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Painting a Picture: A Visual Analysis of the Representations of Africa
and Africans by Irish NGOs (Concern Worldwide and Trócaire) in
their Communications Media.

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at the ways in which Africa and Africans have been depicted in NGOs' (Concern and Trócaire) communications media. Whilst acknowledging the significant and positive humanitarian contributions made by these organisations throughout the continent, the research also interrogates the ways in which their methods of raising awareness and funds have deployed imagery and narratives with lasting societal impact. By employing Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Social Learning Theory as analytical frameworks, the study evaluates how images and visual signifiers within NGO donor newsletters contribute to the construction and reinforcement of stereotypical depictions of Africa as a site of poverty, hardship, and dependency. Through a multimodal social semiotic analysis, the research identifies recurrent patterns, such as the centring of women and children, motifs of deprivation, and generalised portrayals that risk flattening the diversity of African experiences. Whilst both Concern and Trócaire share similarities in their visual approach, subtle differences in tone and narrative are also discussed. The research recognises the important role such NGOs play in mobilising resources and global empathy, yet it highlights the need for more ethical and empowering approaches to representation that respect the dignity and agency of African individuals and communities. Limitations regarding archival access and the inherent subjectivity of visual analysis are addressed. The findings ultimately call for more critical and nuanced visual storytelling, fostering solidarity and mutual understanding, rather than inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes and racist ideas about Africa and Africans.

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To my mom, thank you for wiping away my tears in times of doubt and stress. I don’t want to know what I would do in a world without you.

And to my father, can you love me even after I have outgrown your perception of me?

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Introduction

Africans and Black people in EU states and the USA are frequently portrayed in a negative light, often depicted as inferior to the white population (Fanon, 1967). This Eurocentric framing and the notion of Western superiority remain persistent in media representations (Fanon, 1967; Olusa and Gavigan, 2019). And while advancements in technology have expanded access to digital media, they also amplify the spread of these portrayals. Given that images play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, it is essential to critically examine the media we consume daily (Berger, 1972; Barthes; 1972).

Irish NGOs such as Concern (1968) and Trócaire (1973) formed during events such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the famine in Biafra marked a defining moment in Irish international humanitarian aid (O'Sullivan, 2007; 2013). As Ireland holds a unique position as both a country with a history of colonial subjugation and an active participant in international development aid, it is essential to examine how these organisations have painted Africa as a poor nation to be able to portray themselves as the saviour and the means to end poverty, famine, and suffering in Africa (O'Sullivan, 2013; Parenti, 1995). While these charities were influenced by this historical background, their activities in Africa can also be seen as an extension of the colonial legacy of Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation (Nkomazana, 1998; Said, 1978; Linehan, 2014). In doing so, they contribute to images of Africa as poor and underdeveloped—representations that echo colonial discourses and emphasize “othering” (Said, 1978; Linehan, 2014; O’Sullivan, 2013).

In this context, I aim to critically analyse Irish charities’ role in shaping its population’s perceptions of Africa and Africans in the media. Although these organisations have made valuable humanitarian contribution, they have also helped perpetuate certain narratives rooted in colonial power dynamics (Bateman, 2008; Linehan, 2014). Hence, for my dissertation, I aim to take a Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory approach to analyse how Irish NGOs, Concern and Trócaire, have been representing Africa and Africans in their donor newsletters. The reason for analysing donor newsletters is that they are sent directly to the households that subscribe to them and are read by children and adults in the households.

This research aims to answer three questions:

1. How do Concern and Trócaire visually represent Africa and Africans in their donor newsletters?

2. To what degree do they differ in their visual representation?
3. What signifiers towards Africa and Africans are present in their donor newsletters?

The following working hypothesis are:

1. The representations of Africa and Africans by Concern and Trócaire's donor newsletters have contributed to and perpetuated stereotypical imagery about Africa and its people.
2. The visual portrayals by both organisations are similar in content.
3. The signifiers that signify Africa and Africans remain largely unchanged over the time period studied.

Literature Review

Introduction

The British Empire's legacy in Ireland and Africa has left profound political, social, and economic impacts that still resonate today (Bateman, 2008). Ireland shares the same history of colonial oppression with African nations. Both of which were systematically exploited under the British rule (Bateman, 2008). Central to Ireland's colonial history is the Great Famine (1845-1852), a terrible disaster exacerbated by British policies (Larkin, 1976). The subsequent rise of the Irish Catholic Church which provided a counterpoint to colonial hegemony, reinforcing Irish identity amidst adversity (Larkin, 1976). This literature review will be split into three sections. First, it will examine the British Empire, Ireland under the British rule, how the Irish were treated and depicted by the British, The Great Famine and the subsequent rise of the Irish Catholic Church. Second, a history of Africa's own colonial past will be revisited and the treatment they received under British occupation and other colonisers. Finally, the role Ireland play with their humanitarian aid and missionary activities in Africa.

1. The British Empire

The British Empire's 19th-century expansion was driven by economic ambitions and justified through the "3 Cs": Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation, a doctrine popularised by David Livingstone (Nkomazana, 1998). While imperial rhetoric framed intervention as a philanthropic mission to improve societies by spreading Christianity, commercial systems, and European culture, historians reveal that these endeavours primarily served economic interests. According to Parenti (1995), he argued that colonisation targeted regions for their wealth and resources, rather than their supposed backwardness. And Ireland itself was a target of imperial exploitation within this framework.

Livingstone argued that Christianity, commerce, and civilisation were interdependent, believing their united influence would improve African societies while curbing the slave trade and transforming social institutions (Nkomazana, 1998). In reality, this ideology facilitated the entry of British commercial interests and reshaped indigenous societies in the name of progress. As Livingstone stated, true societal elevation could not happen without commerce, arguing that "Christianity and commerce should ever be inseparable" (Nkomazana, 1998, pp. 54).

1.1 The British Empire in Ireland

The British Empire's civilising ideology was imposed not just on distant colonies but also on Ireland. Under British rule, after the Act of Union in 1801, Ireland's society and economy were fundamentally altered to serve British interests (Larkin, 1976). Policies promoted export-based agriculture, which deepened poverty for many Irish people (Larkin, 1976). According to Larkin (1976), the poorest classes, such as farmers and labourers, struggled to survive, often living in basic conditions and working land that primarily served British needs. While claims were made that union would bring Ireland prosperity and progress, the reality was increased dependence and greater social division (Larkin, 1976).

This civilising discourse therefore justified not simply imperial expansion, but a profound reorganisation of Irish economic and social relations. The consequences included systemic poverty, land alienation, and entrenched social hierarchies. As Larkin stated, "the integration of Ireland into the United Kingdom, under the ideological and economic logic of empire, resulted in economic dependency, social stratification, and repeated demographic crises" (Larkin, 1976, pp. 33).

1.1.1 The Political, Economic, and Social Conditions under British Rule

The 1801 Act of Union ended Ireland's legislative independence, centralising power in Westminster and limiting Irish influence over their governance (Larkin, 1976). Most political decisions about Ireland were made in London, where Irish voices were a minority and often overlooked (Larkin, 1976). Furthermore, the ruling Protestant Ascendancy, mostly Anglo-Irish landlords who were loyal to the Crown, dominated politics, while the Catholics and Presbyterians faced exclusion and discrimination (Larkin, 1976). Although some restrictions eased after the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the systemic inequalities persisted leaving most Catholics poor and underrepresented (Larkin, 1976). Consequently, this political marginalisation led to the unrest and laid the foundation for nationalist movements seeking Irish autonomy (Larkin, 1976).

Economically, Ireland was made to serve Britain's interests rather than their own. Land ownership was highly unequal with British and Anglo-Irish landlords controlling vast estates and extracting high rents from impoverished Irish tenant farmers, often leaving families in

insecurity (Larkin, 1976; Woodham-Smith, 1991). Furthermore, the agricultural sector prioritised exports to Britain, resulting in domestic food shortages (Woodham-Smith, 1991). Consequently, Ireland's economy remained largely underdeveloped and predominantly agricultural (Woodham-Smith, 1991; Kinealy, 1994). Rural families had to live on small rented plots and depend on the potato, with much of their produce exported to pay rents and taxes (Woodham-Smith, 1991). Under their laissez-faire policies, the British government offered little intervention during crises such as the Great Famine, where food exports continued despite widespread starvation (Woodham-Smith, 1991). This showed the extractive and unequal colonial relationship between the two countries, which left Irish families with minimal resources or prospects (Woodham-Smith, 1991).

Socially, the Protestant Ascendancy controlled most wealth and power while the Catholic majority faced discrimination and deep poverty (Larkin, 1976). The Penal Laws institutionalised exclusion, barring Catholics from land ownership, politics, education, and professions for much of the 18th and early 19th century, even after these laws began to be repealed, discrimination and disadvantage remained embedded in Irish society (Larkin, 1976). To add to that, British authorities and the press often portrayed the Irish as “backwards” and “uncivilised”, which reinforced racist stereotypes that justified their harsh policies and state neglect, particularly during the Great Famine (Kinealy, 1994; Bateman, 2008; Casey, 2015). Daily life for most Irish people was precarious, tenant farmers risked eviction, relied on charity and communal networks for survival and experienced growing hardship as the rising populations led to smaller landholdings and increased poverty (Larkin, 1976; Kinealy, 1994). In the wake of the famine and persistent insecurity, emigration became a defining aspect of Irish life, shaping identity both in Ireland and abroad (Kinealy, 1994).

1.2 The Role of the Catholic Church under British Rule

The Catholic Church emerged as both a target of British oppression and, ultimately, a source of Irish cohesion and resilience. Suppressed under the Penal Laws (1695-1829) which curtailed the rights of Catholics, restricting their access to education, property ownership, and public office, Catholicism re-emerged as a defining feature of the Irish identity during the 19th century (Larkin, 1976). The church was forced to operate largely underground until restrictions began to ease in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Larkin, 1976, pp. 16). After

Catholic Emancipation, the Church quickly became central to Irish national life—a development often termed the “Devotional Revolution” (Larkin, 1976). The Church provided spiritual guidance, education, social services, and a sense of community, often stepping in where state institutions failed or discriminated (Larkin, 1976; Milne, 2003). Consequently, Catholic schools shaped generations through curricula imbedded with religious and nationalist values (Larkin, 1976; Milne, 2003). With leaders such as Cardinal Paul Cullen, he fostered a distinct Irish Catholic community that resisted British cultural dominance and solidified the link between Irishness and Catholicism by the end of the century (Larkin, 1976, pp. 83).

1.3 The Great Famine (1845-1852)

When the potato blight struck Ireland in 1845, the consequences were catastrophic. The British government’s response to mass starvation was shaped by a rigid adherence to the free-market economy and a deep-seated prejudice against the Irish, widely seen as “idle”, “reckless”, “lazy”, and “improvident” (Kinealy, 1994). Relief was considered a last resort provided only when it was clear that local resources were exhausted and starvation was imminent (Woodham-Smith, 1991; Kinealy, 1994). Officials resisted intervention. Ultimately, these policy failures driven by economic dogma and colonial attitudes made the scale of deaths and emigration far greater than it might have been.

Over a million lives were lost and many forced to emigrate (Woodham-Smith, 1991). Hence, the trauma and injustice of the Famine became central to Irish identity and a powerful critique of British rule. Exposing the profound structural inequalities and indifference embedded in colonial governance (Woodham-Smith, 1991). This experience shares parallels with famines in British-controlled African states, as stated by Mike Davis (2001). In regions such as India and parts of Africa, imperial policies prioritised resource extractions and export markets, worsening the impact of droughts and crop failures in the colonized states (Davis, 2001). These colonial famines, like the Great Famine, underscore the systematic indifference of the British government towards the well-being of the colonised population. The next section looks at the history of Africa’s own colonial past.

2. Africa's Colonial Past

Africa's colonial history with Europe, characterised by centuries of subjugation, violent exploitation, systemic racism, and historical ruptures, continue to inform the continent's portrayals in academic, political, and popular media (Said, 1978; hooks, 1981). This vast and tragic period decisively shaped Africa's modern realities, underpinning legacies of underdevelopment, dependency, and the continuing re-formation of African identity and agency in the shadow of empire. To understand Africa's contemporary place in the world and the persistent tropes in media and knowledge production, it is essential to first explore the motives, practices, discourse, and impacts of colonialism and the slave trade.

2.2 The Economic Motives behind Colonisation

One of the most widely cited explanations for the scramble for Africa is the economic reason of capitalism (Mudimbe, 1988). By the late 19th century, European industrial powers faced surplus of capital, goods, and labour, which created pressure to find profitable opportunities beyond Europe's saturated markets (Mudimbe, 1988). As Rodney notes, the capitalist world system develops certain regions at the expense of others, turning Africa into both a storehouse of resources and a field for European investment and commerce (Mudimbe, 1988, pp. 3). According to Mudimbe (1988), he highlights how Africa was reimagined in Europe as "terra nullius", an empty, ownerless land, "ripe for appropriation" (pp. 46). Because of this, it erased Africa's agency and justified the division and exploitation of the continent by imperial powers (Mudimbe, 1988). Geopolitical rivalry further fuelled the rush, with Britain, France, and Germany striving for profit, influence, and prestige, each of them anxious not to fall behind their rivals (Mudimbe, 1988; Mbembe, 2001).

This combination of economic and reasoning created the conditions for violence and disruption (Mbembe, 2001). Mining companies, landowners, and trading firms were often the first to push into new areas, with help from government soldiers and police (Mbembe, 2001). And they forced Africans to work, kicked people off their land, and took as many resources as they could (Mbembe, 2001). In the end, what was called "commerce" or business that claimed to bring civilisation was really just theft and exploitation. Foreign companies, protected by colonial armies, took over mines, farms, and forests, making Africans work in conditions that were often hardly different from slavery or forced labour (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 34).

