



BY MARGARET WALLER

scratch

KEVIN CARTER'S Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a Sudanese child (1993) has recently reappeared in magazines and newspapers to advertise M-Net's current affairs programme *Carte Blanche*. MARGARET WALLER scratches below the surface of this controversial campaign.

News photographers make their images to give sense to what it was like "being there". They do so out of a motivation to communicate, to make money and to be known. The news photograph doesn't exist on its own. It requires a caption or text to explain why or how something looks the way it does. Carter's shocking photograph showed us how the civil war and the famine in southern Sudan affects its population. Much of the horror had been distilled down to one moment when a desperately weak child slumps forward onto his/her hands while a vulture waits in the background. Carter's photograph had satisfied for him all three motivations.

For the viewing public, this image has passed from being one of the hundreds of front page horror photographs into our collective psyche. It has joined others we hold sadly dear like Hector Peterson and Vietnam's napalm children.

This already stark image reappeared in 1998 stripped of a caption that would give a context if not meaning for this suffering. Now it is merely a shocking image that advertises M-Net's current affairs programme. The child is framed only by a vivid blue M-Net logo. The advertisers assume that we the viewing public have no questions about this starving child. If this child were white, would the advertiser be so free to use the image to

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT
TO SEE IT ALL.



From horror to humour, from corruption to human kindness. For 10 years our viewers have seen it all. EVERY SUNDAY AT 7PM. ONLY ON M-NET. www.mnet.co.za

& win a dying child

its own advantage? Are we so familiar with starving African children that we don't ask any questions like "Who, why, where, when?"

The dominant text in this advertisement to the right of the photograph reads "You have a right to see it all". In fact, the advertisers are not informing us about our rights. More accurately, M-Net has indirectly told us about their power to pay for any image to advertise itself. The primary motivation is to make money. Any relevance or meaning to Carte Blanche is extremely tenuous as they did not describe this child's situation at that time.

If this appropriation isn't enough to disturb readers, M-Net decided to add a silver scratch over the child. A scratch, in my experience appears as a lottery in supermarkets whereby lucky winners may receive a prize like money or a voucher. In this instance, the prize we win after scratching the surface is a dying child. It is M-Net's logic that we will be so amazed by the cleverness of the advertisement's scratch surprise that we will watch Carte Blanche. The rationale for the scratch (to paraphrase the advertisers) is a play on the idea of a scratch to suggest their investigative journalistic style – scratching the surface to reveal the real story.

When this marketing idea (using Carter's photograph with the audience participation scratch) was presented to the producers of Carte Blanche, they unanimously responded with outrage. According to George Mazarakis, their objections correspond with my sentiments expressed above. Because all the producers said no to this proposal, they thought that the M-Net advertisers would think of other ways to convey their message.

Unbelievably, the advertisers overrode all objections stated by the producers of Carte Blanche because they said "we know the audience".

This comment infers that the advertisers believe that they understand the Carte Blanche audiences better than the Carte Blanche producers.

I don't think that we the public have "a right to see it all". The most recent debate to question the public's rights "to see it all" was the 'Diana' debate. I do think that the producers of Carte Blanche have a right to control their own advertising campaign.

We the viewing public are left with gazing upon the scratched child – some prize.



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George Mazarakis, executive producer of Carte Blanche, responded to Margaret Waller at a meeting to discuss the issue hosted by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism.

THE CARTE BLANCHE TEAM was presented with this idea (for an advertising campaign by advertising agency Ogilvy&Mather) at a conference. We debated it and rejected it.

We didn't buy it.

It saddens me to have to defend what is indefensible.

All the producers were unanimous: this would be riding the coat tails of someone else, it would be exploitative and unethical. We said please revisit this idea.

M-Net marketing went ahead regardless. It is a profoundly shocking image, we

were quite speechless and tried to stop it. The director of (M-Net) marketing was not informed of our objection, it seems one individual was liaising with the advertising agency.

Going public like this has implications. We are a group of freelancers operating independently (of M-Net). I'm the fall guy. Is silence collusive?

We have addressed the individuals who corresponded with us. But we do not have an assurance from marketing that they will be careful about Benetton-type campaigns such as this one.

Linda Ferreira, the account executive from Ogilvy&Mather, had this to say:

WE wanted a campaign representative of the continuum of (Carte Blanche) programming. Something light and frothy for viewers familiar with the stories through to digging beneath the surface to expose the truth.

We spoke to Kevin Carter's father and told him the rationale behind the campaign. He felt the integrity of his son's

work was matched by Carte Blanche's brand of investigative journalism. We were not trying to exploit Kevin Carter.

Of the 1.2 million people who watch Carte Blanche we got maybe two or three letters from people disapproving of the campaign.