

## Racism and Anti-Racism essay

[A brief note on language: There are numerous contested and problematic terms used in this essay. ‘Race’ as used here is defined (drawing loosely on Ronit Lentin 2010, pg. 1) as a system for the classification, regulation and control of bodies. The related social constructions, *Black* and *White* are used throughout, along with *Global North* and *South* despite the overwhelming tension involved in their usage (and to make matters far worse, they are frequently used interchangeably, as if synonymous). Similarly, there is an assumption throughout that ‘development’ and ‘development NGOs’ are White, Northern institutions. While this is clearly not (exclusively) the case, these assumptions have been kept in place in order to address a broad trend in development discourse and practice.]

### **THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITE PRIVILEGE IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE**

#### INTRODUCTION

The issues of ‘race’ and the operation of racism are rarely addressed in the area of development, neither in the analysis of development issues, nor the practice and discourse of development itself (Kothari 2006b, pg. 4). This essay starts from the assumption that the operation of racism is deeply and inescapably implicated in the history and current context of international development (Power 2006). It sets out to examine the power of ‘racelessness’ and representation in development discourse and practices, focusing in particular on the invisible reproduction of White privilege in the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

This analysis is rooted in a definition of racism that relates the emergence of an ideology of White superiority to the historic and continuing economic and political exploitation of Black people. In the first section of this essay the origins of racial hierarchy are traced back to their roots in the systems of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism and the perpetuation of these relationships in the legitimizing discourse of development.

The second section explores how, in recent decades, colour-blindness and ‘racelessness’ have been deployed to mask the perpetuation of racial hierarchies. It also looks at the centrality of representation in constructing and maintaining ideologies of superiority and inferiority.

The third section is a critique of the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, looking at the way in which racial hierarchies and White privilege are invisibly reproduced in the following ways:

- The preservation of hierarchical and exclusionary Us/Them binaries.
- A presentation of development relationships divorced from the history and current dynamics of North-South political and economic oppression.

- ☑ An appropriation of ‘universal’ values, making (invisible) Whiteness emblematic of fairness, justice, dignity and respect.
- ☑ The implicit claim to power implied in bestowing the virtues listed above, and in ‘giving voice’ to people who have been misrepresented.
- ☑ The failure to locate the practice of development NGOs in that very misrepresentation.
- ☑ Enshrining a deep sense of entitlement on the part of White people to appropriate and define images of Black people.
- ☑ Maintaining the insistence that poverty has a ‘Black face’.

Drawing from Critical Race Theory, the Code will be assessed according to Derrick Bell’s model of ‘contradiction-closing’ cases and this section then concludes with a challenge to the legitimacy of the Code as it stands. In calling for a dialogue on the urgent need to address the misrepresentation of Black and Southern peoples in development discourse and mainstream media, the essay ends with an insistence on the need for Black and Southern organisations, groups and individuals to be central to this process rather than pursuing modifications to the current Code that claims to work on their behalf.

### **SECTION ONE: The Origins of ‘Race’**

Racism is underpinned by the bogus notion that human beings can be categorised according to a hierarchy of separate ‘races’, each with distinct physical, moral and social characteristics (Malik 1996), a notion that is so new, in relative terms, that in Europe the word has only been in popular use since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Bernasconi 2001, pg. 12).

A construction of colonial times, it was (and remains) a vital force in the processes of global economics (Cox 1948) that allowed Europe and North America to enrich themselves through invasion, slavery and genocide for centuries without any great remorse. ‘Race’ was conceived as a means to justify White people’s entitlement to travel the world and, in effect, plunder it. The emergence of scientific racism reinforced a previously ‘God given’ sense of superiority over Black people and lent their ruthless treatment an ‘objective’ validity and justification (Todorov 1993).

In 1853, drawing from his vast reading in the area of anthropology and the writings of leading ‘physiologists’ (Bulmer & Solomos 1999), Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau published his "Essay on the Inequality of Human Races" , where he neatly divided the

world's people into three - black, yellow and white – claiming, incorrectly, that these groups were biologically distinct. He 'proved' that of the three only Whites were capable of intellectual creativity. Whilst the 'Yellow' race could only imitate White brilliance, he denied that Black people had the capacity to do even that.