2.2 Strategic, Civilising, and Ideological Motives

2.2.1 Strategic Control

Countries were not just after the money, they wanted military advantage as well. For example, controlling Egypt and the Suez Canal gave Britain a quick route to India and allowed for quick movement of troops and resources around the world (Mbembe, 2001). To add to that, ports and colonies along Africa's coasts gave access to trade and more spaces to expand further inwards (Mbembe, 2001). Often, conquering new territories was justified as a way to protect more valuable colonies nearby from European rivals (Mudimbe, 1988). The term "effective occupation", formalised at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference, meant that countries had to actually control and manage African territories, not just put their flags there, but defeat local rulers and set up government structures, often resorting to violence (Nkomazana, 1998).

2.2.2 The Civilising Mission: Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation

Christianity, commerce, and civilisation served as key justifications for colonial conquest in Africa (Nkomazana, 1998). Christianity was invoked to "save" Africans from the "darkness" of their traditions, with missionaries destroying sacred sites, burning objects of worship, and using biblical teachings to justify both the slave trade and the expectation of submissive behaviour amongst Africans (Mudimbe, 1988; Ottuh, 2022). Meanwhile, commerce was promoted as a civilised alternative to slavery, as Livingstone who called for the union of "commerce and Christianity", but in reality, it facilitated exploitation and the takeover of African land and labour for foreign profit (Nkomazana, 1998; Mbembe, 2001; Ottuh, 2022). To add to that, their civilising mission placed European laws, language, and values as the superior and imposed them through schools and governance, undermining African cultures and identities in the name of progress and salvation (Mudimbe, 1988).

2.2.3 Orientalism and the "Otherness"

Supporting all these rationales for empire was another idea: that Africans were entirely "different" or inferior (Said, 1978). Edward Said (1978) called this way of thinking 'Orientalism'. It was a way of explaining how Europeans created a mental and cultural divide

of seeing Africa as wild, irrational, and savage, while viewing themselves as modern, rational, and dynamic (pp. 40). This “othering” was everywhere, whether in art or science to law or medicine (Said, 1978). As Mudimbe (1988) argued, Africa was systematically pushed into the category of the irrational, prelogical, and savage, and this allowed colonisers to impose their own values, religions, and systems of power. Even today, many researchers, courses, and news stories are still influenced by these colonial ways of understanding Africa (Mudimbe, 1988; Mbembe, 2001; Ottuh, 2022).

2.3 Racism and the Dehumanisation of Africans

One of the features of colonial domination in Africa was the construction of racism. It is a systematic ideology of difference where Africans were viewed and thought of as inferior, primitive, or animal-like (hooks, 1981). This racism is one of the core tools for justifying and perpetuating economic, social, and political subordination of Africans to the European colonisers. It was and still is a way for the Europeans or the white/Caucasian hegemony to suppress Africans’ claims to equality and the possibility of resistance.

Colonial powers needed to justify their rule of a small European minority over millions of Africans, so they systematically portrayed Africans as fundamentally different, irrational, primitive, and animal-like (Mudimbe, 1988). This strategy legitimised their domination and denied Africans of agency and equality by making subjugation appear natural and necessary (Fanon, 1967; Mudimbe, 1988). Stereotyping Africans as “lazy”, “violent”, or “intellectually lacking” reinforced the supposed need for western civilisation and control (Mbembe, 2001). Furthermore, dehumanising Africans as animal-like or bestial enabled colonisers to excuse violence, land theft, exploitation, and cultural destruction whilst protecting their own privilege and power (Rodney, 1974; hooks, 1981; Mbembe, 2002). As Said’s (1978) concept of Orientalism argued, colonised peoples were rarely seen in their full humanity, but were instead cast as the perpetual “other” against which western rationality and superiority were measured (Said, 1978; Mudimbe, 1988).

2.3.1 The Colonial Gaze

It is therefore crucial to look at how Africans were depicted and represented in the media by colonial settlers. The media, in this context, is then the art and posters that were visually disseminated to the general public whether in Africa or back where the colonisers were from to communicate and spread racist ideas and stereotypes about Africans. These images help establish what it meant to “look African” and shaped mainstream perceptions in Africa and Europe. As McCormack (2021) highlights in *Women in the Picture*, European art traditions not only objectified women but also reinforced whiteness as the ideal archetype, at the same time marginalising and stereotyping non-white African bodies.

Hence, portraits, paintings, and advertisements often depicted black African bodies as wild, exotic, monstrous, undesirable, and exaggerated their physical features to signal difference and inferiority to white standards (hooks, 1981; McCormack, 2021). Historical artworks “objectify women, normalise violence against them, stereotype or exclude racial diversity, or demonise aging and non-normative bodies and sexualities” (McCormack, 2021, pp. 14). And the same visual grammar that dehumanised women were also used to dehumanise black African woman, a legacy that persists in contemporary media where black bodies are rarely portrayed with agency and power (McCormack, 2021).

A prominent example is the depictions of Saartjie Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus”, paraded in Europe where her body was fetishised and objectified as evidence of “otherness” and animality (McCormack, 2021, pp. 49). Similarly, Stothard’s *The Voyage of the Sable Venus* (c. 1800) depicted a black African woman in a classical Venus pose but as property and object of the predatory colonial gaze, erasing her agency and underlying trauma of slavery (McCormack, 2021). As a result, these depictions of black African women reinforced hierarchies of race, gender, and power that underpinned colonial dominance and continue to influence today’s perceptions (McCormack, 2021). The next section looks at how Ireland and Africa share similar experiences under the British Empire and the role Ireland now plays in Africa through their missionary activities and humanitarian aid there.

3 Ireland and Africa: The Shared Suffering under Colonial Rule

Ireland and many African states share a legacy of subjugation under British imperial rule that has shaped their identities and interactions to this day. Both Ireland and Africa were constructed by colonial discourse as “the other”, by portraying them as racially, culturally, or socially inferior and in need of western intervention (Hogan, 1979; O’Sullivan, 2013). Hence, British authorities justified exploitation by depicting Irish and Africans as “uncivilised”, “backward”, and requiring moral and spiritual salvation. Postcolonial theory highlights these parallels, that Ireland and Africa were framed as objects of western intervention and symbols of “difference” and “backwardness” (Laird, 2016). For Ireland, stereotypes, land dispossession, and the Famine deepened their marginalisation within the British Isles just as African societies were cast as primitive and dependent on western intervention (Hogan, 1979; O’Sullivan, 2013).

3.1 Ireland’s Humanitarian Relationship with Africa: Empathy, Mission, and Neocolonial Representation

The trauma of the Great Famine has shaped national identity and fostered a sense of kinship with African societies who have also been affected by famine and colonialism (O’Sullivan, 2013). Irish humanitarian appeals, especially during humanitarian crises in Biafra and Ethiopia, have invoked memories of their Famine to underscore a natural empathy toward African suffering and to justify Ireland’s extensive missionary activities across the continent (Hogan, 1979; O’Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, Irish missionaries and volunteers often saw their work as both a religious duty and a moral response rooted in their collective trauma, and framing their intervention in Africa as a redemptive act for both giver and receiver (Corkery, 1971; Hogan, 1979; Connolly, 1995; O’Sullivan, 2013).

However, this empathy-driven engagement often perpetuated old colonial hierarchies (Bateman, 2008). Irish missionaries, like other Europeans, tended to adopt paternalistic attitudes and depicted Africans as passive recipients needing salvation (Bateman, 2008; O’Sullivan, 2013). For example, missionary periodicals and NGO campaigns presented Africa through the lens of helplessness, primitivism, and dependency, which reinforces a “saviour” narrative and perpetuating racial and civilisational binaries (Sheridan et al., 2017). Campaigns such as the “Black Babies” fundraisers and the use of “poverty porn” imagery in appeals and

educational materials have reduced African subjects to objects of pity, stripped of their agency and autonomy (Sheridan et al., 2017; Clough et al., 2024).

This form of neocolonial representation maintains unequal power relations under the guise of charity and humanitarianism (Sheridan et al., 2017). Although Irish aid is rooted in historical empathy, it often positioned itself and the West as active, civilised donors and Africans as voiceless, dependent “others” (O’Sullivan, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2017). Hence, these representations continue to shape perceptions among Irish children and the public, fostering social distance, and reinforcing stereotypes about African difference (Sheridan et al., 2017; Clough et al., 2024). So, this dynamic shows how images and narratives within Ireland’s humanitarian missions can perpetuate legacies of inequality and othering in global relations, despite their compassionate intent.

3.2 Viewers as active participants

While images are understood in terms of their affective impact and capacity for “myth-making” (Barthes, 1972), scholars have stressed that viewers are not merely passive participants of visual messages (Nathanson, 2013). The multimodal social semiotic approach states that meaning is created through the interaction between the image and viewer, who brings their own knowledge, experiences, and cultural perspectives (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Backed also by Berger (1972, pp. 10), he notes that “our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing”, and that the context in which an image is encountered and the associations it provokes can transform its meaning. Thus, while NGO campaigns may aim to evoke compassion and increase donations, viewers can resist or reinterpret these visual messages based on their cultural background (Berger, 1972). And by recognising the viewer’s active role in interpretation and the ideological nature of visual images is essential for developing more ethical and accurate humanitarian communication (Nathanson, 2013).

Conclusion of literature review

In reviewing the existing literature, it is evident that there remains a significant gap relating to the analysis of visual imagery used by NGOs in their representations of Africa and Africans. Given these gaps, this research aims to address several key questions. Firstly, it seeks to analyse

how Africa and Africans are visually represented by Concern and Trocaire in their donor newsletters. Secondly, to what degree do they differ in their visual representations and what signifiers are attached to Africa and Africans.

Profile of Concern Worldwide

Concern Worldwide is Ireland's largest humanitarian organisation. Established in 1968, it was a direct response to the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding during the Biafran War in Nigeria (Concern Worldwide, n.d.a). The organisation was founded by John and Kay O'Loughlin-Kennedy alongside priests following the revelation that over 6,000 children were dying each week due to starvation and conflict in Biafra (Concern Worldwide, n.d.a). Concern's mission is to alleviate extreme poverty in the world's most vulnerable regions, underpinned by a focus on equality, dignity, and community-led solutions (Concern Worldwide, n.d.a). Its work encompasses five core areas: 1) humanitarian response, 2) health and nutrition, 3) livelihoods, 4) education, and 5) gender equality. As of 2025, Concern is operating in 26 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia (Concern Worldwide, n.d.b). It reached 16.8 million people globally in 2024 (Concern Worldwide, n.d.b). In Africa, its operations include feeding centres for malnourished children, water sanitation systems, agricultural resilience training, mobile health clinics (Concern Worldwide, 2024).

Profile of Trócaire

Trócaire was founded in 1973 by the Irish Catholic Bishops (Trócaire, n.d.a). The Irish bishops formed this organisation to express the Church's commitment to social justice globally. Trócaire's mission is to support the most vulnerable people in the Global South by addressing the structural causes of poverty, conflict, and injustice (Trócaire, n.d.b). The organisation's strategic framework for 2021-2025 outlines five key priorities: 1) defending human rights, 2) promoting climate and environmental justice, 3) protecting and empowering women and girls, 4) delivering emergency humanitarian aid, 5) fostering public engagement and advocacy for global justice within Ireland (Trócaire, n.d.b). Currently, Trócaire operates in 14 countries, nine in sub-Saharan Africa (Trócaire, n.d.c). Its African operations include post-conflict community rebuilding in South Sudan, gender-based violence prevention in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and climate resilient farming programmes in Kenya and Malawi (Trócaire, n.d.d). In 2024, Trócaire reached over 690,000 people with their services (Trócaire, n.d.c). This organisation plays a critical role in promoting global awareness the Irish public, aligning with Catholic social teaching and emphasising solidarity with the communities in the Global South (Trócaire, n.d.e).

Theoretical Framework

1. Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytical framework that considers how race and racism are embedded structurally and institutionally within society and are perpetuated through cultural representations (Busumtwi-Sam and Kashyap, 2025). The use of CRT allows this research to scrutinise how visual portrayals of Africa and Africans in these newsletters may reinforce and normalise dominant narratives about race, otherness, and power. CRT is particularly significant in this context because western humanitarian and media images have historically contributed to systems of privilege and inequality, often depicting Africa in ways that echo colonial hierarchies and racialised constructions of difference (Dolinar and Sitar, 2013). By applying CRT, the analysis can contextualise Concern and Trócaire's visual materials within broader histories of colonialism, power, and ongoing relations of the domination and subordination in western imaginary (Busumtwi-Sam and Kashyap, 2025).

2. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory will also be employed in this research as a framework to examine how historical structures of colonial power and ideologies continue to shape modern perceptions, language, and in this case, imagery of formerly colonised societies. According to Said (1978) and Mudimbe (1988), colonial discourse has constructed Africa as “the other”, lacking primitive and in need of western intervention. Hence, by applying postcolonial theory, this research will deconstruct how NGO newsletters mould Africa and Africans into passive recipients of aid, objects of sympathy, and needing to be rescued. This framework enables an analysis of not just explicit messages but also the underlying assumptions embedded in the images. Furthermore, it provides tools to reveal the subtle continuities with colonial patterns of representation.

3. Social Learning Theory

This research will also draw on Social Learning Theory (SLT) to interpret the societal impacts of these visual representations. SLT states that people learn by observing others, particularly media models rather than only through direct experience (Bandura, 1971; Dill and Burgess, 2012). And much human learning occurs vicariously through repeated stories and visual images encountered in daily life. As visual images can trigger strong emotional reactions, emotionally charged visuals, such as depictions of starving children or conflict, therefore can evoke

empathy or guilt and are likely to be embedded in viewer's memories (Michira, 2002; Dill and Burgess, 2012). Consequently, these images will be internalised, and shaping personal and collective understandings of places and people that are not directly experienced (Dill and Burgess, 2012). For children in the Global North, initial impressions of Africa often come from NGO campaigns or educational materials that portray the continent as plagued by famine, poverty, and conflict (Michira, 2002; Olusa and Gavigan, 2019). And according to SLT, repeated exposure to such imagery not only informs but also forms narrow and stereotypical perceptions of Africa and Africans, that are continually reinforced by NGOs and the media (Michira, 2002; Olusa and Gavigan, 2019).

