

# Human rights, democracy and celebrity

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## Introduction

On 24 September 2015, the Russian President Vladimir Putin telephoned the British singer-songwriter and gay activist Sir Elton John (Reginald Dwight) to meet him. The call occurred as Putin had decided to respond to the singer's concerns about the 'ridiculous' nature of the homophobic attitudes which existed in Russia. Most especially, John was concerned that the Russian lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community had been brutalised through a combination of homophobic legislation, state victimisation and political violence. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) diplomatic correspondent Bridget Kendall, John criticised the passage of a Russian law in 2013 designed to prosecute those private citizens who were deemed to have promoted 'gay propaganda' to children.

Matters between Putin and John had been complicated when two Russian pranksters had tricked the pop star by claiming that the Premier had agreed to meet him. When the singer commented that Putin had agreed to a meeting he quickly received a denial from the Kremlin. Therefore, on this occasion, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Pskov confirmed to the world's media that Russian President had indeed contacted John. The press release stated that Putin respected the singer as an internationally renowned entertainer who enjoyed a huge fan-base in Russia. John's celebrity had given him an entrée to speak directly to Putin as a legitimate spokesman for LGBT rights. At the time of writing, both Putin and John have stated that they want to arrange the meeting when their schedules allowed them to do so.

This incident exemplified how John could utilise his global fame to place the Russian state's homophobic attitudes onto the international agenda. In recent years, he has advocated gay rights and engaged in the wider process of celebrity altruism. Conversely, it could be claimed that the incident was a clever publicity stunt wherein a wealthy pop-star and a shrewd political operator used gay rights for their mutual benefit. Invariably, celebrity figures including John, Bono and Bob Geldof have been accused of being 'bards of the powerful' to political leaders such as Tony Blair, George W. Bush and Putin (Monbiot 2005). Celebrity humanitarians have been accused of trivialising the issues so that the public interest could be easily manipulated.

Therefore, as there has been an increase of celebrity philanthropy within the humanitarian sphere, academic interest has simultaneously grown. In many respects, the contours of this

populist debate have segued into the academy's inter-disciplinary (political communications, media and cultural studies; international relations (IR) and diplomacy; development) analysis of celebrity humanitarianism. At one end of the spectrum, there is Ilan Kapoor's critique of a 'capitalist celebrity machine', drawn heavily on the theories of Slavoj Žižek, in which celebrity humanitarianism is depoliticising, inequitable and anti-democratic (Kapoor 2012). In contrast, the IR scholar Andrew Cooper contends that celebrities create a new 'space' to open up the 'disconnect' between the diplomatic classes and the public (Cooper 2008: 113–114). This form of public diplomacy may be seen to be part of a wider democratisation process in international affairs.

Consequently, this chapter will consider how the debate within the academy has facilitated a greater understanding of the relationship between celebrity, human rights and democratic behaviour. First, this study will outline the factors which have defined the principles of celebrity engagement and human rights. There will be a discussion of how celebrity humanitarians have used their fame to draw media attention to international causes. Moreover, their mediated personas have been deployed by international state actors (ISAs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to effect a 'connection' with the public. This section will show how there has been a popular debate about the worth of such engagement.

Second, the chapter will discuss the competing intellectual claims which have been made in relation to celebrity humanitarianism. This analysis will consider how these interventions demonstrate that a range of ideological values and disciplinary perspectives (critical development, international relations, public diplomacy) have been directed at celebrity activism. Most especially, this section will compare and contrast the arguments made about the worth (or not) of celebrity engagement within the international public sphere.

Finally, it will ask whether this polarised academic debate – in which celebrities have been to seen to either aid or undermine the realisation of human rights – should be reconfigured. Instead, the chapter will contend that for a proper analysis of celebrity humanitarianism to be operationalised that there should be a consideration of the structural conditions and personal forms of agency which shape such activism. Therefore, it will discuss how a literature which has been framed upon the principles of aesthetics and style (Street 2004, 2012; Farrell 2012), Global North and South relations (Richey 2016) and post-humanitarianism (Chouliaraki 2013; Brockington 2014a) can be employed to map the relations between celebrity, human rights and democratisation.

### **Drawing public attention to causes and mediated personas – celebrity humanitarians in modern human rights campaigns**

Politicised celebrities can use their fame to draw *public attention* to a range of causes by acting as patrons, advocates and fundraisers for specific issues, human rights and social movements. A patron refers to a celebrity who allows an organisation to cite his or her name, thereby affording credibility to external publics and validation to internal audiences. In tandem, a spokesperson or endorser is a celebrity who is identified with a particular charity and appears or makes statements on its behalf. Through their participation in an international visit, the writing of an opinion piece, or an appearance at a public rally, celebrities can attract visibility to a cause and to themselves. Consequently, celebrities have taken stances on human rights issues, become spokespeople for charities, or have participated in benefit performances.