The theory of biologically distinct 'races' has since been completely discredited. Genetic science makes it clear that there is, truly, just a single human race, but the concept of a racial hierarchy, and the accompanying 'ideology of superiority' that placed White Settled people at the top, has been difficult to shake. Two hundred and fifty years on, though we deplore the crassness of de Gobineau's theory, the basic idea lives on in the popular imagination: Europe invents, Asia copies, while Africa struggles with basic 'development'.

And because global relations are still characterized by gross exploitation of Southern nations and peoples, for the enrichment of the relatively few, racism retains its purpose. In the North, it is still relied on it to put a gloss on an unjust state of affairs and render it less offensive, less damning to the people who profit from that system (us). It allows us to live in a global system where 80% of the population survives (or perishes) on less than 20% of the world's resources, and to see this situation as somehow, regrettably, *natural*.

Many postcolonial theorists argue that 'development' plays a similar function and equate its emergence in the post-war period with the persistence of racist colonial relations (see Kothari 2006, pg. 10), employing much the same symbolism (Grovoqui 2001), occupying the same geographical spaces, to the same ends, but exercising power through slightly different channels.

## **SECTION TWO: The White Gaze in Development Discourse**

The notion of 'privilege' is often absent from discussions on racism. Increasingly analyses of racism tend to focus on issues of cultural difference and identity, with scant, or no attention paid to the material basis for the establishment and maintenance of racial hierarchies. However, if there is a group that is disadvantaged by the operation of racism (Black people), then, by logical extension there is another group (White people) that gain (materially and politically, at least) at that other's expense.

White privilege was, for centuries, exercised through overtly oppressive practices. However through this prolonged period of slavery, colonialism, resource theft, segregation and economic marginalization, the gains made by the North and by White people have become 'locked-in' (Roithmayr 2000) to the point that overtly exclusionary practices may not always be required to perpetuate inequality. Nevertheless, many discriminatory practices *do* persist, at an interpersonal, national and international levels but criticism of these policies is diverted through the mechanism of colour-blindness (Lipsitz 1997). The key to the 'successful' operation of Whiteness is its invisibility. The value of developmental discourse to the maintenance of White privilege is the way in which it utterly obscures any reference to race or colour, thus distancing current global inequalities from an association with overtly racist colonial practices. In contemporary racist societies, the deployment of colour-blind rhetoric and policies is particularly beneficial to White interests. 'White' is not classed as a 'race' but as 'racelessness' and in this way is rendered synonymous with *normality* and central to the globally racialised order of power, a regime of corporate capital "predicated on the reduction of all to the colour of money" (Goldberg 2002, pg. 206).

### **Now You See Me, Now You Don't: The Politics of Representation and Invisibility:**

Under these circumstances, David Goldberg contends that being colour-blind amounts to "being blind to people of colour" (2002, pg. 222-223). The power of the coloniser, or slave 'master' was defined by the ability to control the right to see, and to be seen. In a literal sense, enslaved Black people could be punished for looking directly at their captors. Today this remains true in the North's power to define whole tracts of the world and the world's people as in need of development, whilst enjoying immunity from any reverse of the "critical gaze". The real power of the global North, as Ziauddin Sader declares, is in its power to define (1999, Chapter 3).

Michel Foucault most famously associates the analysis of power with the regime of surveillance (literally, looking over) and representation (Dyer 1997). In their control of, and access to, a vast array of media outlets, development agencies almost have a monopoly on representation of the South and of their work with, and, more frequently, on behalf of Southern peoples. Articulating the connections between representation and control, Arturo Escobar has defined development as a "regime of representation" (1995 pg. 6). Likewise, Richard Dyer asserts that "looking at, and being looked at reproduce[s] racial power relations" (Dyer 1997, pg. 45). bell hooks puts it most succinctly in saying,