Methodology

This research will adopt a qualitative content analysis to examine how Concern and Trócaire represent Africa and Africans in their newsletters. The analysis is grounded in the framework of the Multimodal Social Semiotics, drawing on *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). This approach will provide a toolkit for systematically deconstructing the grammar of the visual design by examining the patterns of colour, perspective, framing, and composition to reveal how these images communicate meaning beyond what is shown (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The core objective is to uncover how the functions of these images feed into and sustain broader narratives about Africa and Africans within Western discourse.

1. The Multimodal Social Semiotic Approach

The multimodal social semiotic approach explores how different forms of communications, like images, text, and layout, work together to create meaning in specific social and cultural settings (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Each mode, including visuals, can shape how ideas are expressed. Visuals are powerful modes because they can present information, build relationships with viewers, and organise content all at once, and they can leave an impression on viewers because seeing comes before words (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) "Grammar of Visual Design" can help explain how images create meaning. This research will apply Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) three metafunctions, the representational, interactive, and compositional, to analyse the images.

1.1 Representational Meaning

The representational meaning refers to how images depict the world, how they show people, places, things, and the relationships or actions connecting them (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Within this dimension, analysis focuses on two main processes: narrative and conceptual. Narrative processes show action, events, or processes. These images capture moments of change or interaction, engaging the viewer with unfolding stories. Conceptual processes show static relationships, classifications, or qualities.

1.2 Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning involves the relationships between the image, depicted subjects, and the viewer (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). It examines how images engage, address, or position viewers. Key elements include the gaze, social distance, and point of view. A demand

gaze refers to participants who look out at the viewer in the image and an offer gaze is when the participants do not make eye contact with the viewers. Social distance refers to the closeness between participant and viewer, such as close-ups shots (which suggest intimacy) or longshots (which suggest distance). Finally, point of view refers to the angle or perspective from which the image is shown. High-angle shots position the viewer above the subject, implying power and superiority, while low-angle shots do the opposite, giving the participants power over viewers.

1.3 Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning refers to how different elements are organised within the image and how it creates meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Key elements include information value, salience, and framing. Information value refers to the placement of elements, on the left/right (Given/New) or top/bottom (Ideal/Real) which influences their significance (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Salience refers to the degree to which certain elements attract the viewer's attention, determined by size, colour, focus, contrast, and central positioning. Finally, framing refers to how boundaries like lines, spaces, contrasts, connect or separate elements within the image. Strong framing isolates subjects, making them stand out as distinct, and weak framing connects elements through colour and layout.

2. Sampling

Sampling will involve all annual newsletters produced by Concern (six in total) and all seasonal newsletters by Trócaire (17 in total) from 2019 to 2025. To ensure a systematic and efficient analysis amongst the vast materials, images analysis is those occupying around a quarter of a page, smaller images will be omitted. Images of African people or scenes identified as in Africa will be analysed only as the study's focus is on the portrayals of Africa and Africans. This approach will provide a representative and manageable sample for in-depth visual analysis.

3. Theories

To examine how such visual representations contribute to the constructions of racial and cultural hierarchies, the research will draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Postcolonial Theory to examine how race and racism are produced through institutional and cultural practices and scrutinise the ways in which visual portrayals of Africa and Africans may help perpetuate narratives about race, otherness, and power.

Presentation of the Findings

This chapter presents the results of the images analysed in Concern and Trócaire's monthly and annual donor newsletters using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) Multimodal Social Semiotics framework. In total, 112 images from 23 donor newsletters were analysed, 34 images from Concern and 78 images from Trócaire. The analysis of these images comprised of three levels from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) Grammar of Visual Design framework which are: 1) the representational, interactive, and compositional meaning.

1. The Representational Meaning

Narrative processes show action, events, or processes.

Conceptual processes show static relationships, classifications, or qualities.

	Images	Types of participants	Description
Concern summer 2019	1	Conceptual	The picture depicts an African woman who is smiling at the camera, wearing a traditional African outfit. Since she is static, it generates a conceptual meaning.
	2	Conceptual	The picture depicts an African woman smiling at the camera whilst holding her baby. They are standing in front of what seems to be a hut.
	3	Narrative	The picture shows an African woman, in the centre of the image, opening bags filled with food supplies. In the background, a man and a woman are doing the same.
	4	Conceptual	This picture shows an African mother on the far right of the picture holding her child. A boy on the left is seen looking at the camera too. The two boys are wearing clothes with dirt stains.
	5	Narrative	It shows a young boy holding a goat in the centre of the picture. He is smiling directly at the camera. Behind him are mountains and trees, the "roads" are dirt roads.
	6	Narrative	This picture shows two African men pushing their bicycle carrying a bag of sticks crossing the river. One is pushing the bicycle from behind and one in the front wheels.
Concern summer 2020	7	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman smiling directly at the camera. She is wearing a green headscarf and green clothes.

8	Conceptual	The picture shows an African woman smiling directly at the camera. She is static hence generating a conceptual meaning.
9	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman sitting on a chair with young children surrounding her. The woman is smiling at the camera along with the children looking directly at the camera.
10	Narrative	This picture shows three African woman in their traditional African outfits carrying what seems to be big sheets on their heads.
11	Conceptual	This picture shows an African mother smiling directly at the camera. She is holding her daughter on the left.
12	Narrative	This picture depicts a white man looking in the direction of the young African girls who seems to be filling up murky water into big plastic bottles.
13	Conceptual	A young African boy is pictured with a cow. He is smiling directly at the camera.
14	Conceptual	This picture shows an African mother holding her child. The woman is smiling directly at the camera whilst the baby is looking outside of the camera.
15	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman sitting with a baby on her lap and two young African boys standing behind her. They are smiling directly at the camera which gives this a conceptual meaning.
16	Conceptual	This picture shows an African mother on the right holding her baby on the left. The woman is wearing a face mask and is in vibrant colour clothes.
17	Narrative	This picture shows an African man (left) and woman (right) in beekeeper suits with each of their hands placed on the wooden hive. They are both looking at the camera.

18	Conceptual	This picture shows an African mother and her three children holding soaps in their hands. They seem happy in the picture. Their clothes seem old and slightly dirty.
19	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman smiling directly at the camera. She is in traditional Kenyan outfit and is wearing a headscarf.
Concern summer 2022	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman (left) holding her baby (right). She is smiling at her baby whilst a hand (seen in the picture) feeds her baby nutrients in a silver packet. There are tears on the baby's face.
21	Conceptual	This picture shows a group of African women and men in their traditional outfits. They are holding something unidentifiable in their hands to show the viewers.
22	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman (centre) sitting in a chair in the midst of receiving a vaccine from an African healthcare professional (female). The woman receiving the vaccine is holding another woman's hands for support and has her eyes closed. Surrounding her are African men, women, baby perhaps waiting for their vaccine.
23	Narrative	This picture shows an African man planting in his farm. He is working under the sun hence giving the picture a narrative meaning
24	Conceptual	This picture shows two African women and two young children, one sitting in between the women and one on the lap of one woman. They are smiling at each other. The woman on the right is in vibrant colour clothes but looks slightly dishevelled with dried mud or dirt on her neck area.
25	Narrative	This picture shows an African mother holding her baby. Her baby is sucking on its thumb. The child also has a visible bloated belly, a common sign of malnutrition. They are both in the forest or woods with the trees and branches in the background.
Concern summer 2023	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman in traditional African outfit. She is smiling directly at the camera which gives it a conceptual meaning.
27	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man with his arms crossed smiling directly at the camera. He is wearing a buttoned up flannel shirt with some small holes visible on the shoulder area.

28	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (right) next to a younger African woman (left). They are both smiling directly at the camera and are dressed in bright red/pink clothes. Slums can be seen in the background.
29	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (left) holding her baby on her lap and a young boy standing next to her. They are all looking directly at the camera. The woman is wearing a headscarf. Dirt can be seen on their clothes and they seem to be in a tent.
30	Conceptual	This picture shows a young African boy holding a chicken smiling directly at the camera. He is in oversized clothes with dirt visible on them. In the background, trees surround him.
Concern summer 2024	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (left) standing next to an African man (right). The man is holding his baby in his arms. The man and woman are both smiling directly at the camera. Behind them are compartments of food supplies.
32	Narrative	This picture shows two African mothers, both sitting on the ground and feeding their babies in their lap. They are wearing vibrant colour clothing and are wearing headscarfs as well. They seem to be feeding their babies porridge.
33	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman showing her crops to the viewers. She is surrounded by the crops grown there and because she is looking directly at the camera, it gives the picture a conceptual meaning.
34	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (left) holding her child (right). They are both looking directly at the camera, giving it a conceptual meaning. They seem to be standing in front of a building made of mud.
Trócaire spring 2019	Conceptual	This picture shows a screenshot of an African man talking to the viewer. He is wearing a brown/grey colour tie and light purple shirt.
36	Narrative	This picture shows an African young girl standing next to a white young girl and an adult white woman talking to a police officer on a bike. The girls and the woman have a 3D enlarged size Trócaire lent box placed in front of them.
Trócaire winter 2019	Narrative	This picture shows an African man (left) holding a baby (right) in his arms. A sombre atmosphere surrounds them.

38	Narrative	This picture shows a landscape picture of Northern Uganda with storm clouds over them.
39	Narrative	This picture shows a young African boy holding a pair of flip flops smiling directly at the camera. He is leaning to the adult standing next to him on the left.
40	Narrative	This picture shows a young African boy looking into the distance. Dirt is visible on his clothes.
41	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man (left) holding his baby (right) on his hip. They are both in crop fields. The man is wearing a buttoned-up shirt with a hoodie over it. The baby is wearing yellow and black strips shirt.
42	Narrative	This picture shows an African man minding the two goats that are on leashes. The three seem to be on cropped land. A hut is seen in the background.
43	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman in a sitting position smiling at the camera. She is using the sewing machine to sew some things (unidentifiable).
44	Narrative	This picture shows a young African boy/girl laying on their stomach doing their homework or learning material on the ground. They are using a solar lantern as light to see.
45	Conceptual	This picture shows a picture of a young African child (left) holding hands with an African woman. They are both smiling directly at the camera in the open field.
46	Narrative	This picture shows a young African child on the right side of the frame eating a white coloured food with their hands. They are smiling directly at the camera.
47	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman carrying her baby on her back with a wrapper. They are both looking in the direction of the camera. The woman seems to be doing some farming in the open on a cropped land.

48		Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (right) next to her child (left). They are both standing in front of a hut on the muddy ground. They are both looking at the camera.
Trócaire winter 2020	49	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. She is only slightly smiling with her lips and she is out in the open.
	50	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman in a yellow hoodie sitting at the sewing machine. She is sewing a piece of clothing in what seems to be her living room/house.
	51	Conceptual	This picture shows a young African girl holding a chicken in her hands. She is looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a yellow dress with brown strips and is standing in front of a mud wall.
	52	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. Surrounding her are other African women, men, and children. They seem to be in a classroom.
Trócaire spring 2021	53	Narrative	This picture shows a young African girl filling up her water bottle from a manmade hand well pump. She is wearing a green dress with a white top underneath. She is smiling directly at the camera.
	54	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (centre) with four of her children standing next to her and in front of her. They are all looking directly at the camera and are standing in front of a mud wall that can be seen as the front of their house.
	55	Narrative	This picture shows many African people in an assembly waiting to collect aids and food supplies. Viewers can see bags filled with wheat or food supplies and boxes of aids piled up on each other.
	56	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (left) standing next to her granddaughter (right). They are both looking directly at the camera. Behind them are wooden sticks standing upright and bricks piled up.
Trócaire winter 2021	57	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman in a yellow face mask looking directly at the camera.

58	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (centre left) standing with her children next to her on both sides. They are all in face masks and looking directly at the camera. They seem to be wearing donated clothes.
59	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman wearing a yellow face mask looking directly at the camera. She is sitting at the sewing machine and her hands are holding a piece of cloth in place.
60	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman (left) holding her child in her lap who is being fed nutrients in a metal mug by an African male doctor (right).
Trócaire spring 2022	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man (left) and women (centre) with the CEO of Trócaire (right). She is a white woman and they are all sitting on the ground. There are a number of African children in the background.
62	Conceptual	This picture shows three African women sitting next to each other in their traditional outfits. They are all smiling directly at the camera.
Trócaire winter 2022	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman smiling directly at the camera. She is sitting on a wooden stool and she is holding a potato in one hand and the other peeling the skin off. She seems to be in surrounded by crops.
64	Conceptual	This picture shows an African girl (centre) with two of her siblings standing next to her. They seem dishevelled and their clothes unclean. Dirt is visible on their clothes and on their arms as well. They are standing outside and in the background are some upright sticks made to seem like a wall.
(repeated image of front cover, close up shot on this instead)	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman smiling directly at the camera. She is surrounded by field crops. Her clothes seem old and dirty.
66	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man looking directly at the camera. Bricks can be seen behind him.
67	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman in a type of headscarf holding her baby in her arms. She seems concerned about the wellbeing of her child.