John Corner and Dick Pels contend that in the era of global communications there has been a focus on post-ideological lifestyle choices which foregrounds matters of aesthetics and style (Corner and Pels 2003). As the public is less likely to identify with traditional forms

of international politics and diplomacy, they have favoured a 'more eclectic, fluid, issue specific and personality-bound forms of political recognition and engagement' (ibid.: 7). They argue that through their *mediated personas* – the individual's public image – film, television and music stars have created new forms of identification in which they attain public admiration, sympathy and authority to effect political expression. Thus, celebrity humanitarians command credibility through a conjunction of de-institutionalisation, personalisation and parasocial familiarity to transcend other agencies of social authority. They have achieved such status through establishing a star iconography and by negotiating modern public-relations systems.

For instance, as celebrities have become brands, they have engaged in a range of cross-over issues in which they can utilise their 'brand identity' when lending their support to international causes. Moreover, there has been a major cultural shift in which celebrities have assumed a moral authority among target audiences which was previously associated with charismatic leaders. While celebrities were politically active in the past, their fans demonstrated little or no desire to see their favourite actors, musicians and performers in a political guise. With the growing demand from global audiences for authentic forms of celebrity engagement, transformative stars have realised their value as advocates for human rights agendas. Sally Totman and P. David Marshall have noted that this has been reflected in the rise of what they describe as *celebrity-political magnification*, in which film stars are placing their humanitarian concerns into a range of feature film vehicles to reinforce their political status (Totman and Marshall 2015: 604).

These developments have been tied together with a democratisation of foreign policy in which global concerns have been placed on the popular agenda:

Celebrity activists ... operate within the framework of *globalism*, cultivating the potential for shifting concerns of politics away from traditional struggles of sovereignty towards issues of mutual concern. Celebrities provide and represent *cosmopolitanism* to audiences, constructing the identity of global citizenship and solidarity.

(Tsaliki et al. 2011: 299)

Lisa Tsaliki, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos and Asteris Huliaras (Tsaliki et al.) argue that celebrity activists can 'bridge' the gap between Western audiences and faraway tragedies by using their fame to publicise these international events (ibid.: 299).

### *The United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors' scheme and non-governmental organisations*

Such activity effectively began when the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) collaborated with the American film star Danny Kaye in 1953. Subsequently, there has been a massive increase in celebrity intervention through a range of United Nations (UN) celebrity galas and concerts, along with the formalisation of the Goodwill Ambassador schemes. When Kofi Annan was the UN Secretary-General (1997–2007) he oversaw a public-relations revolution which saw a massive increase in the number of celebrity ambassadors. In 2002, Annan hosted a conference called 'Celebrity Advocacy for the New Millennium' which included stars such as the Brazilian footballer Ronaldo and declared 'he wanted celebrities to be the tools the UN would use to pressurise reluctant governments to take seriously the rhetorical pledges they make during every General Assembly' (Alleyne 2005: 179). This was designed to offset the international cynicism that had been directed towards the UN and to counter-balance the view that it was beholden to the United States (US) (Cooper 2008: 28).

In raising the UN's profile, the most spectacular success has been the film actress Angelina Jolie, whose image was transformed from a Hollywood wild-child to a credible celebrity diplomat. Undoubtedly, she knows that her fame, beauty and photogenic qualities can attract the world's media to promote the causes she endorses. Yet, Jolie's emotive responses were seen to be legitimate when she published her diaries, about her visits to refugee camps, which appeared to be serious and well-informed. Other notable celebrity ambassadors have included George Clooney and Charlize Theron.

Most recently, under the leadership of Ban-Ki Moon (2007 onwards), the UN has employed well-known filmmakers, humanitarians and celebrities to propagate its 'Global Goals'. This programme was established in September 2015 and set targets for nutrition, health and well-being, gender equality, social inequality, and the environment over the next fifteen years. Accordingly, the United Kingdom (UK) comic filmmaker and campaigner Richard Curtis (*Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1998), *Comic Aid, Make Poverty History*), in partnership with Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill and his wife Melinda Gates, was commissioned to create the 'Project Everyone' programme. It was this project's aim to make these goals 'famous' in an extremely concise form to billions of people in a period of seven days. The campaign deployed a publicity film, advertisements, radio spots and the social media, and included a star-studded concert in New York City with Beyonce, Cold Play and Pearl Jam. In tandem, UNICEF announced that the initiative was supported by celebrities like Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan, Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram, tennis star Serena Williams and the Brazilian footballer Neymar.

Further, celebrity humanitarians may complement the work of NGOs by using their charismatic authority to establish an equitable discourse within the global civil society concerning the mutual values of the organisation's work. For instance, Jolie has worked independently from the UN and has collaborated with Peter Gabriel in his Witness Programme, which documents human rights abuses and establishes policies for international justice. She has most recently promoted the equality rights for women who have been subject to exploitation, sexual trafficking and genital mutilation with the former UK Foreign Secretary William Hague. Similarly, the singer Annie Lennox has accompanied her role as a United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) Goodwill Ambassador with active support for Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Burma UK. The American Red Cross utilises a 50-member celebrity cabinet that includes Jamie Lee Curtis, Jane Seymour, L.L. Cool J. and Jackie Chan.

### *Celebrity humanitarianism*

There has also been the dramatic rise of more freelance forms of celebrity philanthro-capitalism which have reflected the professionalisation of charities and the marketisation of their publicity campaigns. This has been most fully emphasised by Sir Bob Geldof's emotive response to the famines in Ethiopia with the initial creation of *Band Aid* and release of the 'Feed the World' charity single, leading to the *Live Aid* global concerts in 1985. Geldof's globally televised *Live Aid* shows reconfigured the public's attitude towards charities by demonstrating that fundraising could be desirable.