“there is power in looking...and the gaze has always been political...” (1992, pg. 115) Though they have been enduring, representations of Whiteness and Blackness are not static. At times power may lie in being seen, commanding admiration or fear, at other times power lies in its invisibility. On this unstable arrangement of representation and visibility, Patricia Williams notes that, “how or whether, blacks are seen depends of a dynamic of display that ricochets between hypervisibility and oblivion. Blacks are seen ‘everywhere’, taking over the world one minute; yet the great toll of poverty and isolation that engulfs so many remains the object of persistent oversight.” (1997, pg. 15) Similarly Whiteness can take a ubiquitous form, being everywhere, literally (as, for example, a colonial or neo-colonial power on the world stage) or as the ‘everyman’ (sic), figuratively omnipresent, standing for ‘humanity’. This seemingly modest position of being ‘just human’, Dyer reminds us, belies its elevated status, and its apparent racelessness obscures its positioning of Whiteness at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy: “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human,” and to be able, therefore, to speak for humanity (1997, pg. 1-2). This seemingly innocent denial of ‘race’ is in fact a colonisation of the norm (being ‘just human’), and in practice denies Black people their full humanity and autonomy. To declare that Whites are “just people,” Dyer argues, “is not far off saying...that...other colours are something else...as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples...they/we function as a human norm... in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they are... the human race.” Alice Mc Intyre (1997 pg. 16), describes two serious outcomes of this inability or unwillingness to challenge the invisibility of Whiteness: “White people’s lack of consciousness about their racial identities has grave consequences in that it not only denies white people the experience of seeing themselves as benefiting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility for eradicating it.”

These issues of White privilege and responsibility in the context of development are seldom raised. Raising the issue of White privilege, Uma Kothari (2006, pg. 2), examining some of the plausible explanations for the ‘invisibility’ of race in development discourse, poses the provocative question of whether “the silence of ‘race’ conceals the complicity of development with racialised projects?”

### **SECTION THREE: The Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages**

The revised Code of Conduct on Images and Messages was published by Dochas (The Irish Association of Non Governmental Development Organisations) in 2006 with the aim of providing ‘a framework which organizations can refer to when designing and implementing their public communication strategy.’ By offering a set of guiding principles, the Code “can assist organisations in their decision making about which images and messages to choose in their communication while maintaining full respect for **human dignity**.” (Dochas *b*, emphasis in the original) The Code ostensibly represents a direct, and much-needed challenge to the ubiquitous use of negative and/or patronising images of the Global South that have come to characterize the output of Northern aid agencies, government overseas assistance departments and development education organisations over a number of decades.

The use of images of dire poverty and suffering in the NGO sector has traditionally been defended for fundraising purposes (journalists and news agencies may have other rationales). Faced with the challenge of generating funds to carry out relief work in an already saturated visual culture, aid agencies justify the deployment of these images by their shock value, on the grounds that they provoke the Northern public to donate to worthy causes.

However, the exploitation of these kind of images has been rightly condemned on a number of grounds, including the violation of rights and the entrenchment of stereotypes of whole communities, countries, and indeed continents, as uniformly impoverished and dependent on Northern assistance (Escobar 1995; Power 2006; Goudge 2003) . These concerns are addressed in the Code’s Guiding Principles, which insist that images and message must be selected with full regard to “respect for the dignity of the people concerned, belief in the equality of all people, and acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.”

As already stated, the need to address the use of images and messages is pressing, for a range of reasons, and Dochas is to be applauded for making the issue such a prominent and sustained part of its work. However, the Code as it stands is problematic on a number of fronts, which will be explored below.

### **‘Us’ and ‘Them’**

The Code fails to interrupt the pattern of neo-colonial relationship, premised on a developed ‘Us’ and a less developed ‘Them’, nor does it address the power imbalance at the heart of this relationship. The colonial binaries of *us/them*, *the civilized/uncivilized*