Trócaire summer 2022	68	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman (left) talking to a white man (right). He seems to be jotting down notes in a notebook. In the middle is an African woman who is listening to what the woman on the left is saying. They are all sitting and seem to be in a room.
	69	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. Her hair is wrapped in a pink sheet and she is wearing a blue shirt.
	70	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. She is showing the viewers grain-like seeds in a green bucket. She seems to be in a hut made out of straw.
	71	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman in a crop field planting some vegetables. Above her is a picture of dying crops.
	72	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman checking on her vegetables she had grown in what seems to be her backyard. She is wearing a face mask and a single floor house can be seen in the background.
Trócaire summer 2023 (special edition)	73	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman holding an upright stick staring directly at the camera. She is in traditional African outfit.
(repeated image Trócaire summer 2023)	74	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man looking directly at the camera. He is standing outdoors and tree branches and leaves can be seen behind him.
	75	Conceptual	This picture shows a group of African men and women smiling at the camera. They are standing in the open and are wearing vibrant colour clothes.
	76	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman looking at the baby she is holding in her arms. She seems to be wearing an oversized shirt and her baby is wrapped in an orange sheet.
(repeated image, Trócaire winter 2023)	77	Narrative	This picture shows an African Trócaire staff (men on left) assessing a baby (right) in their mother's arms. The baby looks malnourished.

78	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman at the rice miller collecting rice into a purple bucket. Standing in the background is a man looking at what she is doing. They are indoors in a room painted in blue with other machinery there.
Trócaire spring 2023	Narrative	This picture shows a young African girl dressed in traditional African outfit smiling at the camera. She is using a bamboo-like skin as a jump rope. She is jumping barefoot out in the open on dried mud road.
80	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (in purple) with her four children standing in front of her. They are all looking directly at the camera and are wearing what looks like donated clothes.
81	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. She is holding her baby in her arms. They seem to be inside a tent.
(repeated image, Trócaire spring 2024 cover)	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (in yellow) holding her baby on her lap and her other child is leaning against her. They are all smiling directly at the camera and are sitting on a sofa inside their house.
82	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man holding his two children in his arms. They seem to be outside under the sun. Behind them is a hut made out of sticks.
83	Narrative	This picture shows an African healthcare professional (left) consulting a patient (mother and child, right). They seem to be in a hospital. The mother is carrying her child in her arms.
84	Conceptual	This picture shows an African family standing in front of a door. They are all looking at the camera.
85	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman standing up talking to a group of men who are sitting on chairs surrounding her.
86	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman sitting front of a table with tools to repair shoes.
87	Narrative	

88		Narrative	This picture shows an African woman carrying a big yellow bottle on her back walking towards something. She is outside in the open with a tree and greenery visible in the background.
Trócaire winter 2023	89	Narrative	This picture shows an African man standing looking at the camera. Surrounding him are a group of young children sitting in rows with wooden desks. They seem to be in a hut made out of sticks.
	90	Conceptual	This picture shows a young African girl shading herself from the sun with a big purple piece of clothing. She is looking directly at the camera.
	91	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman holding up a plastic container full of seeds. She is wearing a Trócaire shirt and hat and standing outside in the sun. The is smiling directly at the camera.
	92	Narrative	This picture shows a group of African women with most of them wearing pink shirts and the same caps. Some of the women are dressed in traditional outfits. They are holding up a sign and has one of their fists held out.
Trócaire spring 2024	93	Conceptual	This picture shows an African man sitting on a plastic chair with a baby on his lap. Sitting on the ground is his wife and their seven children. They are leaning against a hut made out of sticks.
	94	Narrative	This picture shows African patients in a hospital. Most of the patients are sitting or lying in a bed. They are all looking at the camera. Mosquito nets can be seen hanging on top of their beds.
Trócaire summer 2024	95	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman looking at the camera. She is holding a grape hoe in her hands and is standing on fields used for farming. A big cloth is wrapped around her waist as a form of dress.
	96	Conceptual	This picture shows a group of African women all looking directly at the camera. One of the is wearing a Trócaire shirt, the others are in normal shirts. They are all wearing big cloth that is wrapped around their waists. They all have short/shaved hair and are outside in crop fields, as seen in the background.
	97	Narrative	This picture shows three young African boys playing board games with each other on the ground covered in carpets. They are smiling and looking at the camera.

98	Narrative	This picture shows a four-picture collage. Clockwise, starting from top left: 1) it shows a group of African people pointing at the solar light on the ceiling. 2) a row of houses with lights on in their house. 3) a group of people (standing and sitting) in front of a house with the solar lights there at night. 4) houses lit up by the solar lights at night.
99	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman holding her malnourished baby in one arm and a cup in one hand and a white packet in the other. They seem to be inside a clinic.
100	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman (right) holding her newborn child (right). She is smiling at her baby who is wrapped in a white cloth. They seem to be inside a hospital.
Trócaire winter 2024 (also repeated image in the newsletter)	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a type of headscarf and is carrying a bunch of branches and leaves on her back.
102	Narrative	This picture shows an African Trócaire staff (men on the right) talking to a group of African woman (mostly sitting on the ground) in the open.
103	Narrative	This picture shows a group of African women waiting for yellow water container to fill up. They are all standing outside.
104	Narrative	This picture shows an African man in the beekeeping suit looking directly at the camera. Behind him are two rows of hanging wooden beehives.
Trócaire spring 2025	Conceptual	This picture shows two young African boys standing outside huts made out of sticks. They are wearing very dirtied clothes with holes in them. They seem undernourished.
106	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman holding two packets of nutrients/food. She is wearing a type of headscarf and is standing in front of a Trócaire sign. Below the sign are more packets of nutrients/food supplies.
107	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (centre) sitting with two of her children by her side. They are all smiling directly at the camera. They seem to be barefoot and outside.

108		Narrative	This picture shows a group of young African girls sitting in two rows at their wooden desks. They have pen/pencils and a notebook for them to take notes. They are all in headscarves
Trocaire winter 2025	109	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (right) with her child sitting on her lap (left). They are both looking at the camera. The child seems to be wearing an oversized shirt and the mother is wearing a type of headscarf.
	110	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman smiling at the camera with her two goats.
	111	Narrative	This picture shows an African woman feeding her baby nutrients in an orange cup. She is holding her child in her lap and they seem to be in a hospital because of the hospital beds seen in the background.
	112	Conceptual	This picture shows an African woman (right) holding her child in her lap (left). They are both smiling directly at the camera. The woman is wearing some type of headscarf.

2. The Interactive Meaning

Demand gaze: eye contact with viewer. Offer gaze: no eye contact with viewer.

Social distance and relation: 1) very close shot (intimate personal): only the head or the face.

- 2) close shot (intimate): the head and shoulders.
- 3) medium close shot (far intimate): from waist up.
- 4) medium long shot (close social impersonal): whole figure.
- 5) long shot (far social): whole figure and space around it.
- 6) public distance: torso of at least 4-5 people.

Point of view: 1) Frontal: viewers directly facing participants.

- 2) Oblique: viewers see participants from the side.
- 3) High-level angle: viewers seeing participants from above.
- 4) Low-level angle: viewers seeing participants from below.

	Images	Gaze	Social distance & relation	Angle	
				Horizontal	Vertical
Concern summer 2019	1	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

2	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
3	Offer	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Slightly Oblique	Low-level angle
4	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
5	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
6	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
7	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
8	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
9	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Slightly Oblique	High-level angle
10	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
11	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
12	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Low-level angle
13	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
14	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
15	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
16	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

17	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
18	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
19	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Concern summer 2022	Offer	Very close shot (Intimate (personal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
21	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
22	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
23	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Low-level angle
24	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
25	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Slightly Oblique	Low-level angle
Concern summer 2023	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
27	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
28	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
29	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
30	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Concern summer 2024	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

32	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
33	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
34	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire spring 2019	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
36	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire winter 2019	Offer	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
38	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	High-level angle
39	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
40	Offer	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
41	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
42	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
43	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
(picture repeated in Trócaire summer 2023 special edition)	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
Trócaire summer 2020	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

46	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
47	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
48	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
Trócaire winter 2020	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
50	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
51	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
52	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire spring 2021	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
54	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
55	Offer	Public distance (participants and viewers are strangers)	Oblique	High level angle
56	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire winter 2021	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
58	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
59	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
60	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

Trócaire spring 2022	61	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
	62	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire winter 2022	63	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	64	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
(repeated image of front cover, close up shot on this instead)	65	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	66	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	67	Offer	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire summer 2022	68	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	69	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	70	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	71	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	72	Offer	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
Trócaire summer 2023 (special edition)	73	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
(repeated image Trócaire summer 2023)	74	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

75	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
76	Offer	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Slightly Oblique	Slightly high-level angle
77	Offer	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
78	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
79	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
80	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
81	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
(repeated image, Trócaire spring 2024 cover)				
82	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
83	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
84	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
85	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
86	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
87	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
88	Offer	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

Trócaire winter 2023	89	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	90	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	91	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	92	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire spring 2024	93	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
	94	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
Trócaire summer 2024	95	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Low-level angle
	96	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	97	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	High-level angle
	98	Offer	Public distance (participants and viewers are strangers)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	99	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	100	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
Trócaire winter 2024 (also repeated image in the newsletter)	101	Demand	Close shot (Intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
	102	Offer	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Slightly Oblique	Slightly high-level angle

103	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
104	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
Trócaire spring 2025	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
106	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
107	Demand	Medium long shot (close social (impersonal) distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
108	Offer	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly high-level angle
Trócaire winter 2025	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
110	Demand	Long shot (far social distance)	Frontal	Slightly low-level angle
111	Offer	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle
112	Demand	Medium close shot (far intimate distance)	Frontal	Eye-level angle

3. The Compositional Meaning

Information value: placement of elements, top/bottom, left/right.

Salience: which elements attract attention, ie. size, colour, focus, contrast, positioning.

Framing: connected elements are visually joined by continuous colour, compositional features, lack of dividing lines. Disconnected elements are separated by visual boundaries, ie. lines, empty space, contrasting colours etc.

	Images	Information Value	Salience	Framing
Concern summer 2019	1	The African woman is placed in the centre right of the picture. She has taken up half the page thus she is considered the most important element in the picture.	The woman is given salience in the picture by enlarging the size and foreground.	The woman depicted does not seem connected.
	2	The African woman holding her child is placed in the centre of the picture. Her child is on the side. Thus, she is the most important element and her child following.	The African mother and child are given salience in this picture by placing them in the foreground whilst using big size and the vibrant colours of their clothes.	The mother and her child are connected.
	3	The African woman is placed in the middle of the picture. Her colleagues are in the background. Thus, she is given more value than her colleagues behind.	The depicted woman is the most important element in this picture by placing her in the foreground.	The woman in the foreground seems disconnected from the others.

4	The African woman (right) and the two boys on the left are the most important elements in the picture because they are in the centre of the picture.	The mother and her two boys are given more salience by placing them in the foreground and by blurring the background.	The mother and her two boys are connected but disconnected from the others in the background.
5	The boy and the goat are the most important element in the picture. The mountains and trees are the second next important elements.	The boy and the goat are given more salience by placing them in the foreground and focusing on their faces and blurring the background.	The child and the goat are connected but not connected to the background.
6	The two African men in the picture is placed in the centre of the picture. Thus, they are given more value than what is shown in the background.	The two men and the bicycle are given more salience by placing them in the foreground and the stark contrast between a bicycle and a low-level lake/pond.	The two men and the bicycle are connected but disconnected to the background.
Concern summer 2020	The African woman is placed in the centre of the picture making her the most important element in the picture.	The woman in the picture is given salience by enlarging the size of her face and body. She is further accentuated by the vibrant green of her clothes.	The woman depicted is disconnected.
8	The African woman is placed in the centre of the picture making her the most important element in the picture.	By taking up more space in the picture, the woman is given more salience. The focus on her face and the plain background makes her more noticeable.	The woman depicted is disconnected.
9	The African woman is placed in the centre of the picture; young children surround her. Hence, the woman is the main element in the picture because she is placed in the centre.	The woman in the picture is larger in size compared to all the young children surrounding her, she is also placed in the foreground.	The woman is connected to the other young children surrounding her.

10	The three African women are placed in the centre of the image. All three women carrying the same thing on their heads, hence they are all of equal importance in the picture.	The three women in the picture given salience by the vibrancy of their clothes and the blurring of the background.	The three women are connected but not connected to the background.
11	The African woman and her child are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element in there.	The mother and her child are given salience by placing them in the foreground. They are further accentuated by the plain background colour.	The mother and her child are connected.
12	The young African children in are placed in the centre and right side, with the white man placed by the side (left). So, the children are given more importance. They are the main element in the picture.	The children are given more salience because of their number. They also take up more of the picture as opposed to the white man on the left side.	The children seem connected but disconnected with the white man.
13	The young boy and the cow are placed in the centre of the picture. Hence, they are the main element in the picture.	The young boy and the cow are given more salience by focusing on their faces and the blurring of the background. They are also much bigger in size.	The child and the goat are connected but not connected to the background.
14	The African woman and her child are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element in there.	The mother and her child are bigger in size and they are focused in the picture, hence giving them more salience. The plain background colour adds to it too.	The mother and her baby are connected.
Concern summer 2021	The mother and her children are placed on the top, bottom, left, and right of the picture making them the most important element there.	The mother and her children are given more salience by placing them in the foreground.	The mother and her children are connected.

16	The woman and her child are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element in the picture.	The mother and her child are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They are enhanced by the blurred background.	The mother and her child are connected.
17	The man and woman are stood on the left and right side of the picture. In between them is a wooden hive, placed in the centre of the picture. Hence, the wooden hive is the most important element in the picture.	The man, woman, and wooden hive are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The background is also darkened.	The man, woman, and wooden hive are connected.
18	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture. Her children are on her left, right, and one in front of her. They are all in the picture making them the most important element there.	The mother and her three children are all in the picture. They are also in the foreground and behind them is a plain coloured wall hence giving them more salience.	The mother and her three children are connected.
19	The woman is one the left side of the picture. On the right is a piece of lettuce or a type of leaf vegetable.	The woman is given salience with her taking up half the size of the picture and by placing her in the foreground. Her background is also blurred to enhance her image.	The woman is connected to the leafy vegetable but not connected to the background.
Concern summer 2022	The picture shows a woman (on the left) holding her baby (on the right). The woman's faced is not completely shown but the baby's face is completely shown. The baby is also placed close to the centre right of the picture making it the most important element in the picture.	The baby is given more salience by placing him/her in the foreground. The background is blurred to bring attention to the mother and child.	The mother and baby are connected but not connected to the background.
21	The group of African men and women are all placed within the picture making them the most important element there.	The group of African people are in the foreground of the picture, their background is not much seen and they have taken up much space of the picture, hence given more salience.	The group of African people are connected but not connected to the background.

