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## Mirror's weeping child picture is a lie and smacks of lazy journalism at best

Paper's use of stock shot of American child to illustrate splash about food banks in UK is betrayal of its photographic heritage



The Daily Mirror front-page picture was a stock shot of an American child taken five years ago. Photograph: Daily Mirror

The Daily Mirror's weeping child picture was basically a lie, and we don't normally condone lying. The Mirror used a stock shot of an American child taken five years ago to illustrate their front-page splash about the growth of food banks. This is the prime position for a news image and the Mirror has a fine tradition of commissioning and publishing strong news pictures.

Its photographic style has its roots in gritty Picture Post-type reportage of UK social

affairs. To use a stock shot on the front page is misleading its readers and a betrayal of its photographic heritage. The reader really doesn't expect a picture used with a front-page hard news story to be a soft library image.

Only a few weeks ago the Mirror took the brave decision to publish the shocking image of the bodies of the children gassed in Syria. It was a troubling picture, but told the truth in a bold way that most of the other UK papers shied away from. Possibly exploitative to some people, but also true to its tabloid sledgehammer style, it presented the evidence available on the day.

Surely the point is that if the reader can't believe in the picture presented with no hint that it might just be an illustration, can they believe the story? This is a manipulation of the truth. In the rush to publish the story, the visual veracity has been forgotten.

If food banks are handing out so many parcels would it have been so difficult to find a real UK family relying on them? If I was a Mirror reader, I'd feel pretty patronised; where will this image pop up next? To illustrate a story on child abuse? Playground bullying? An Easter egg shortage?

Someone has used the word manipulation, referring to the readers' possible reactions to the child and her tears. Of course manipulation also has a different resonance in the world of news photography. The Mirror was at it again a couple of weeks ago.

Associated Press photographer Kirsty Wigglesworth had shot a great picture at Spurs the Sunday before last: Tottenham striker Emmanuel Adebayor saluting embattled manager Tim Sherwood after he scores a goal against Sunderland at White Hart Lane. Sherwood is also saluting and alongside him is a member of Spurs' coaching squad, Chris Ramsey.

A nice moment well captured by Wigglesworth. So well captured that, out of the hundreds taken that day, several papers including the Guardian used it on their back pages the next morning.

But a couple of UK papers, the Daily Mail and the Mirror, saw fit to erase Ramsey from the image. For what reason is not exactly clear, perhaps the Mail thought that their fact box would look bolder without a figure behind. In the Mirror's case was it to let their headline stand out more?

For whatever reason, the irony is painfully clear: if Kirsty Wigglesworth had amended her photograph, AP would have sacked her, because that's their policy and they have a good track record in enforcing it. Only a few months ago, AP news photographer Narciso Contreras had his contract terminated for altering a picture from Syria.

The Guardian, along with other national newspapers, subscribes to the big news

agencies like AP and Reuters because we can believe that their images haven't been altered by their photographers. Several photographers have paid a very high price to ensure newspaper picture editors can continue to have that trust: it's so sad that these rules are being undermined by this sort of crass Photoshop work. At least the Mail had the good grace to apologise for their actions on their website.

News organisations altering pictures or using convenient heart-tugging stock shots in news situations smacks of lazy journalism at best. At worst it's a betrayal of their loyal readers and photojournalism past and present.



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