*world*, which found their continued expression in the post-war developmental tropes of *first-world/third-world*, and more recently, *developed/developing* (also expressed as *'underdeveloped'* or even *'undeveloped'*), are uncritically reproduced in the Code. The active/passive roles appropriated and imposed by colonizers on Southern peoples was one of the key justifications for imposing colonial rule. 'They' do not know how to govern themselves, so it is up to 'Us'; this is the White Man's Burden, reconfigured through the humanitarian prerogatives of developmental discourse ('We' *develop* 'Them'). This suggestion of Northern dynamism and Southern passivity is reproduced with the assertion that the Code emerged from the "desire" of the "hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland" working in the Irish Development NGO sector for clarity about their activities, whilst staying silent about the determination of hundreds of millions of Southern people to resist the exploitation of their images, not to mention the significant body of academic output and activism in this area (see, for example, the work of Guyatri Spivak, Arturo Escobar, Samir Amin, Vanessa Andreotti, Chandra Mohanty, Walden Bello, Ashis Nandy, and Vandana Shiva). In this way the Code becomes another example of the *developed* 'Us' addressing the problems of the *developing world*, on their behalf. The North here is presented in the very familiar role of expert. This expertise is implied by the lack of consultation with Southern actors in the formulation of the Code and in the absence of any stated expectation or obligation on other NGOs to do so either. The 'South' is consulted only at the level of the most vulnerable by, by seeking the consent of the isolated individuals whose image the North wants to use. Meanwhile the critique, selection, editing, captioning, positioning and end use of the images are all in the hands of the Northern NGOs. The "subjects of the images and messages and their communities and countries" are indeed listed amongst the primary stakeholders in relation to the Code (Dochas c, pg. 4), yet there are no guidelines relating to the importance of working with Southern actors on these matters, beyond the issue of consent from individual photographic 'subjects'. In an explicit rejection of Southern agency, the Code recommends that its "guiding principles should act as the main reference point for all decisions"(Dochas c, pg. 10).

### **Entrenched Power Relations**

It would be impossible to realise the aims of the Code without a significant shift in the underlying imbalance of power that characterizes North-South relationships and the interaction between donors and recipients, yet this goes unaddressed. Lacking even a

cursory analysis of these relationships, the advice offered by The Guide risks perpetuating power imbalances, even as it claims (and presumably strives) to challenge these inequalities.

The approach suggested in the Guide for use in obtaining verbal consent to take and use photographs makes the balance of power abundantly clear: on page 11, development workers are invited to address their 'subjects' with the line, "I am taking photos for [name of organization], an NGO working to improve health in [your country]."

Language is not a barrier in obtaining consent: "If you don't speak the same language, communicate with your body language. At the very least, smile, nod, and point to your camera before shooting." Having established the unequal donor/recipient status of the two parties, the next question appears little more than a formality: "Do I have your permission to take your photo for use in educational media and in our publications?"

The Guide is very clear that no images should be taken if there is "any sense of reluctance, confusion or disdain." However, it is worth considering what are the factors that might go through the mind of someone cast in the 'recipient' role when they are asked a question like this? Ultimately, their relative powerlessness in this situation is made clear by the title of this section of the Guide, which names their position as *subjects* (ibid pg. 10), a term used prominently throughout the publication. The development worker evokes the authority of, and common cause with, a wide range of actors when requesting the prospective subject's permission to photograph: themselves and/or the photographer, the international NGO (helping), "your country" (being helped) and the consumers of NGO publications (presumably Northern, being educated about you). It is against this impressive collective that the prospective 'subject' has to stand if she, or he, declines to have a photograph taken.

The image and message has, in any case, already been framed, and if this 'subject' is not willing, another will be found. The entitlement of Northern NGOs to capture images of human beings in vulnerable and distressing situations is unquestioned (and articulated as an imperative and "need" (Dochas s, pg. 3). This right is pre-supposed, regardless of the sensitivities involved (including the exposure of HIV status, "abortion history, disease...sexual orientation, alcohol and drug use, contraceptive use"). The first four words of the Guide's suggested line rest on the unassailable assumption of this right: "I am taking photographs." The assertion of this role, this *fact*, comes before any request. The only matters to be resolved are how to obtain images that are 'respectful'. The

question of who decides if an image is respectful, fair or dignified is a crucial one, and is conspicuously absent from the Code. But a more important question might be whether it is possible, under these circumstances (the power dynamics of the donor-recipient relationship and the one-way appropriation of images), to have an engagement that is genuinely respectful or based on solidarity.