22	The woman in the centre of the picture is the most important because she is placed in the centre. The healthcare professional on the left is the second important element, then the rest are the people surrounding the two women.	The woman receiving the vaccine is given more salience. She is in bright colour clothes and the faces of the people surrounding her are not in focus.	The woman, the healthcare professional, and the people surrounding them are connected.
23	The man is placed in the centre of the picture hence is the most important element in the picture.	The man is given more salience because he has taken up most of the space in the picture. He is also placed in the foreground.	The man is connected to the crops.
24	The women and children are the most important element there because they are placed in the centre.	The women and children are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The plain wall and door help accentuate the women and children in the picture.	The women and children are connected.
25	The mother is placed in the centre and on the right side is her baby. Texts are covering most parts of the mother and none on the baby hence the baby is the most important element there.	The mother and child are placed in the foreground of the picture. The woman is covered by the texts whilst the baby is untouched by any texts. Hence the baby is given more salience than the mother.	The mother and baby are connected but not connected to the background.
26	The woman is the most important element in the picture because she is placed in the centre.	The woman is given salience by the black background. Her clothing also helps attract attention.	The woman is not connected.
27	The man is placed in the centre of the picture hence is the most important element in the picture.	The man is given more salience because he has taken up most of the space in the picture. He is also placed in the foreground.	The man is not connected.

28	The two women are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element there.	The two women are given more salience by their bright coloured clothes. They are also placed in the foreground and their background is not focused.	The two women are connected but not connected to the background.
29	The mother and her two children are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element there.	The mother and her children are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The darkened background also helps draw attention to them.	The mother and her two children are connected.
30	The child is placed in the centre of the picture. With him, the chicken is placed in the centre bottom of the picture making it the secondary element in the picture whereas the boy the main element.	The young boy and the chicken are given more salience because of the blurred background. They are also placed in the foreground of the picture.	The young boy and chicken are connected but not connected to the background.
31	The man, woman, and baby are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element there.	The man, woman, and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. Their white coloured clothes also help accentuate their presence in the picture.	The woman, man, and baby are connected but disconnected to the background.
32	The two mothers are placed on either side of the picture with their babies in the centre. Hence the babies are the most important element in the picture and then the mothers.	The two mothers and their babies are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. Their vibrant coloured clothes also draw attention to them.	The mothers are connected to their babies but not connected to the background.
33	The woman is placed on the centre-left of the picture. The crops are in the bottom part of the picture.	The woman is placed in the foreground of the picture, hence is given more salience. Her background is also blurred so that attention can remain on her.	The woman is connected to the crop her hand is touching.

34		The mother and her child are placed in the foreground of the picture. The people in the background are also blurred. The size of the woman and child are also larger than the people in the background. Hence, the woman and child are given more salience.	The mother and her baby are connected but not connected to the background.
Trocaire spring 2019	35	The man is positioned in the centre right on the picture.	The man is not connected.
	36	The participants are placed in the centre of the picture. More specifically, the three women with the Trocaire lent box is placed on the left and the police officer on the right.	The participants talking to each other are connected but not connected to the background.
Trocaire winter 2019	37	The father (left) and baby (right) are both placed in the centre of the picture making them the more important element there.	The father and baby are connected but not connected to the background.
	38	A long dirt road is placed in the centre of the picture. On both sides are trees and houses.	N/A
	39	The child is placed in the centre of the picture. The adult on the left and the pair of flip flops on the right side of the picture.	The child and the flip flops are connected. He is also connected to the adult standing next to him.

40	The boy is placed in the centre of the picture.	The boy is given more salience by the blurred background and the sharp focus on him. The light background colour also helps by making the boy silhouette-like.	The boy is not connected.
41	The father (left) and baby (right) are both placed in the centre of the picture making them the more important element there.	The father and baby are given ore salience by focusing on their faces and bodies. Their background is also blurred to highlight the contrast.	The man and baby are connected.
42	The man is placed in the centre of the picture. The two goats at placed on either side making them secondary to the man.	The man is given more salience by the distinct colour of his shirt in contrast to the colour of nature in the background.	The man and the goats are connected but not connected to the background.
43	The woman is placed on the left side of the picture and on the right the sewing machine making them both an important element in the picture.	The woman is given salience by amount of space she has taken up in the picture. She is also placed in the foreground with her background slightly blurred.	The woman is connected to the sewing machine.
44	The child is placed in the centre with the solar lantern on the right. This signifies that the solar lantern is the new information and the side of the future.	The child in given salience by the light shone in his/her face. The solar light is also given salience by its bright colour distinct from the general dark atmosphere.	The child is connected to the pen/pencil
(picture repeated in Trocaire summer 2023 special edition)			
45	The child and the mother are both placed on either side of the picture with a box of text in between them.	The child and mother are given more salience by placing them in the foreground and having the background blurred. The colour of their clothes also helps draw attention to them.	The child and mother are connected but not connected to the background.
Trocaire summer 2020			

46	The child is placed on the right side of the picture.	The child is given salience by placing him/her in front of a plain wall (background).	The child is connected to the food in his hands.
47	The mother and child are placed in the centre right side of the picture.	The mother and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They are also distinguishable from the green colour of the crops and the blue in the sky.	The mother is connected to the child but does not seem connected to the background.
48	The mother (right) and child (left) are placed in the centre of the picture making them the most important element there.	The mother and child are given more salience by placing them in the foreground and the slight blurring of the background. They also draw attention because of the colour of their clothes and the plain background colour.	The mother and child are connected.
49	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given salience by placing her in the foreground and the sharp focus on her face and her background blurred. She has also taken up much of the picture.	The woman is not connected to the background.
50	The woman is placed in the centre right of the picture and the sewing machine is placed in the centre left.	The woman is given foreground by placing her in the foreground. She and the sewing machine is also in a brighter and lighter colour than their background.	The woman is connected to the sewing machine.
51	The girl is placed in the centre of the picture. The chicken is placed in the centre bottom of the picture.	The girl is given salience by placing her in front of a plain background. She and the chicken are distinct from the brown wall behind and the colour of her clothes draw attention to her.	The girl is connected to the chicken.

52		The woman looking directly at the camera is placed in the centre left of the picture.	The woman is given more salience because of the sharp focus on her face and the blurring of the women in the background. The light shown on her face and the colour of her clothes help draw attention to her.	The woman is not connected to the background.
Trocaire spring 2021	53	The young girl is placed in the centre of the picture with the hand well pump placed on the left side.	The young girl is given salience by the colour of her clothes. She is also placed in the foreground and focused.	The girl is connected to the hand well pump but not connected to the background.
	54	The whole family is placed in the centre of the picture.	The participants are given more salience by placing them in front of a plain coloured background. Their clothes help alleviate their presence.	The children and mother are all connected to each other.
	55	The food supplies and kits are placed in the bottom of the picture and the participants on the top.	The "ALERT" sign helps draw attention because of its red that is distinct from the crowd in the background. The food supplies also draw attention by its lighter colour hence given them more salience.	The participants in the picture are all connected.
	56	The grandmother and granddaughter are placed in the centre of the picture.	The grandmother and granddaughter are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. Their clothes also help distinguish them from the bricks and sticks in the background.	The grandmother and granddaughter are connected but not connected to the background.
Trocaire winter 2021	57	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given more salience by her face taking up most of the space in the picture. Her face is also focused and the background blurred.	The woman is not connected to the background.

58	The mother and children are all placed in the centre of the picture.	The mother and her children are given salience by placing them in the foreground. Their clothes also help bring out their presence in the picture.	The mother and her children are all connected but not connected to the background.
59	The woman is placed in the centre left of the picture and the sewing machine on the left side.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. She has also taken up half of the picture and her face focused and background slightly blurred.	The woman is connected to the sewing machine.
60	The mother and baby are placed in the left side of the picture and the doctor on the centre right.	The mother, child, and doctor are given salience by placing them in the foreground.	The mother, child, and doctor are connected.
61	Trócaire spring 2022 The three individuals looking directly at the camera are placed in the centre of the picture.	The African woman, man, and the white woman are given salience by placing them in the foreground. However, the white woman is given more salience by the stark contrast between the skin colour the African people and herself.	The African woman and man are connected to the white woman but they are not connected to the background.
62	The three women are placed in the centre of the picture with no empty space around them.	The three women are given more salience by placing them in front of a plain background. The colour of their clothes and the light shone on their faces also gives them more salience.	The three women are connected but not connected to the background.
63	Trócaire winter 2022 The woman is placed on the right side of the picture with written texts on the left.	The woman is given more salience by the contrast between the colour of her clothes and the grey/green colour in the background.	The woman is not connected to the background.

64		The three siblings are placed in the centre of the picture.	The three siblings are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They have taken up much space in the picture and the colour of their clothes help draw attention to them.	The three siblings are all connected but not connected to the background.
65	(repeated image of front cover, close up shot on this instead)	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. She has also taken up much space in the picture and the contrast between the colour of her clothes and the green in the background.	The woman is not connected to the background.
66		The man is placed in the centre of the picture.	The man is given more salience by placing him in the foreground. He has also taken up much space in the picture and the colour of his clothes help draw attention to him in contrast to the plain brownish bricks in the background.	The man is not connected to the background.
67		The mother and baby are placed in the centre of the picture. The mother is placed in the top half of the picture and the baby is in the bottom half.	The mother and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They have also taken up much space in the picture. They are both focused and their background blurred. The colour of the mother's clothes also helps draw attention to her and her baby.	The mother and baby are connected but not connected to the background.
68	Trócaire summer 2022	The African woman talking is placed on the left, another African woman in the centre, and the white man on the right side of the picture.	The three individuals are given salience by placing them in the foreground.	The three individuals are connected.
69		The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. Her clothes give her the distinction between the colour of the background and herself.	The woman is not connected to the background.

70	The woman is placed on the right side of the picture whereas the seeds in the green bucket is in the centre.	The woman is given salience by the focus on her face and her red coloured shirt. Her face and the bucket of seeds are also focused with their background slightly blurred.	The woman is connected to the seeds but not connected to the background.
71	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given more salience by the colour of her clothes and the blurring of the background. She is also focused and is distinguishable from the colour of the crops.	The woman is connected to the crops but not connected to the background.
72	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given salience by placing her in the foreground. Her clothes also help draw attention to herself. She is focused and her background slightly blurred.	The woman is connected to the vegetables.
73	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture making her the most important element there.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. She is sharply focused and the background blurred to give her distinction. The colour of her clothes also helps draw attention.	The woman is connected to the upright stick but not connected to the background.
74	The man is placed in the centre of the picture.	The man is given more salience by placing him in the foreground. He has also taken up much space in the picture and the colour of his clothes help draw attention to him in contrast to the green in the background.	The man is not connected to the background.
75	The group of people are all placed in the centre of the image with little empty space around them.	The group of people are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The colour of their clothes also distinct them from the others in the background.	The group of African people are connected.

76		The mother is placed on the left and the baby in the centre right.	The mother and baby are given salience by placing them in the foreground. The baby, however, is given more salience than the mother because it is wrapped in a bright orange cloth, drawing more attention to it. Whereas the mother is dressed in plain clothes and darker in colour.	The mother and baby are connected.
(repeated image, Trócaire winter 2023)	77	The Trócaire staff, mother, and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They are also focused in the picture and the background blurred.	The Trócaire staff, mother, and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The light shone on to the rice miller and woman also makes them more noticeable than the man standing in the background.	The mother, baby, and Trócaire staff are connected but not connected to the background.
	78	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture with the rice miller in the centre right.	The woman and the rice miller are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The light shone on to the rice miller and woman also makes them more noticeable than the man standing in the background.	The woman is connected to the rice miller and the bucket but not connected to the background.
Trócaire spring 2023	79	The young girl is placed in the centre of the picture.	The young girl is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. The colour of her clothes and her bright smile and focused face draws more attention. The background is also blurred.	The girl is connected to the jump rope but not to the background.
	80	The mother and her children are all placed in the centre of the picture with very little empty spaces on either side.	The mother and her children are given more salience by placing them in front of a plain coloured wall. Their clothes help draw attention to themselves.	The mother is connected to all her children but they are disconnected to the background.
(repeated image, Trócaire spring 2024 cover)	81	The mother and baby are placed in the centre of the picture.	The mother is given more salience than her baby because she is the only face shown in the picture. Her baby also draws attention by the distinct colour of its clothes.	The mother and child are connected but disconnected from the background.

82	The mother and her children are placed in the centre of the picture.	The mother and her children are given salience by the distinct colour of their clothes from the colour of the sofa.	The mother and her children are connected.
83	The father and his two children are placed in the centre of the picture.	The father and his two children are given more salience by the blurred background and the focus on their faces. They are also placed in the foreground and the colour of their clothes separate them from the upright sticks in the background.	The father and his two children are connected but disconnected from the background.
84	The doctor is placed on the left side of the picture whilst the mother and baby on the bottom right.	The doctor, mother, and baby are given salience by placing them in the foreground.	The healthcare professional is connected to the mother and baby.
85	The whole family is placed in the centre of the picture.	The family is given salience by placing them in front of a plain wall. The colour of their clothes and the sunlight shone on their faces also help draw viewers' attention to them.	The whole family are connected to one another but disconnected from the background.
86	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture. The men surrounding her on the left, right, and bottom sides of the picture are secondary to the woman.	The woman is given more salience by her upright position. The vibrancy of her dress also helps distinguish her from the group of men surrounding her.	The woman does not seem connected to the men and the background.
87	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. Her blue shirt helps distinguish her from the plain wall.	The woman is connected to the tools.