On 24 October 1984, the BBC News correspondent Michael Buerk filed a devastating report about the widespread starvation of Ethiopian refugees in camps at Korem. In the resulting outpouring of public grief the horrified Geldof, the front man of a fading post-punk band, The Boomtown Rats, became an unlikely celebrity humanitarian. He cajoled 45 UK pop stars including Bono, George Michael and Sting to form *Band Aid*, which recorded a charity single *Do They Know it's Christmas* (1984). The record raised millions of pounds. This led to Geldof further

bullying celebrities, such as David Bowie, Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Lionel Richie and Elton John, along with bands including Dire Straits, Queen, U2 and The Who, into performing at the simultaneous *Live Aid* concerts in London and Philadelphia on 13 July 1985.

The media spectacle brought the plight of the starving Ethiopians to the attention of two billion viewers across 160 countries and challenged them to contribute to the cause, not least due to Geldof's impatience. Because the BBC failed to effectively advertise the phone numbers available for public donations, only a relatively small amount of money had been raised. Consequently, *Live Aid* is remembered for Geldof's (in)famous outburst on a pre-watershed channel which has inaccurately gone down in folklore as 'Give me the fucking money!' *Live Aid* raised a global total of £50 million and Geldof's indignant behaviour was seen to be crucial to its success.

Moreover, celebrity humanitarians can provide an effective lead 'through the 'non-confrontational' reordering of political and economic forces in the service of global goals' (Tsaliki et al. 2011: 300). Therefore, Geldof's *Live Aid* and *Live 8* campaigns indicated the skilful linkage of pop music with famine imagery to generate philanthropic activity amongst the public. In a similar vein, U2 singer Bono's (Paul David Hewson) *Product RED* – constructed with Jeffrey Sacks, Paul Farmer and Bobby Shriver – makes conspicuous how American Express, Motorola, Armani and Microsoft can be used profitably (in both senses of the word) to effect material change to avert poverty. Bono has been responsible for tilting much of the focus of celebrity advocacy toward poverty in the developing states of the global economy. He has placed an emphasis on direct action and building effective institutions, while using his fame to gain an inside track to lobby governments. The rock singer is the co-founder and remains the public face of the *One Campaign* and *DATA* (Debt, Aids, Trade Africa), which promote the ending of extreme poverty, the fighting of the AIDs pandemic and international debt relief.

Bono has also been instrumental in mobilising other celebrities to build a direct link between Hollywood and the Global South. In 2004 he was invited by Brad Pitt to address Tom Hanks, Sean Penn, Julia Roberts, Justin Timberlake and the architect Frank Gehry so that they would lend their support for the *One Campaign*. Further, Bono recruited Clooney for the campaign and the film star has made explicit reference to his influence:

'Bono's model really worked,' Clooney says. 'There is more attention on celebrity than ever before—and there is a use for that besides selling products.' Stars like Brad Pitt (Katrina), Ben Affleck (Congo), and Sean Penn (Haiti) followed suit. 'A lot of the young actors I see coming up in the industry are not just involved, but knowledgeable on a subject and then sharing that with fans,' says Clooney. No one's just a 'peace activist' anymore—they have a specialty.

(Avlon 2011: 16)

Cooper notes how Bono has used his fame to gain entrance to the corridors of power by appealing to modern leaders like Blair and Bill Clinton due to their fascination with popular culture (Cooper 2008: 38). Yet, as he engaged with compromised leaders including George W. Bush and Blair, alongside illiberal figures such as Putin, Bono has been accused of being a quisling figure. For the *Debt and Development Coalition Ireland* (DDCI) and *UK Art Uncut*, he is a hypocritical self-publicist who has engaged in tax-avoidance schemes while simultaneously lecturing Western governments on how they should deal with international debt. Notably, *UK Art Uncut* unfurled a twenty-foot inflatable banner emblazoned with the legend 'U pay your tax 2' at the 2011 Glastonbury Festival.

Others have suggested that Bono's proclamations have been a good way of selling tickets for his band and assuaging Western consumer guilt. The anarchist band Chumbawamba wore 'Bono

Pay Your Tax' T-shirts when they appeared at the festival and have criticised the U2 singer's close relations with the powerful. Notably, their first album was entitled *Pictures of Starving Children Sell Records* (1986). Further, punk poet John Cooper Clarke parodied the rock star in his poem *Bongo's Trousers* (2011), wherein 'Bongo' (sic) has his Stetson hat, designer sunglasses and leather trousers stolen. When he is forced to dress in a lounge suit, no one (including U2 guitarist 'The Hedge') recognises him, meaning 'He can't save the planet dressed like that!'

With the increase in celebrity humanitarians, the worth of such activism has been questioned and its impact on cultural and political practices has become more controversial. Thus, Geldof and Bono's involvement in *Live 8* has been criticised for sloganising poverty, deflecting the public's attention away from the viability of aid and being co-opted by an unaccountable political class. Concurrently, anti-poverty campaigners such as *Making Poverty History* argued that *Live 8* wilfully undermined their messages of 'Justice not Charity', stole the media agenda and depoliticised the cause through its construction of a dependency culture.