### **‘Other People’s Children’**

The Guide (pg. 13) acknowledges that children are “the most frequently portrayed subjects,” and on that basis a key issue for consideration. However, in proposing guidelines for the representation of Southern children that are totally at odds with those for children in the North, the Code creates a serious imbalance in protective standards, and thereby, in perceptions of relative worth. The assertion, for example, that it is good practice to give ‘subject’ children’s full names, and to identify their communities (see, for example, the current Dochas leaflet on aid), whilst claiming that parental/guardian’s verbal consent should be sought, “when possible,” bears no relationship whatsoever to corresponding domestic child-protection policies in Ireland and other Northern countries where any such identification of children is strictly regulated. The suggestion of a hierarchy of protection for North and South is extremely problematic.

### **Whiteness as an Emblem of Benevolence**

In its broad aims, the Code is an example of a developmental “discourse that seeks to give representation to the Other, to give a voice to the voiceless... [creating] ...a brighter whiter future” (Sadar 1999, pg. 45-46)

The dynamics of representation discussed in the Code operate in one direction only, *benefactor to recipient*. The alignment of the Code with broad universal standards of dignity, fairness and justice (pg. 3) assume a claim on these values that, in the framing of the document, are bestowed on one group by another. In its evocation of these humanitarian principles, the Code’s concern for truthfulness, equality (pg. 2), and for ‘humanity’ is established *as* a property of the North and a quality of Whiteness - there is no reference to this as a Southern concern, or suggestion that this could be a reciprocal process, making the North the beneficiaries of Southern concern for rights and dignity. In this way Whiteness, here recast as ‘developed’, functions as an emblem of benevolence and benign “authority, expertise and knowledge” (Kothari 2006, pg. 10), embodying virtue, and bestowing its compassion on Southern Others. On the silencing function of

‘noble intentions’, Kothari notes that “it is this overwhelming depiction of beneficence (as it was for the missionaries of old) that obscures relationships of power, and in particular ‘race’” (ibid, pg 18).

### **The Invisibility of the North**

This claim to work on behalf of the others is complicated by the absence of the North from the frame, and the failure to implicate the policies and practices of Northern powers in the creation of the very poverty and inequality that the development NGOs set out to address.

As discussed above, the only form of representation considered in the Code is of the South by the North. The North floats above this process, dispensing benevolence, but rarely forced to enter the frame unless it is in the role of benefactor.

Vincent Tucker contends that the “failure to examine critically our own [White Northern] social imagery has led to a form of mystification that places our myths (by denying they are myths and instead treating them as science) outside the beam of the critical stare while devaluing those of others” (1999, pg. 20). The commitment to “give people a real voice and opportunity to tell their own story” (Dochas c pg.10 ) is fundamentally undermined by the limited framing of these personal narratives. The North tells its stories about the South, or it may empower the South to tell its own stories. The North also likes to tell stories about itself (stories of benevolence, for the most part) but the existence, let alone the telling, of stories the South might have about the North (stories, for example of exploitative trade practices, illegal dumping of toxic waste, or support for repressive regimes) is not considered. Furthermore, the insistence that “stories should, where possible, be told in the first person,” is helpful in principle. However, in the framing of the North as universal and disconnected, in contrast with a South which is embodied in individual stories, another dichotomy is created that maintains a hierarchical distance, rather than the purported aim of solidarity. This representation of African stories as particular, in contrast with a universal North is exemplified in the Dochas publicity material produced in support of meeting Ireland’s aid targets (‘Act Now on 2015’). Of the four photographs included, three are of Black people in specific, local settings in Rwanda, Ethiopia and Togo (two of which give the full names and location of those depicted, see child protection issues, below). Alongside these images, ‘Ireland’, in contrast, is represented by a picture of the national flag, centrally positioned amongst those of the European Union, several European States and just above that of the United

Nations. The caption reads, “Ireland’s international reputation is built on its long-held commitment to the world’s poor.” (Dochas *d*)