88	The woman is placed in the left side of the picture with written text in the centre and centre right.	The woman is given salience by the colour of her clothes, different to the greenery in the background. However, the texts are given more salience by their white colour and the space they occupy.	The woman is connected to the yellow bottle but disconnected from the background.	
Trócaire winter 2023	89	The man and young girls are all placed in the centre of the picture with no empty spaces around them.	The man and girls are given salience by the plain background. Their faces are also focus.	The man and children are all connected.
	90	The young girl is placed in the centre of the picture.	The young girl is given salience by the vibrant colour of her clothes and the sunlight shone onto her face. She is also focused and her background blurred.	The girl is not connected to the background.
	91	The woman is placed in the centre left of the picture and the container of seed on the right side.	The woman and the container are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. They are also focused and their background blurred the draw attention. The blue shirt also helps draw attention to the woman.	The woman is connected to the container of seed but not to the background.
	92	The women are placed in the centre of the picture with no empty spaces on either side.	The sign the women are holding is given the most salience because of its colour, different from the pink the women are wearing.	The women are all connected to one another and to the sign they are holding.
Trócaire spring 2024	93	The family is placed from left to right in the picture. However, they are also placed in the centre with empty spaces on the top and bottom sides of the picture.	The family is given salience by placing them in front of a plain wall made out of sticks. The colour of their clothes also draw attention to themselves.	The whole family are connected to one another and are connected to the manmade wall made out of sticks.

94		The women are placed in the left and right side of the picture.	The women are given salience by the distinct colour of their clothes.	The patients are connected to the hospital bed.
Trocaire summer 2024	95	The woman is placed in the centre right of the picture with written texts on the right side.	The woman is given more salience by placing her in the foreground. Her background is also slightly blurred and her face focused. The colour of her clothes is also different from the background.	The woman is connected to the grape hoe but seem disconnected from the background.
	96	The women are placed in the centre of the picture with no empty spaces on either side.	The group of women are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. Their faces are also focused and the background blurred. The colour of their clothes also adds to their presence.	The women are all connected to each other but disconnected from the background.
	97	The three boys are placed on the left, centre and right side respectively. There are empty spaces on the top and bottom of the picture.	The three boys are given salience by placing them in the foreground. Their clothes are also distinct from the multitude of colour surrounding them.	The children are connected to each other and the board games on the ground.
	98	The written text is placed in the centre of four picture collage, making the text the most important element there.	The solar light is given the most salience because of the lack of natural light during nighttime.	The participants are connected to one another in picture 1 and 3. However, the four pictures are not connected to one another.
	99	The mother and baby are placed in the centre of the picture.	The mother and baby are given more salience by placing them in the foreground. The vibrancy of their clothes also adds to their presence.	The mother and child are connected but disconnected from the background.

100		The mother and baby are placed on the right side of the picture with written white text taking up more space there.	The mother and child are given salience by placing them in the foreground. The baby is given the most salience because it is wrapped in a white cloth, very distinct from the colours around it.	The mother and child are connected.
Trócaire winter 2024 (also repeated image in the newsletter)	101	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture with no empty space on either side.	The woman is given salience by placing her in the foreground. The colour of her headscarf and the focus of her face adds to her presence.	The woman is connected to the tree branches behind her.
	102	The Trócaire staff is placed on the right side and the women around him on the left in the picture.	The Trócaire staff is given the most salience because of the light coloured Trócaire uniform he is wearing. The women around him are secondary with their vibrant clothes and the plain colour surrounding them.	The Trócaire staff does not seem connected to the people in the background.
	103	The water containers are placed in the centre slightly bottom of the picture whereas the women in the back are placed slightly in the top.	The water containers are given the most salience by placing them in the foreground. The bright yellow of the containers also draw attention to them.	The women are all connected to each other. The water containers are connected to one another. But the women and water containers are not connected to one another.
	104	The man is placed on the left side of the picture and the wooden beehives taking up most of the picture.	The man is given salience by placing him in the foreground. The beehives are also given salience because they take up the most space in the picture and are distinguishable from the green surrounding them.	The man in beekeeper suit is connected to the wooden beehives.
Trócaire spring 2025	105	The two children are placed in the centre of the picture.	The two young children are given salience by placing them in the foreground. They are also focused and their background blurred. The colour of their clothes also helps distinguish them from the plain colour around them.	The two children are connected to each other but not connected to the background.

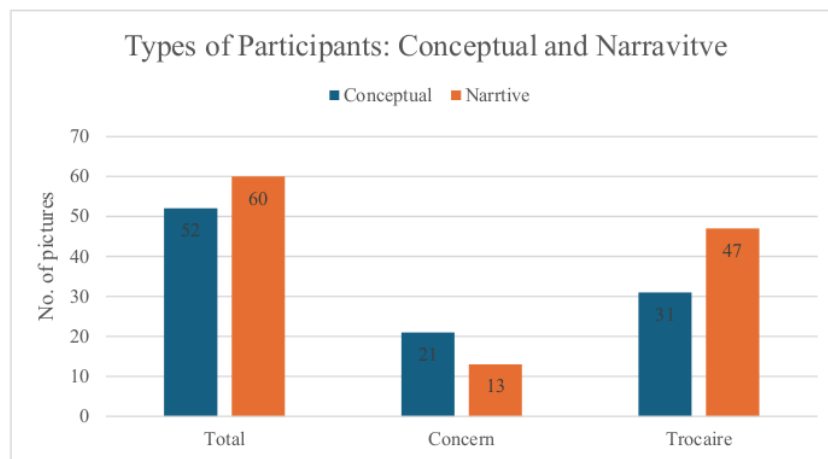
106	The woman is placed on the left side of the picture and the Trócaire logo is placed on the right.	The woman is given salience by placing her in the foreground. Her face is focused and her dark coloured clothes help draw attention to herself.	The woman is connected to the two packets in her hands.
107	The mother and her children are placed in the centre of the picture with very little empty space on either side.	The mother and her children are given salience by placing them in the foreground. Their faces are focused with the background blurred giving them distinction. The colour of their clothes also helps solidify their presence.	The mother and her children are connected but disconnected from the background.
108	The group of women are placed across the picture with no empty space on either side.	The written texts are given the most salience by placing them in front of the women. The white coloured text is also different from the general colour of the women in the picture.	The group of women are connected to each other but not to the written text.
Trócaire winter 2025	109	The mother is placed on the right side in the picture and the child in the centre.	The mother and child are connected.
	110	The woman is placed in the centre of the picture. Her two goats are placed on each side respectively.	The woman is connected to the two goats but disconnected from the background.
	111	The child is placed in the centre of the picture and the mother on the right.	The mother, child, and orange cup are connected.

112	The baby is placed in the centre of the picture and the mother on the right. A text box is placed on the left side of the picture.	The mother and baby are given salience by placing them in the foreground. Their faces are focused and background blurred to give them distinction.	The mother and child are connected to each other.
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Discussion of Findings

1. Results of the Representational Meaning

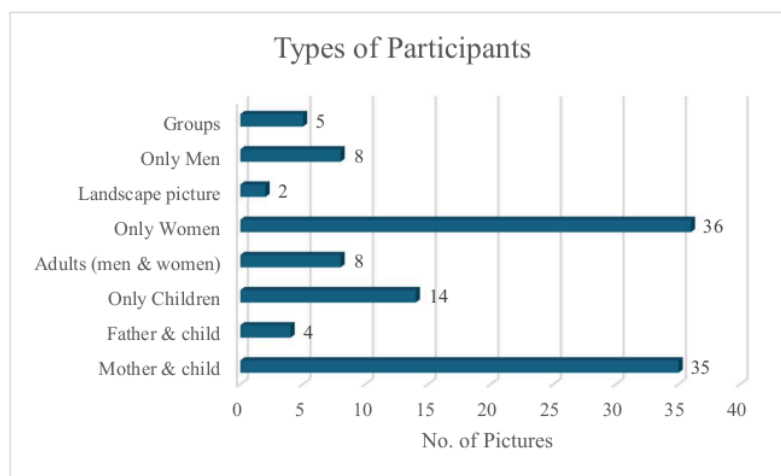
The first layer of Visual Grammar relates to the representational meaning which focuses on the depiction of people, places, and things within an image. Two major processes lie within this layer: the narrative and the conceptual. The narrative process shows actions, events, and changes as they occur, highlighting movements and temporal shifts (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). The conceptual process shows participants based on their categorisation, structure, and general characteristics, conveying qualities that are more stable and static rather than tied to specific actions or moments (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).



From the chart above, in total, of the 112 pictures analysed, 52 (46.43%) of them were conceptual processes and 60 (53.57%) narrative. Images from Concern’s newsletters alone, 21 pictures were conceptual processes and 13 narratives. On the other hand, of the 78 images analysed from Trócaire’s newsletters, 31 pictures were conceptual and 47 narratives. Which meant that Concern tended to depict African people in a static manner (61.76%) and Trócaire tend to depict Africans doing things (narrative process) (60.26%).

Concern’s images of Africans were generally more cheerful and positive, with individuals often smiling and looking directly at the camera. These choices likely aim to inspire hope or highlight resilience, and fostering a more uplifting narrative. On the other hand, Trócaire’s images tended toward more “realistic” or sombre portrayals, consistent with stereotypical representations prevalent in western media, and participants, especially children are often pictured in poor living conditions, showing signs of malnourishment, sadness, or desperation. This approach

aligns with traditional “poverty porn” tactics intended to evoke sympathy and urgency from the viewer.



It is also important to note that of all the images analysed, pictures of only women participants and mother and children were depicted the most with 36 and 35 pictures, respectively, as shown in the graph above. Only four pictures were of father and children, with one from Concern and three from Trócaire. A total of 8 images contained only adult participants. And there were 14 pictures containing only children. So, of all the 112 images analysed, images of women and mother and children were shown the most. Furthermore, in the images where the mother is holding her child in her arms, she is most often shown feeding her child from a plastic cup. This just shows the viewers that Africa and Africans are still suffering from poverty.

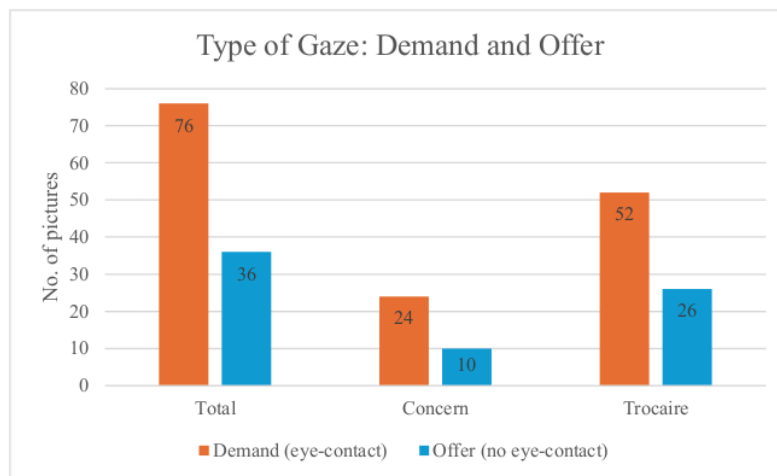
The recurring use of the mother and malnourished child imagery serves several purposes. First, it evokes empathy through the universal appeal of motherhood and vulnerability, urging viewers, especially mothers, to act to alleviate suffering. Second, there are resonances with Christian iconography, particularly the motif of motherly love and sacrifice, implying that all children deserve to have their basic needs met. Finally, this narrative is strategically employed to drive donations, playing on the emotional response of empathy, guilt, or moral duty (Nathanson, 2013).

2. Results of the Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning refers to how relationships are established between those depicted and those viewing the image. Three aspects of the interactive meaning are: the gaze, social distance, and point of view.

2.1 Gaze

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), whether the participant is shown making eye contact with the viewer or not can significantly change the meaning of images. In total, almost 70% of the pictures show the participants making eye contact with the viewer. Both Concern (70.59%) and Trócaire (66.67%) resorted to using pictures where the participants are looking directly at the viewer. Participants that look out directly at the viewer were mostly smiling, showing teeth, and holding a cheerful disposition in Concern's newsletters. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, pp 118), they stated that when a participant's gaze is combined with gestures or facial expressions such as a smile, it invites the viewers to form a sense of social connection or closeness with them. Therefore, participants looking directly at viewers with a smile can be seen as inviting viewers to develop a friendly connection with them.

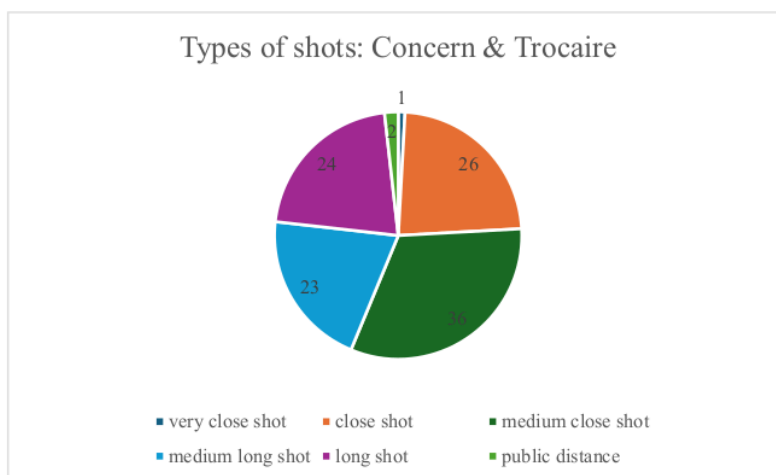


In contrast, if the participant's gaze is more solemn or serious, rather than friendly or inviting, it signals that the viewer is being asked to take the interaction seriously or to acknowledge an important or heavy issue (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 118). This direct, serious look can position the viewer in a role where they are expected to respond with respect, reflection, and/or recognise the gravity of the situation of the participant. This type of gaze was more

present in Trócaire’s newsletters than Concern’s. Solemn looks, only smiling slightly without showing teeth, and giving more serious looks are present in the participants in Trócaire’s newsletters. Furthermore, the participants who showed more solemn and serious looks were often mothers or fathers with their malnourished children, or young children in oversized shirts with visible dirt on them (Image 105).