As the gap between the expectation and resolution of human rights has widened, celebrities have been criticised for their simplistic or moralistic responses to the complexities of these issues. In using celebrities, NGOs and NSAs have been accused of leveraging pity, acting as moral guardians and casting an air of superiority, which sets a cultural stage for disrespect and disconnection. Countless celebrity advocates have been accused of falling into the saviour trap by trying to do what they think is best but creating an output that is outdated and misguided and old-fashioned. Further, the media's focus on such celebrities often means that the cause becomes an afterthought. Celebrity humanitarians have been accused of debasing the quality of international debate, diverting attention from worthy causes to those which are 'sexy' and failing to represent the disenfranchised. They have been seen to be superficial and to have remained unaccountable.

## The critiques of celebrity advocacy and human rights

### *Trivialisation*

In many respects the popular discourse on celebrity humanitarianism has been replicated within the debate in the academy. Consequently, concerns have been raised that Goodwill Ambassadors have trivialised the UN's mission. Mark D. Alleyne argues that the UN's deployment of Goodwill Ambassadors has been elitist and ethno-centric. He maintains that the employment of celebrities was part of a general malaise in which a desperate UN incorporated public-relations techniques into its marketing so that the international media would provide it with a favourable coverage (Alleyne 2005: 176). Essentially, Alleyne argues this placed a 'happy', but ultimately impotent, face on the UN as it has serious shortcomings concerning its promotion of values, conduct and credibility. This was a shallow approach to solving crises, reinforced ethnic stereotypes by perpetuating an imbalanced view of need and offered 'a primarily mellorative approach, giving succour to the incapacitated rather than hope for a better life through programmes of education, consciousness-raising and cultural affirmation' (William Over quoted in Alleyne 2003: 77).

### *Neo-liberalism*

Further criticisms contend that compliant celebrity humanitarians have reinforced the economic inequalities between the Global North and South. Following *Live Aid* Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte maintain that a 'fourth wave' of celebrity activism has occurred. Principally, 'Band Aid' was commoditised into 'Brand Aid' so that major corporations and celebrities combined

to support charities aimed at African poverty. Thus, as these apparently ethical forms of behaviour sell 'suffering' to the public, Richey and Ponte argue that aid causes have become 'brands' to be bought and sold in the global marketplace. Most especially, *Product RED* marked the point wherein there was a fusion of consumption and social causes.

In particular, Richey and Ponte have maintained that Bono, along with Sachs, Shriver and Farmer, has constructed a form of 'compassionate consumption' in the wake of *Product RED*. They argue that there has been a de-linking of the relations which have existed between capitalist exploitation and global poverty (Richey and Ponte 2011: 179).

The primary goal of RED is not to push governments to do their part, but to push consumers do theirs through exercising their choices. The contemporary era of celebrity activism will be more eclectic, with different kinds of celebrities holding power in various realms and with shifting alliances between various kinds of celebrities holding sway over diverse constituencies.

*(Richey and Ponte 2011: 33–34)*

Consequently, Richey and Ponte outline the development of aid 'celebritariats' who appeal not only to the consumers but also to the international aid community. It is argued that these celebrities have filled the void that has been left behind by those institutional actors who have failed to coordinate the effective provision of economic relief for the global underclass. While these authors do not make light of the celebrity activists' impulse to 'do good' globally, they contend that there are inherent dangers in conceiving that stars, philanthropists and corporate executives can effect solutions to global crises.

Further, they maintain that this apparent altruism provides another means through which corporations may market themselves in relation to the growing concerns of lifestyle, culture and identity. Thus, corporations gain from developing 'responsible practices' so that they can brand themselves to a wider consumer base. However, by focusing the public attention on the plight of 'distant others' they deflect the focus away from their own dubious behaviour in exploiting developing states. In this respect, celebrities lend credence and validate such 'ethical' corporate behaviour.

Within this schema, Littler (2008) and Kapoor (2012) maintain that the celebrity humanitarians appeal to the public to effectively sell the poor for profit in a global market-place. Littler argues that celebrities actively contribute to the structural injustices that they apparently seek to change. She contends that for celebrity advocacy to be progressive it must facilitate audience activity. However, as these forms of humanitarianism are offered in terms of pity rather than justice they do not provide the means to confront the systemic injustices of capitalism which in themselves have defined the principles of celebrity (the Hollywood star system, public relations, wealth, materialism and elite power). Moreover, while the conditions of global injustice might be recognised by celebrities they are 'simultaneously denying the material implications of the wealth of [their stardom] and how they contribute to the spaces where suffering takes place' (Littler 2008: 248).