### **Magnetic North**

The Code, motivated by the desire and needs of White Northern development workers (Dochas *c*, pg. 2), and written by White Northerners (without the input of Southern ‘voices’ nor even a cursory consultation with Southern ‘ears’) functions as moral compass, always pointing North. Reified in this way, compliance with the Code is enough to assure Northern NGOs that their use of images and messages is in accordance with the highest of human values - because the Code says so. In this way the North, in the guise of the ‘neutral’ Code, becomes the arbiter of Southern values and sensibilities. The contradiction implied in the Code’s unilateral insistence on respectful and dignified representations of the South is bypassed entirely by the assumption that the North retains full control over these subjectivities. The Code acknowledges that there may be differences of opinion in this matter, but the only differences that matter, it seems, are between those in the North. At least, these are the only ones taken into consideration: “People have different opinions on what constitutes ‘acceptable’ in relation to images and messages in development and depending on their end use, different people, often within the same organisation, may champion certain images and messages by reject others” (Dochas *c*, pg. 2). ‘People’ are here defined exclusively as Northern development workers.

This process of reification also protects the Code from any fundamental challenge or questions regarding its underlying assumptions. Dochas does have a feedback mechanism “whereby anyone can comment” or exercise their “right to challenge”. but only on the “fulfillment of the Code” or Dochas’ application of it. The Code itself takes on the quality of something fixed, natural, and beyond meaningful challenge. Criticism of the Code, then, is limited to its application (or lack of it), rather than a willingness to engage in debate on the foundational assumptions underpinning its operations.

### **White Right: The Operation of Entitlement**

The overall concerns of the Code are lofty (dignity, equality, fairness, solidarity and justice are all picked out in bold print in the online edition of the Guiding Principles) but nebulous. The practical concerns, where articulated, are often for the NGOs themselves and their target audiences rather than the people whose images are being used. In the

introduction to the Guide, for example, the use of images is deemed important because of the “enormous impact on people’s perceptions and attitudes” (pg. 2), the ‘people’ in question here being, presumably, ‘Ours’.

Elsewhere, under ‘Tips for Obtaining Informed Consent / Cultural Sensitivity’, those collecting images are reminded that “how you approach individual communities creates a relationship that *can have a lasting impact on field staff and future travellers*” (Dochas(c), pg. 11, emphasis added). The impact that culturally insensitive behavior may have on those being offended is not considered as overriding the entitlement to take photographs of “taboo practices or stigmatized populations” in the first place (ibid). In other words, the right of Northerners to capture images is presupposed. The privilege of stance lies in the protected position of Whiteness behind, rather than before, the camera. It is the “one-way gaze of the soberly disengaged, in whose world you would never be permitted the intimacy of such study” (Williams 1997, pg. 21).

### **Representing Poverty**

The Code is underpinned by an assumption that the images best suited to the portrayal of global inequalities are those of vulnerable Black people. Debates may rage within and between NGOs about the ethics of fundraising on the backs of ‘starving Black babies’, but this rarely goes further than the proposal of a replacement image of a smiling Black baby. The question of White entitlement to appropriate images of Black people has been addressed above, but here there is a different issue concerning representations of poverty. How was it decided that economic injustice or ‘poverty’ is most effectively portrayed by a picture the impoverished, rather than an image of those responsible for the impoverishing? Arguably, a photograph of an EU Commissioner, such as Peter Mandelson negotiating (to use an unnecessarily polite term) a Economic Partnership Agreement with Senegal, or any one of the 76 African, Caribbean and Pacific nations being targeted by the EU in the full knowledge that these mechanisms have the power to decimate the livelihoods of millions of economically vulnerable people in the name of European business interests would be an apt representation of ‘poverty in the making’ (Monbiot 2008).

Equally, a picture of Bill Clinton threatening to impose a 100% import tariff that would directly threaten the economies of several Caribbean democracies, in order to further the business interests of Charles Linder, coincidentally a major Democratic Party benefactor (Robinson 2001, pg. 103), would surely have far more explanatory power for those

seeking to locate poverty in its “wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development” (Dochas a, pg. 3), than an image of a hungry, or for that matter, a happy, child.