2.2 Social Distance

Social distance refers to how images use different framing, such as close-ups, medium, or long shots. They help shape viewer’s sense of proximity to what is shown. This approach can be applied on people, objects, and landscapes. Influencing whether viewers feel personally connected or detached from the subject (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). From the images analysed, there were 36 medium close shot pictures, 26 close shot pictures, 23 medium long shot pictures, and 24 long shot pictures. There were only one very close shot picture and two public distance pictures present.



Close shots focus closely on a person’s face or a detail of an object, usually showing only the head and shoulders or even less (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). This framing creates a sense of intimacy and personal connection to the participants, as if the viewer is physically very close to the participant. It invites viewers into the participants personal space, which encourages emotional involvement and making the interaction feel direct and engaging (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). 32.35% of Concern’s pictures were taken in close shots, much higher than Trócaire’s, only 19.23%. Within the close shots taken, pictures from Concern were mostly

depictions of a woman smiling directly at the camera or mother holding her child up close. Similarly, in Trócaire, images of mother holding her child were present but also the depictions of a child alone, and a woman alone in the picture were shown.

Medium close shots show the participant from around the waist up. This framing implies a slightly less intimate, but still personal relationship akin to a friendly conversation or social interaction among acquaintances. The viewer still feels involved and engaged but slightly more distant than close, balancing approachability and respect for personal space. Both Concern and Trócaire had 32% of their pictures in medium close shots.

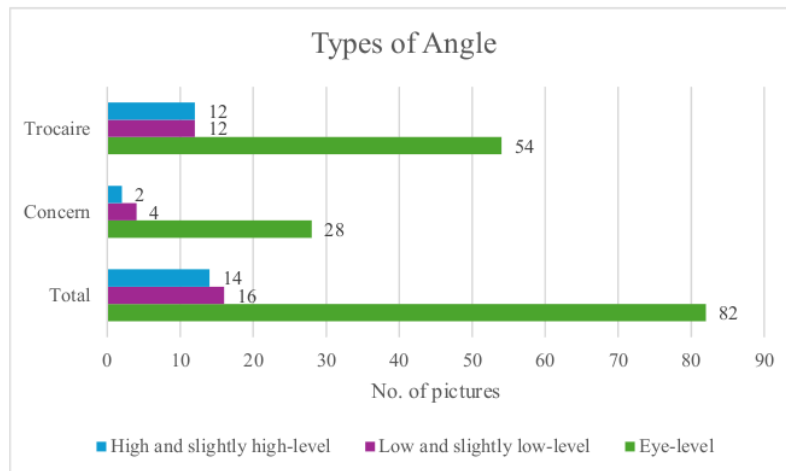
Medium long shots show the participant's entire body, usually from the knees up. This conveys a more formal or neutral relationship between the participant and the viewer. The viewer is positioned as a respectful observer, not too close for intimacy but not far enough to be a complete outsider. 23 pictures in total were in medium long shots, five from Concern and 18 from Trócaire. Participants can be seen in vibrant clothing, sometimes in their traditional outfits in Concern's newsletters. The background shown in these images are also more colourful and light-hearted. On the other hand, Trócaire's pictures showed participants in clothing with dirt visible on them and they are usually standing outdoors. Moreover, viewers can see the living conditions of the participants, the huts, walls made out of sticks, the warm weather resembling a drought in the pictures, and the quality of their clothes which can then guide viewers to form an understanding of their lives and their living conditions.

Long shots move viewers further back, showing participant's full figure with space around it. This framing establishes a formal, impersonal, and even detached relationship between the participant and the viewer, similar to how strangers might interact in a public setting (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Furthermore, the human figure becomes part of the broader environment and the individual emotional connection is minimised. A total of six and 18 long shots were found in Concern and Trócaire's newsletters, respectively. All participants are seen doing something the pictures from Concern's newsletters, for example, mothers feeding their babies in their lap, a farmer farming, women carrying materials on their heads. Pictures from Trócaire however, were slightly different compared to Concern. One picture showed a landscape of Northern Uganda, some were of participants standing in front of their houses, and some were taken in a family portrait style. The participants can be seen slightly dishevelled, in old and dirty clothes that were likely to be donated by charities, and the living conditions of these people.

2.3 Point of View

The point of view is examined through two angles: the horizontal and vertical. The horizontal angle reflects the level of viewer involvement and the vertical indicates the relative power dynamics between the viewer and participant (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). The frontal angle is when the viewer is positioned directly in front of the subject. This invites the viewer into the world of the participant. It implied that the viewer shares some participation, connection, or engagement with the scene or people shown. Almost all of the pictures from both organisations portray the participants through the frontal angle. Which means that viewers are part of what is shown in the pictures, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, pp. 136) put it, “what you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with”. Only six pictures in total were taken in an oblique or slightly oblique angle.

An eye level angle is when the viewer and the participant are on the same level. This viewpoint suggests equality and mutual respect, that neither party is dominant or subordinate (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). It creates a sense of balance, inviting a neutral interaction between viewer and participant. There is no power difference between viewer and participant. 73% of all images were taken at eye level. 28 (82.35%) pictures show participants at eye level from Concern and 54 (69.23%) from Trócaire. This shows that there is a mutual respect and equality between the participants and viewers.



On the contrary, high level angle positions viewers as having greater power or authority over the participant. The angle lets viewers see the participants from above, making the participant appear smaller, less significant, or subordinate. Only two pictures were taken from a high-level

angle in Concern's newsletters and 12 in Trócaire's. This posits that there is much more power play present between the participants and viewers in images from Trócaire and less in Concern.

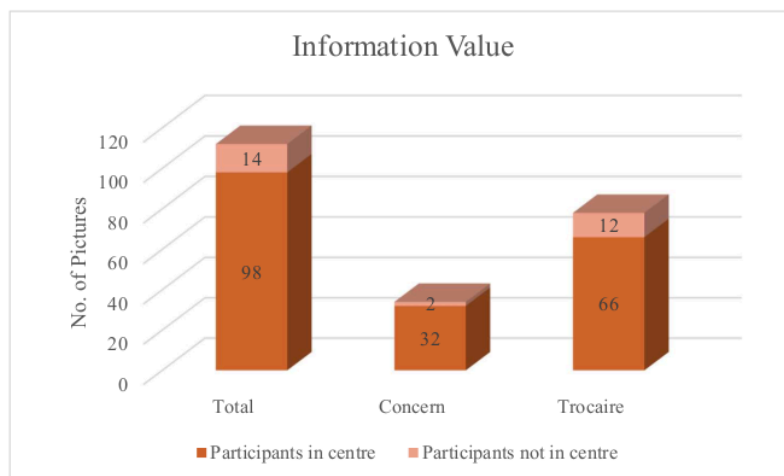
A low-level angle is when the viewer looks up at the participant from below. This grants power and dominance to the participant, making them appear larger and more important (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). In Concern's newsletters, only four low level angle pictures were shown and in Trócaire's 12. Hence, in most pictures, participants and viewers have no power difference in both organisation's newsletters.

3. Results of the Compositional Meaning

The goals of the compositional meaning are to incorporate the representational and interactive meanings in visuals through information value, salience, and framing.

3.1 Information Value

Information value is about how the position of visual elements shapes their meaning, directs attention, and affects the way viewers understand and relate to the overall message (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).



As illustrated in the graph above, almost all participants were placed in the centre of the image in Concern's newsletters, one placing participants on both sides and one placing participant on the right side. It is slightly higher in Trócaire's newsletters where participants were not placed in the centre, 12 pictures. The participants placed on the side of the image were often

accompanied with a box of text on the other side, sometimes taking up three quarters of the picture. Signalling to the viewers that the written texts are more important than the participants in the picture. However, apart from these images where participants were not placed in the middle, participants were almost always placed in the centre, making them the most important element there.

3.2 Saliency

Saliency determines which parts of an image command the most attention, helping to organise information visually and direct viewers toward the intended points of interest (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). From analysing the images for this research, it is clear that almost all the participants were placed in the foreground, making them separate from the background. In 106 out of 112 pictures, the participants were placed in the foreground. Most of them take up half the space in the pictures, while some, more. Their background is also blurred or slightly blurred to give the participants distinction and help direct viewers' attention to them. The use of colour, the vibrancy of colour is also visible from participants' clothing in Concern's newsletters, whilst in Trócaire's, their colour is duller than Concern but nonetheless different from their background which helps draw attention to the participants.

3.3 Framing

Framing is the technique of using visual features like lines, spaces, or contrasts, to separate (disconnect) or join (connect) elements within an image (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Connecting elements means presenting them so they appear to belong together as part of a unified whole whilst disconnecting elements means visually separating them, making them stand out as a distinct piece of information. From the images analysed, most participants, where there is more than one person in the picture, are connected to one another. However, the participants are more often than not disconnected to the background to make them stand out.

4. How have these depictions changed over time?

The pictures analysed from Concern from 2019 to 2024 have shown that not much difference has changed over this six-year period. They have consistently shown images of mothers and children and have portrayed Africans in a more optimistic light. Concern has not shown pictures

that perpetuate the negative stereotypes surrounding Africa and Africans in the media. Over the period analysed, they have not resorted to the use of “poverty pornography” like showing pictures of starving malnourished black babies, pitiable faces, or the poor living conditions of these people.

However, it cannot be said the same of Trócaire’s portrayal of Africa and Africans in the media. Over the seven-year period analysed, from 2019 to 2025, Trócaire has shown children and adults in poor living conditions and quality of life, from the old clothes they wear with holes and dirt on them, to the houses (huts) they live in, their portrayal of Africans have not much changed in 2025 as in 2019. Like Concern, they have stuck to the mother and child trope more often than not. With mothers shown feeding their babies in their arms to signify to the viewers that their child is perhaps malnourished and sick or that food scarcity has escalated into a dire situation due to a combination of factors such as conflict, climate change, economic instability, and/or political corruption so on and so forth.

5. The signifiers of Africa and Africans

From the images analysed, when it comes to the signifiers tied to African women from Concern and Trócaire, it would be African women wearing headscarves. Moreover, because the mother and child pictures are used repeatedly, starving/malnourished children, oversized clothes, clothes in poor condition are the common signifiers to them. Because images of father and child are not the norm and much fewer than the mother and child trope, then fathers can be easily forgotten by viewers and hence tend to naturally associate children with mothers and vice versa. On the whole, there were more images of women, mother and child, and young children than there were of men and men alone in the pictures shown in the newsletters. Because of that then, when it comes to the representation of Africans, the signifiers would be African women, mother and children, malnourished children with bloated bellies, poor (wearing donated clothes, clothes with holes and dirt, oversized clothes, barefoot), poor living conditions (wooden huts, stick huts, straw huts, mud houses, no electricity), and the lack of transportation (always walking, carrying things on their backs and heads).

In addition, these representations of Africa and Africans have made them a monolithic continent, disregarding the individuality and autonomy of the countries within this continent. For example, the countries where the images were taken from were not explicitly highlighted in bold to the viewers and the images shown of Africa and Africans from different countries do

not differ from one another. As shown in the image below, taken from Trócaire's summer 2022 newsletter, the pin is on one of the countries in Africa (highlighted in green). However, the country is not named but the whole continent is. Reducing each African state into one single monolithic continent can be harmful. This is because the more viewers see similar depictions, it gives them the permission to stereotype Africa as a continent facing food scarcity and poverty when they are shown a picture of a malnourished baby in Ethiopia, for example.



Trócaire Summer 2022 newsletter.

Limitations and Criticisms of Research

Although this research offers valuable insights into the visual representations of Africa and Africans by Concern and Trócaire, several limitations must be acknowledged that may have influenced the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the findings. First, the primary limitation lies in the lack of archival access to historical newsletters produced by these two organisations prior to 2019. Although both organisations were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they do not have publicly accessible digital or physical records of the newsletters from their start to the 2010s. This absence of materials severely constrains the longitudinal scope of this research, hindering the ability to conduct an analysis of representational change over time. As these earlier materials may have contained visual depictions with more explicit colonial or racial tones, the lack of access potentially obscures the shifts in tone, content, and strategy that could significantly influence the overall findings and interpretations.

Secondly, the ethical concerns in analysing images of African people calls for particular attention. NGO images depict vulnerable individuals, especially children, in difficult circumstances. There is an ethical responsibility to consider whether those photographed gave consent and whether reproducing them respects their dignity. Furthermore, initial contact was established with both Concern and Trócaire to request access to their donor newsletters and interviews were also considered in the early stages of the research design. However, they were not pursued. This is because the limited time frame of the study, 2019 to 2025, would not have yielded substantive insights as organisational representatives may not have been directly involved in the visual or editorial decisions across this short period.

Finally, a limitation in this research is the interpretive nature of visual analysis itself. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), images operate within a “grammar” that is not fixed but contingent on cultural and social contexts. Hence, viewers do not interpret images in a vacuum, but rather bringing their own subjectivities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences into their interpretation. Consequently, the meanings derived from the newsletters’ images are not universal. What may appear as exploitative, stereotypical, or paternalistic to one viewer may be perceived as compassionate and empowering to another. As Berger (1972) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argued that the meanings are not inherent but arise through the viewer’s engagement within specific cultural and social contexts. Subsequently, my own positionality shaped by my academic background, sociocultural identity, and ideological standpoint, influences the semiotic reading of images. While this dissertation attempts to mitigate bias through the systematic application of the Grammar of Visual Design framework, complete

neutrality is not possible. So, the research embraces its subjective standpoint as an integral part of the knowledge production process.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to critically analyse the visual representations of Africa and Africans in the donor newsletters of two prominent Irish NGOs, Concern and Trócaire. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT), Postcolonial Theory, and Social Learning Theory (SLT) as analytical frameworks. The intersection of Ireland's history as a formerly colonised nation and its extensive participation in global humanitarian work forms a unique context in which these depictions must be understood. While it is crucial to acknowledge the important and beneficial humanitarian contributions of these organisations, this research has shown that the way their communications mediate images of Africa remains deeply entangled with legacies of colonialism, racial hierarchies, and the western donor "saviour" narrative.