Even more aggressively Kapoor contends that the ideological underpinnings of celebrity advocacy are not so much about humanitarianism as self-promotion, brand marketing and elite-centred politics (Kapoor 2012). Celebrity humanitarians are fundamentally depoliticising and aggravating the very global inequality they should address. Figures like Geldof, Bono, Jolie and Clooney not only serve to reinforce unaccountable capitalist power relations but through an illegitimate 'moral spectacle' contribute to peoples' suffering. Celebrity humanitarianism indicates an underlying cultural imperialism which has abused the developing world so that

## Human rights, democracy and celebrity

it becomes a dumping ground for self-promotion, hero-worship and humanitarian fantasies. Kapoor ~~takes an instrumentalist approach in which he~~ employs Žižek's usage of the concept of *jouissance* (extreme enjoyment or orgasmic pleasure) to argue that celebrity humanitarians satiate their 'super-egos' through engaging in the morally repugnant pretence of 'doing good' (Brockington 2016).

### *Neo-colonialism*

Riina Yrjölä maintains that the values of celebrity advocacy preserve global stereotypes. Principally, Bono, Geldof, Clooney and Jolie are represented as selfless Western crusaders dedicated to alleviating the suffering of Africans who exist outside of the 'civilised' processes of development, progress, peace and human security. Therefore, celebrities and 'Africa' operate under assumed roles which are presented as part of a wider discourse about the natural order of world politics. Yrjölä, employing the theories of the post-structuralist Michel Foucault on hierarchical power relations and the writings of Frantz Fanon on the inherent violence of colonialism, argues that:

The moral war against poverty in Africa is not waged in the name of any specific country, but instead is justified in the name of 'humanity', which remains located and rooted firmly in the foundational superior morality of the west and grand histories of progress ... Reflecting colonial rescue narratives, cloaked with religious language of crusades and inscriptions of western self-mastery, 'Africa' becomes located, through these interpretations, outside western modernity, freedom and civilisation, rendering the continent as a central battleground between good and evil.

(Yrjölä, 2012: 369).

Therefore, this has meant that instead of Geldof and Bono acting as humane philanthropists, they have reinforced the West's neo-colonial rule over the Global South. This dominant paradigm has meant that aid will 'magically' release the 'victims' from the shackles of Southern societies. Within this apparently benevolent narrative the focus on the indigenous peoples' needs rather than the facilitation of their creativity has been used to 'police' the boundaries of the public's imagination. It directly equates to the perpetuation of the neo-colonial hegemony of the Global North elites over the requirements of the Global South.

### **Public diplomacy and celebrity humanitarians**

Alternatively, other scholars have suggested that a more ~~tolerant and~~ pragmatic approach to celebrity humanitarianism is required (Tsaliki et al. 2011). For instance, in a commercially dictated global media, the escalation of Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace programmes was one of the few realistic responses open to the UN, along with NGOs, to promote the international community's activities. Accordingly, it is contended that celebrity advocates have the ability to bring focus to international campaigns, to have an impact on human rights agendas and to advocate global principles of liberal internationalism.

This approach is drawn from a growing interest in the transition between traditional and modern forms of diplomatic behaviour. In a normative sense, diplomacy has been seen as a co-ordination of state interests with broader conceptions of collective security and economic power. However, as the international political environment has rapidly changed due to major technological innovations in transport and communication, foreign-policy mandarins no longer have the luxury of time or the ability to husband information in the manner they had previously

enjoyed. Consequently, the Westphalian diplomatic order has been challenged by the new currencies of public diplomacy in which ‘emotional commitment’ and an engagement with public opinion have been utilised to create a democratic arena for political change.

In particular, the diplomatic norms have been challenged by the nature of media coverage, which has expanded with the rise of 24/7 global news programming, in which there has been a decentralisation and fragmentation of opinion. Moreover, the rise of social media networks places a greater emphasis on interactive and person-to-person communications. These developments have placed global concerns on the popular agenda. Therefore, a ‘new public diplomacy’ has emerged in the wake of alternative communications through which non-state actors (NSAs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) have promoted cultural interchanges to mobilise public interest to advance their causes.

Geoffrey Pigman comments that CSOs, including NGOs such as Greenpeace, use direct-action techniques to become newsworthy and achieve public visibility. Pigman also notes that so-called ‘eminent person diplomats’ have made their presence felt on the international stage through developments such as the Elders Programme to raise public awareness and affect diplomatic responses about the war in Darfur (Pigman 2010: 88–89). This initiative was constructed by the musician Peter Gabriel and the Virgin Media entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson and included the late South African President Nelson Mandela and former US President Jimmy Carter. Within this sub-category, Pigman comments that the proliferation of celebrity representations reflects a broader set of social, political and international changes within diplomatic practices:

It makes sense to consider the activities of these individuals as diplomacy because, importantly – at least when they are successful – they and the messages that they bear are received by the interlocutor with which they wish to communicate. They are accredited as having standing and legitimacy by the counterparts to whom they seek to negotiate. They are engaging in the core diplomatic functions of representation and communication ... and by doing so they play a key role in mediating estrangement between other actors.

*(Pigman 2010: 96–97).*

Therefore, celebrity activists have shifted the focus away from state-directed types of public diplomacy to bring attention to more cosmopolitan concerns related to global citizenship and mutual solidarity. Through their charismatic authority they complement the work of ISAs and NGOs to establish a discourse within the global civil society about human rights activities.