Given that the enormously uneven division of global resources is a ‘man-made’ scandal, it can (must) be conceived as a form of large-scale abuse. In other sectors dealing with abuse (for example, child abuse, torture, domestic violence or rape), NGOs are far more careful in their use of images, and sensitive to survivors. When highlighting abuse cases, the focus is far more often directed to perpetrators and to challenging the systems that facilitate and shelter abusers. Survivors, for the most part, are portrayed with sensitivity and awareness of the wider context. They are also frequently portrayed in the context of their fight for justice, rather than as passive victims. Rape Crisis Centres and domestic violence shelters manage to fund-raise without displaying and naming the victims of these abuses. It would be surprising to find those sectors produce a list documenting the uses of images of abuse survivors (including media, marketing, advocacy and reporting) all described as “legitimate and worthwhile” in the Guide (pg. 2). Why then does the development sector feel so unquestioningly entitled and compelled to do so? Why are the perpetrators of global economic, political, cultural and environmental abuse kept so persistently out of the frame?

### **Contradiction-Closing Code**

Critical Race Theorist Derek Bell coined the term contradiction-closure to describe the kind of legal mechanisms employed by the White establishment to maintain order when societal inequalities become so evident that they threaten to disturb the fundamental imbalance of power. These are devices that “serve as a shield against the excesses in the exercise of white power, yet they bring no real change in the status of blacks” (*cited in Gillborn 2008, pg 32*). Regardless of its intentions, the analysis of the Dochas Code presented here suggests that it serves just such a legitimizing function for White Northern interests. As Richard Delgado notes, “contradiction-closing cases...allow business as usual to go on even more smoothly than before, because now we can point to the exceptional case and say, ‘See, our system is really fair and just. See what we just did for the minorities or the poor’” (*ibid, pg. 33*).

### **Exposing the Contradictions of Representation: The Pornography of Poverty**

In his key note address to the Africa Centre’s recent conference on ‘Images and

Messages; A Human Rights Issue?’ Samwel Mohochi described the images promoted in the name of development as “the pornography of poverty”. This section will conclude by considering this provocative image in the light of the Code’s aims, and in doing so expose its foundational contradictions and limitations.

It is not unusual to hear aid images described as development pornography, and nor is this description simply metaphorical, so what happens if we take this term seriously and apply the aims of the Code to it? Does it make any sense to try to make *pornography* more respectful, a venture based on the “paramount principles of...solidarity and justice” (Dochas *a*, pg. 3)? Is it possible to imagine the feminist cause being in any way advanced by Hugh Hefner deliberating on the need to “ensure that those...being represented” in his publications “have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves” (ibid, pg. 4)? Finally, is it in any way meaningful to strive to make pornography that conforms “to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of...vulnerable people” (ibid)?

The metaphor of pornography speaks straight to the heart of power and exposes the contradictions inherent in the attempt to make the mapping of poverty onto Black bodies (while Whiteness is embodied as a universal concern for rights and dignity) a respectful exercise. The Code, as it is currently constellated around Northern interests, is not designed to adequately answer these questions. It may also be that the Northern development is not best placed to tackle these questions (many of which are dilemmas of their own making) in isolation.

### **Opening to Dialogue**

Marcus Power addresses these needs for a deeper challenge to structural injustices, and to bring the actions and inactions of the North into the frame. These shifts are necessary in order to develop a dialogue, built on relationships of solidarity that would truly contribute to an enhanced “understanding of the realities and complexities of development” (Dochas *a*, pg. 3):

“Perhaps...the almost exclusive focus on ‘underdevelopment’... needs to be offset with an equal attentiveness to the problems of what Gilroy (1998) terms ‘overdevelopment’... A crucial first step, then, in building any anti-racist perspective on development is to include a concern with wealth creation and ‘overdevelopment (e.g. Europe and North America) more prominently in our conceptions (Power 2006, pg. 36-37).

## CONCLUSION

The Development sector's tendency to silence on the issue of racism limits its ability to engage effectively with issues of structural poverty and representation. There is therefore a pressing need for a broader dialogue, informed by diverse perspectives and experiences. This form of dialogue will require to a wholly different form of engagement, a move away from unilateral pronouncements and a one-way gaze, to a reflexive "looking at ourselves looking" (Tucker pg. 23). Dialogue necessitates relationship, and in that engagement the mainstream development sector can expect to find itself, "constituted by others as they are constituted by us" (ibid). The history and context of this engagement will inevitably render it complex and contentious, but the only alternative is to continue reproducing old fallacious representations of superiority and inferiority.

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