogra documents how this dualism allows for the poor to be characterised as distant and different from potential donors at the same time as sharing humanity for the

'Developed World' audiences whose charitable support is being sought.

The book contains eight chapters that are separated into a context setting introduction and three main parts. Part 1 explores issues of 'difference and distance' as central to how the 'Developed World' constructs images of the 'Majority World' (chapters 2, 3 and 4). The author reflects on the reliance in charitable appeals on 'photogenic poverty' depicting caring mothers and happy and healthy looking children. These images are ideologically convenient and are based in colonial representational repertoires that do not implicate potential UK-based donors in the causes and extent of poverty in the 'Majority World'. Reliance on images of needy children and/or the women in their lives, in conjunction with the absence of men, serves to infantilise and feminise poverty. Men are generally absent from charity messages, and appear elsewhere in news reports as intertextually-linked evil and corrupt warlords or rebel fighters who have brought poverty on their own communities. Combined, these representational practices work to internalise poverty as a problem inherent to the society itself rather than as a result of Anglo-American exploitation.

Part 2 documents issues of *oneness* as being inherent to campaigns that draw on notions of universal humanism (chapters 5 and 6). Focusing on key informant interviews with campaign producers, Dogra explores how and why campaign representations of the poor are dehistoricised and decontextualised. Dogra refers to the nexus of discourses through which a human *oneness* is constructed and histories of colonialism, imperialism and slavery are displaced from contemporary discussions of poverty. Part of the problem seems to be how agencies perceive context in behavioural terms, including how many people are present in an image and what they are depicted as doing. Little attention is given to broader issues beyond the frame, including who gets to decide who is depicted in the

frame and what they are doing. Producers did not engage with historical links between the 'Majority World' and 'Developed World' to contextualise contemporary poverty. Such omissions were justified by campaign producers who asserted that their own purpose is to obtain donations and not to invoke guilt in, or to alienate, donors.

Part 3 (chapters 7 and 8) considers the understandings of UK audiences, and how their perceptions relate to the representational and production practices explored in previous chapters. Audiences recognised conventional representational practices, and were also capable of moving reflexively beyond these messages in order to question relationships between developed and majority worlds. Resistance to contextualising poverty was related to a sense in which UK citizens were tired of being made to feel guilty about that happened 'so long ago'. UK audiences tended not to respond positively to messages that implicate them in 'Majority World' poverty. This reaction was associated more with older and middle aged audiences. Younger audiences were more receptive to messages anchored in historical realities. Dogra points to the potential here for change and efforts that engage younger donors whose responses bring into question the assumptions shaping the production of campaigns.

By way of criticism, the book is introduced as an analysis of representations of global poverty. The analysis is actually focused on UK-based public charity appeals to UK donors. The representations are of people from the 'Majority World' countries in which UK charities are operating, and not the mass of other nation states around the globe. Regardless, the book remains an invaluable resource for psychologists interested in issues of colonialism, globalisation, development, charitable giving and poverty more generally.

Finally, Dogra uses compelling examples to ground an analysis that documents how 'Developed World' stereotypes of needy others in the 'Majority World' are repro-

duced in charitable campaigns and enter into public discourse. The book makes an important contribution to current conversations regarding the economic crisis and implications for increased global inequalities and poverty. In this regard, readers should also consider watching the BBC documentaries ‘*Poor Us: An animated history – Why poverty?*’ and ‘*Surviving Progress*’.

Reference

Miller, D., Kitzinger, J., Williams, K., & Beharrell, P. (1998). *The circuit of mass communication: Media strategies, representation and audience reception in the AIDS crisis*. Sage: London.