### *Celebrity diplomacy*

Andrew Cooper maintains that if public diplomacy is married to more open-ended versions of agency, then traditional forms of state-centric diplomacy are eroded even further (Cooper 2008: 2). He argues that celebrity diplomacy creates a new ‘space’ in which stars provide a conduit between the public and foreign affairs to overcome the ‘disconnect’ which has occurred as official diplomats have sought to husband information rather than share it (*ibid.*: 113–114). Consequently, celebrities can provide points of identification to mobilise public opinion for diplomatic reform. Therefore, Cooper identifies celebrity diplomacy as an alternative form of agency which has the potential to define international communication agendas:

The power of agency – and ... its adaptive capabilities ... – is captured by the continued rise of Angelina Jolie ... Jolie has exhibited many of the potential strengths, in part because of her ability to mix art and real life. Starring in adventure films in exotic locations provided

added credibility to her frontline activity as a UN Goodwill Ambassador and her more recent ventures into freelance diplomatic activity. It also reflected an immense amount of personal growth ... caused by ... [her] ... growing appreciation of what her role could be. (Cooper 2008: 116).

Cooper contends that celebrities not only draw public attention and actively promote causes but are ideational figures who frame and sell ideas within the international community (ibid.: 10). This enables them to employ their rhetorical power within the centres of diplomatic power, such as the US Department of State and the UN. Cooper defines this as the 'Bonoisation' of diplomacy, suggesting that celebrity advocates such as Bono and Geldof have placed causes such as world debt on the international agenda. Further, he argues that decision-makers can benefit from the favourable public opinion engendered through such an association with celebrities. This mutuality of interests means that celebrities can gain an unprecedented amount of face time with leaders, meaning that stars may advance their causes. Further, the lobbying power of celebrity diplomats is 'dependent on the extent to which they work within networks and coalitions and elaborate pragmatic goals' (Huliaris and Tzifakis 2011: 40). To this end, Bono has become the quintessential 'outsider-insider' as he has combined his public appeal with being a political brand with the requisite networking skill to access the powerful (Cooper 2008: 42–44).

Cooper's celebrity diplomacy thesis accords with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power as it suggests that change occurs through attraction rather than 'carrots or sticks' (Nye 2004). In terms of nation states, this power derives from the legitimacy of a society's culture, political ideals and policies directed towards other countries. At the more individualist level, Cooper contends that celebrity humanitarians have utilised the politics of attraction to legitimise themselves within the global public sphere and to access networks of power (Cooper 2008: 10). This 'soft power potential' has meant celebrity diplomats have lent their weight to 'sell' transnational campaigns within a commercially driven news media. In this manner, celebrities have utilised their star power to effect pressure upon diplomats, international policymakers and national leaders.

Therefore, it remains necessary to consider the activities, roles and techniques that celebrities have used in order to examine the nature and extent of their influence within the global public domain. As celebrities have become more politically conscious they have brought about new forms of humanitarian engagement within a construct of global collaboration so that networks of institutional and ideological power may facilitate diplomatic reforms. Thus, in soft power terms, the politics of attraction within celebrity-led campaigns have facilitated greater forms of agency to alleviate global suffering. The dialogue between celebrities and the public has allowed for new opportunities for humanitarian engagement. This has reflected a willingness within audiences to accept celebrities as authentic advocates due to the public's identification with stars. Consequently, the celebrityisation of international politics must not be simply dismissed as an erosion of the diplomatic order but should be understood as part of the transformation processes which are occurring within public diplomacy.

### **New directions of travel – beyond help or harm?**

As Ira Wagman comments, the academic analysis of celebrity, democracy and human rights must move beyond the polarities of the 'help or hurt' paradigm to consider why 'celebrities turn to diplomatic issues, why specific celebrities team up with particular institutions, and what each has to gain' (Wagman 2014). In this respect, celebrity humanitarianism should be framed through

'historically specific, contingent and varied ... particularities [which] reflect both structural and personal forces [that] ... can only be understood ... through 'a more intellectually curious critique' (Wheeler 2013 quoted from Brockington 2016: 212). Most especially, a critical literature which refers to the celebrities' *'affective capacities'* (Marshall 1997), their position within Global North–South relations and the rise of post-humanitarianism can provide a more effective critique of stars' involvement with human rights campaigns.

### *Affective capacities*

John Street's work provides a systematic attempt to analyse how the political aesthetics of politicised celebrities interlink with their democratic worth. Street argues that celebrities can use their reputations to reinvigorate politics with new ideas and as an aggregated form of political agency (Street 2003, 2004, 2012). Such a form of agency shows how celebrities can interact with the public through their ability to be 'in touch' with popular sentiment (Street 2004: 447). Stars can achieve an intimacy with others through fan networks and these can be understood as the basis of political representation. Street contends that such a representational relationship is established by the celebrity's cultural performance:

In other words, the study of politics requires study of the way in which performances are constructed and styles are articulated, because they constitute the transactions between represented and representatives in democracies. Significant political relationships are constructed through media performance.