The detailed multimodal visual analysis revealed persistent patterns in how Concern and Trócaire depict Africa and Africans. Despite their differing institutional identities, both organisations showed similarity in their selection and framing of images. Most frequently, Africans are represented through motifs of hardship, poverty, and vulnerability, particularly by placing women and children at the centre of their visual storytelling. In both Concern and Trócaire's newsletters, mother and child images dominate, with recurring signifiers such as headscarves, oversized or worn clothing, barefoot children, and depictions of poor living conditions, including huts and rudimentary infrastructure. These repeated visual cues not only reinforce longstanding stereotypes of Africa as a site of deprivation and dependency but also risk erasing the diversity, dignity, and agency of African individuals and communities. Notably, Trócaire's newsletters often rely more explicitly on "poverty porn" tropes, such as malnourished children and bleak surroundings, deliberately evoking pity and urgency. Whereas Concern was more likely to present a slightly more hopeful and positive imagery, though still framed within the context of need and dependency. Images of fathers or male caregivers are strikingly rare, reinforcing a reductive maternal framework and project a gendered stereotype wherein care, suffering, and passivity are primarily associated with African women and children.

Moreover, both organisations showed an enduring tendency to represent Africa as a homogeneous, monolithic place. Visual cues and signifiers are rarely differentiated by country or local context. For example, when a specific country is referenced on a map or in accompanying text, the imagery and its connotations do not change. This lack of differentiation fosters generalisation and perpetuated a pan-Africa narrative of despair, overlooking diversity and the specific histories, experiences, and identities of people in different African states. The

repeated use of such images, as backed by Social Learning Theory, continually shapes the perceptions and attitudes of Irish audiences, since these newsletters are distributed directly to households, including children and adults, they confirm and normalise stereotypical and negative images over time.

The theoretical frameworks applied in this research help to contextualise these patterns and clarify their broader significance. CRT draws attention to how the structural and institutional dimensions of race are perpetuated through such practices, reinforcing notions of African “otherness” and upholding western perspectives as the norm. Postcolonial Theory underscores the persistence of colonial discourse, wherein Africans were depicted in ways that reproduce power imbalances, framing them as passive recipients in need of western intervention and denying them agency and subjectivity. Even as Ireland’s own colonial legacy creates a complex dynamic of empathy with African suffering, this frequently manifests as a paternalistic narrative that reinforces rather than dismantles old binaries between a “civilised” West and an “uncivilised” or “helpless” Africa.

It is also necessary to recognise the limitations of this research. Among them is the lack of archival access to historical newsletters predating 2019. Without a longer temporal scope, it is difficult to fully assess how representational strategies have evolved or how overt colonial imagery may have softened or adapted with changing societal norms and increased awareness of ethical guidelines. Additionally, the ethics of using images of vulnerable individuals, often children, is paramount. Both NGOs and this researcher must be vigilant about issues of consent, dignity, and the potential for exploitation, particularly in an environment where such images are used as tools for fundraising. Finally, interpretation in visual analysis is always contingent and subjective. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argued, the meaning of images is constructed not only by their content but also by the cultural context and the viewer’s positionality. Thus, what may seem exploitative or stereotypical to one viewer could be perceived as compassionate or necessary to another. This dissertation is not exempt from such influences; this author’s academic and personal background has inevitably shaped her readings and interpretations.

To conclude, whilst Concern and Trócaire can rightly be credited with making a positive humanitarian impact, they much also face the challenge of evolving their visual communication strategies. The continued use of reductive and stereotypical imagery, however unintentional, contradicts the spirit of partnership and empowerment that the development sector aspires to promote. It risks perpetuating social distance, paternalism, and oversimplification of African

states, ensuring contextual specificity, avoiding overused tropes, and centring portrayals of agency, resilience, and hope. Only then can visual storytelling become a force for genuine solidarity and understanding rather than an unwitting instrument of the inequalities it seeks to redress. By engaging continually with critical and postcolonial perspectives, Irish NGOs can reshape the narratives they produce, not just raising funds but honouring the dignity, diversity, and voices of Africans themselves.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should prioritise and engage with more academic articles by African scholars rather than relying primarily on western perspectives. This shift would add insights grounded in lived experience and local expertise. Secondly, studies should engage with larger and more comprehensive archives, enabling a longitudinal perspective on representational changes over time. Finally, future research could benefit from direct engagements with NGOs, like conducting interviews with organisational staff involved in image selection to better understand their internal rationales and policies concerning visual representations of Africans.

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Appendix

Concern Summer 2019

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Concern Summer 2020

Image 7



Image 8

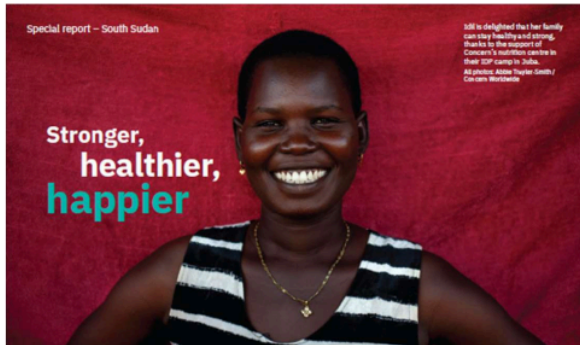


Image 9



Image 10



Image 11

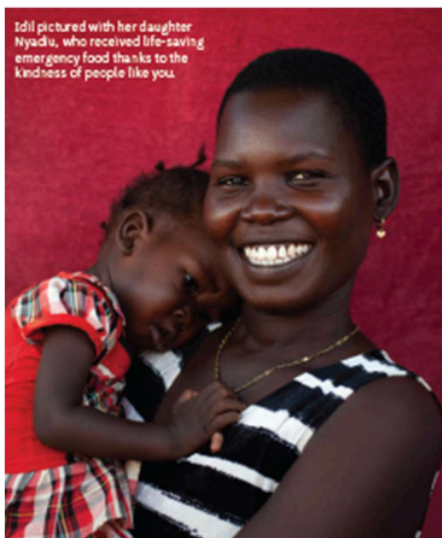


Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



Concern summer 2021

Image 15



Image 16



Image 17

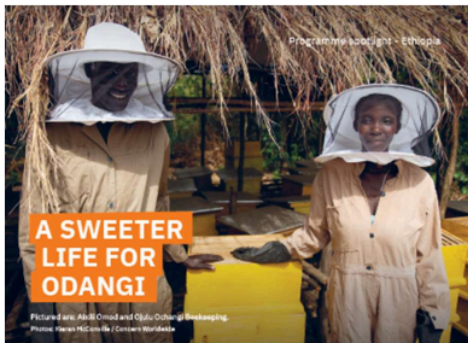


Image 18



Image 19



Concern summer 2022

Image 20



Image 21



Image 22



Image 23

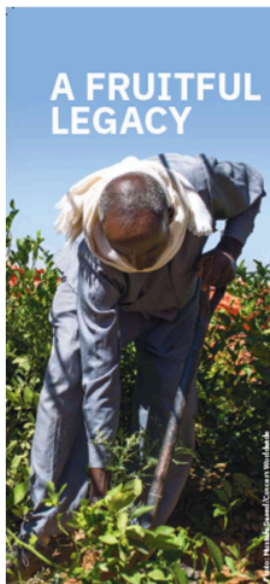


Image 24



Image 25



Concern summer 2023

Image 26



Image 27



Image 28



Image 29



Image 30



Concern summer 2024

Image 31



Image 32



Image 33



Image 34



Trócaire spring 2019

Image 35



Image 36



Trócaire winter 2019

Image 37



Image 38



Image 39



Image 40



Image 41



Image 42

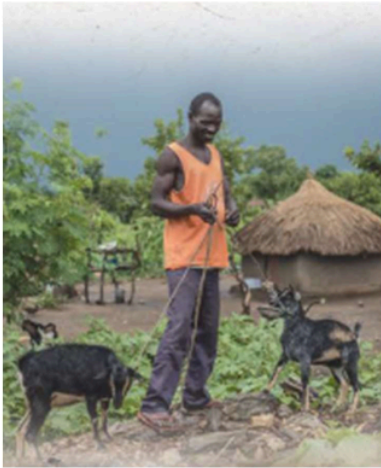


Image 43



Image 44



Trócaire summer 2020

Image 45

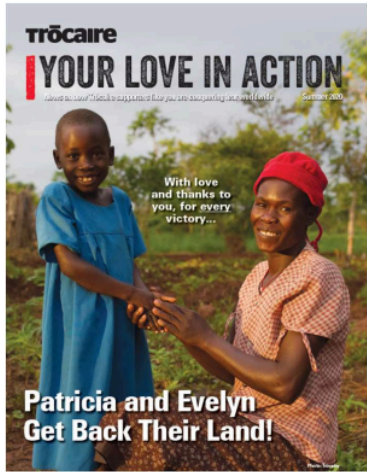


Image 46



Image 47



Image 48



Trócaire winter 2020

Image 49



Image 50



Image 51



Image 52



Trócaire spring 2021

Image 53



Image 54



Image 55



Image 56



Trócaire winter 2021

Image 57



Image 58



Image 59



Image 60



Trócaire spring 2021

Image 61



Image 62



Trócaire winter 2022

Image 63



Image 64



Image 65



Image 66



Image 67



Trócaire summer 2022

Image 68



Image 69



Image 70



Image 71



Image 72



Trócaire summer 2023 (special edition)

Image 73



Image 74

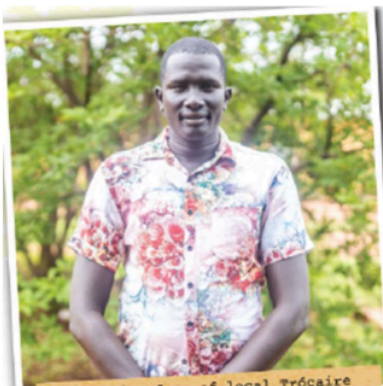


Image 75



Image 76



Image 77



Image 78



Trócaire spring 2023

Image 79



Image 80



Image 81



Image 82



Image 83



Image 84



Image 85



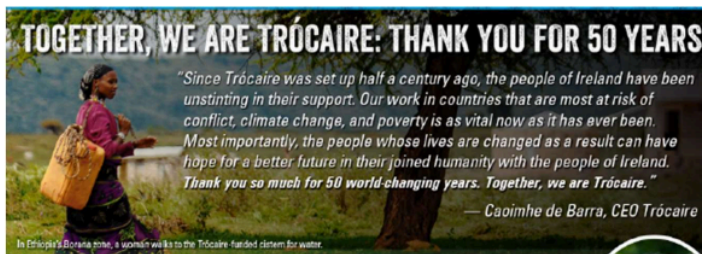
Image 86



Image 87



Image 88



Trócaire winter 2023

Image 89

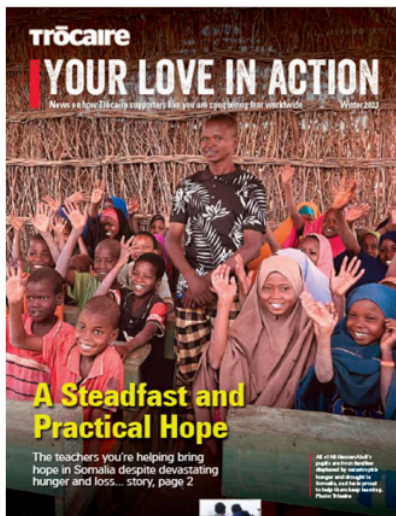


Image 90



Image 91



Image 92



Trócaire spring 2024

Image 93



Image 94



Trócaire summer 2024

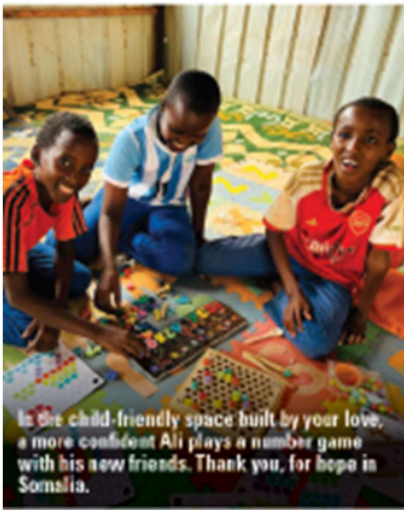
Image 95



Image 96



Image 97



In the child-friendly space built by your love, a more confident Ali plays a number game with his new friends. Thank you, for hope in Somalia.

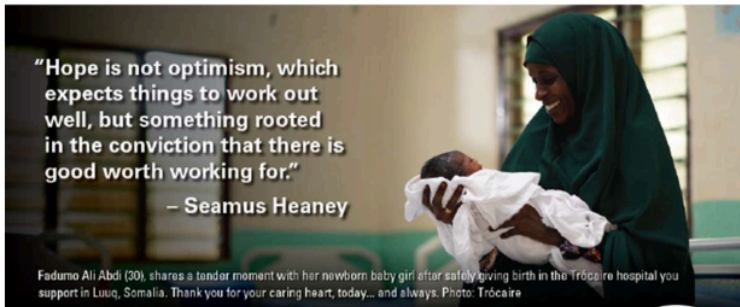
Image 98



Image 99



Image 100



Trócaire winter 2024

Image 101



Image 102



Image 103



Image 104



Trócaire spring 2025

Image 105



Image 106



Image 107



Image 108



Trócaire winter 2025

Image 109



Image 110



Image 111



Image 112