*(Street 2003: 25)*

Consequently, Street comments that politicised celebrities utilise their status and the medium they work in to speak out on specific causes to influence political outcomes. He is concerned to demonstrate how celebrity politics is consistent with a liberal democratic ethos. Therefore, Street is interested in the impact of celebrity performance on political outcomes as he sees fame as neither an exceptional nor an exaggerated form of representation, but a vital characteristic of modern political culture (Street 2004). He refers to Joseph Schumpeter's analogy between the worlds of commerce and politics, to demonstrate how modern political communication has been dominated by marketing as the parties 'compete' for electoral support. Street suggests politics should be seen as a type of show-business in which the currency is fame and the products are the stars' performances as:

In focusing on the style in which politics is presented, we need to go beyond mere description of the gestures and images. We need to assess them, to think about them as performances and to apply critical language appropriate to this. ... To see politics as coterminous with popular culture is not to assume that is diminished .... The point is to use this approach to discover the appropriate critical language with which to analyse it.

*(Street 2003: 97)*

Street's framework provides a critical insight into how celebrity activism works while remaining careful to distinguish itself from any uncritical populism. His purpose is to construct a new method of inquiry rather than to suggest that all these styles of celebrity advocacy are appealing or plausible. In turn, Nathan Farrell (2012) argues that if celebrity politics is a 'real' form of engagement then it needs to be treated as such. This means that there should be more than just a reporting of styles and performances, but an integration of these concepts

into an analysis of how celebrity-fronted campaigns work in respect to how they affect political outcomes:

Street's work ... permits a deeper appreciation of how such campaigns work – their methods and potential outcomes – and the roles of aesthetics and performance within them. Conceptually aesthetics, style and performance as political components allow them to be submitted to the same type of scrutiny previously reserved for the elements of 'traditional' representative politics.

(Farrell 2012: 404)

For example, in constructing a critique of Bono's activities in *Product RED* Farrell demonstrates how Street's criteria of 'legitimacy', 'organisation' and 'performance' provide a more holistic understanding of the processes of celebrity humanitarianism. Within this analytical framework, Farrell defines three aspects of the rock star's representative character – Bono the persona (legitimacy), Bono the capitalist (organisation) and Bono the activist (performance). He contends that these characteristics combine to provide him with the credibility to be an articulate 'emotional sovereign' who can be a representative of social responsibility. These advantages allow him access to the corridors of power and facilitate one-to-one meetings with world leaders. However, at the same time, Bono has to account for his lack of a representational mandate. In his primary role as a famous musician he both augments and impedes his position as a legitimate humanitarian. Consequently, Farrell describes how the singer's star persona and skill-sets associated with his capitalist attributes (real estate, private equity investments, record production firms) have contributed to the success of the RED campaign, while simultaneously exacerbating the accusations about his lack of authenticity and transparency (ibid.: 395).

Thus, Street's framework is not only designed to consider how celebrities legitimise (or not) political agendas, but allows reviewers to discuss whether these celebrity forms of humanitarianism actually work or really matter (Street 2012). Further, his research methodology seeks to make conspicuous the complex nexus of the historical, political, economic and cultural imperatives which shape these types of celebrity activism.

### *Global North and South relations*

Such concerns have been taken up in Lisa Ann Richey's edited collection *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations – Politics, place and power* (2016). As Richey states, in gazing through the 'keyhole' of celebrity, it is possible to analyse, explain and assess such concepts as accountability, agency, authenticity, branding, development, mediation, humanity, inequality, pity, public engagement and representation (Richey 2016: 8). Richey and the contributing authors pay attention to the Global South as a 'place' wherein celebrities intervene into humanitarian processes and which acts as an environment that generates Southern stars who engage in philanthropy. For them celebrity humanitarianism provides a means through which to critically investigate the diverse and multiple relations – aid economics, the representation of the 'other' and new alliances – that facilitate the linkages between the North and South:

By investigating one of the most mediated and distant representations of humanitarianism (the celebrity intervention) from a perspective of contextualisation ... [this analysis] underscores the importance of context in understanding humanitarianism. We examine *politics* to understand how values are linked with authority in global constellations of

humanitarian helping, and in local recipient environments. We investigate the importance of *place* and context .... Celebrity interventions provide an empirical focus point for studying the relations of *power* that may be reproduced or disputed.

(Richey 2016: 3)

Therefore, celebrity humanitarianism must not be only seen to have a social value, but must provide the conditions through which a transformation in international democratic behaviour may occur in an era of late modernity. In this respect, it becomes necessary to consider how such forms of celebrity activity function for both good and ill within the context of *post-humanitarianism*. Within this analytical framework, the converging logics of consumerism and utilitarianism suggest that 'doing good' is less about outward gestures of economic, political or social reform and more about the micro-practices of personal gratification. Similarly, the pertinent questions of equality and justice have been eroded to be replaced by more individualist forms of humanitarian engagement. This has resulted in the grand narratives of solidarity being fragmented into an array of disparate performance projects.

### *Post-humanitarianism*

These concerns have been taken up by Lillie Chouliaraki in *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (2013) and Dan Brockington in *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development* (2014a). Chouliaraki (2013) maintains that contemporary forms of celebrity humanitarianism have been transformed by economic, political and technological pressures. Consequently, these forms of activism mark a shift from other-directed forms of compassion to the articulation of self-directed conceits of personal expression. For Chouliaraki, humanitarianism acts as a means through which stars affirm themselves rather than establishing any conviction to reform the structural conditions which can alleviate poverty or suffering (ibid.: 17).

Most especially, this has resulted in a transformation of celebrity advocacy from the principles of ambassadorial engagement into the guises of entrepreneurial intervention. This has led to an elitist emphasis being placed on the donations made by wealthy figures such as Bill and Melinda Gates or the insider lobbying of 'third parties' like Bono or Jolie who can access the centres of power. Moreover, in analysing the 'theatricality' of the celebrity altruists' performances, Chouliaraki maintains that a utilitarian solidarity has justified the ethics associated with assertive individualism. Therefore, for the politics of justice to operate it is her contention that while there should be recognition of such theatricality there also needs to be a removal of any accompanying narcissism:

Even if only 'in the form of a whisper', effective speech is instrumental for the public morality of the humanitarian imaginary because it construes suffering as an object of potential commitment and entails a promise to engage – a disposition to action that sustains the 'public connection' amongst spectators as citizens of the world.

(Chouliaraki 2013: 103)

These contentions are replicated in Brockington's monograph (2014a), which focuses on celebrity advocacy and international development through an examination of the history, implications and consequences of such lobbying. From the extensive interviews he has conducted with ISA or NGO representatives, Brockington shows how the UK and US aid sectors have employed the 'terrain of celebrity' to negotiate policies with corporations and politicians. Brockington argues that celebrity advocacy signals a new aspect of elite rule through which the various parties can

## Human rights, democracy and celebrity

work effectively to establish developmental policies. Moreover, because this is an elitist discourse and only involves a select few, it is easier and simpler to effect than more populist forms of philanthro-capitalism.

However, Brockington notes a paradox in that while celebrity humanitarians claim to have a legitimate popular mandate in reality they have disengaged from the public and the civil society. He notes that this is part of a post-democratic politics which privileges insider groups such as unaccountable corporations and NGO lobbyists. Therefore, these conditions enable the hegemonic relations associated with celebrity to produce potentially anti-democratic outcomes. Yet, Brockington suggests that there also needs to be a more pragmatic understanding of such forms of celebrity activism:

We cannot understand the rise, or current role of celebrity advocacy, without realising its close connections to corporate sponsorship and corporate social responsibility. However, precisely because of these deep imbrications with capitalism I find that demanding a celebrity-free clean slate provides no better starting point for constructively engaging with celebrity advocacy than bland assertions that celebrity advocacy builds cosmopolitanism. I want to understand the detail of these interactions in order to explore the possibilities of constructively engaging with celebrity advocacy'

*(Brockington 2014a: 44)*

Through an exploration of the actual policies, groupings and individual motivations Brockington claims that there can be a more effective analysis of the diverse range of interventions. By understanding the type of world that is actually constituted by celebrity advocates it becomes clearer to address the relative strengths and weaknesses of such activity. Thus, he concludes that celebrity advocacy is effective in dealing with those corporations which have strong social responsibility agendas. Further, celebrities have the ability to engage with political elites and can open up the doors of power to provide access for NGOs. Moreover, through their eloquence and charisma, such 'celebrity advocates' can crystallise complex campaign issues via impassioned appeals and catchy slogans. It is upon these terms that Brockington comments celebrity advocacy may be worth engaging with. However, he adds with a note of caution:

Within post-democratic environments celebrity advocates are most welcome allies for non-profits, for they will give to the organisations they support welcome access to otherwise inaccessible places. [However] ... we must also realise that this may prove a Faustian bargain. The cost of working with such supporters is that it will strengthen the hold of post-democratic practice more generally. It will enable you to win the battle, but what about the war?

*(Brockington 2014b)*

## Conclusion

In analysing celebrity involvement in humanitarian initiatives, a mixed picture has emerged. UN Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace, NGO endorsers and famous activists have used their star power to effect pressure upon diplomats, international policymakers and national leaders. As the critiques of celebrity advocates have indicated, there are dangers in over-simplifying complex forms of humanitarianism when utilising emotional responses and becoming servants of the power elite. It has led to criticisms that while star power has brought attention to international affairs it effected little in the way of real change. Moreover, within the

academy, celebrity advocates have been accused of trivialising key matters, perpetuating global capitalism and exacerbating international stereotypes.

However, other critiques maintain that celebrities have promoted alternative discourses and have developed credible humanitarian interventions. It should be noted that as celebrities have become more politically conscious they have brought about new forms of diplomatic engagement which have indicated a transformation from a state-centric to more populist approaches to international relations. These reforms have occurred within a construct of global collaboration so that networks of institutional and ideological power facilitate reform. Thus, in soft-power terms, the politics of attraction within celebrity-led campaigns have facilitated greater forms of agency to alleviate global suffering. Further, the dialogue between celebrities and the public has allowed for new opportunities for engagement. This has reflected a willingness within audiences to accept celebrities as authentic advocates due to the public's identification with stars.

In moving the debate along, it has been this chapter's purpose to go beyond the traditional 'help or harm' paradigm. Consequently, the celebritisation of international affairs must not be simply dismissed as either being an erosion or an embracement of global politics. Rather, it should be understood as part of a *constructivist* process in which there will be a range of potential outcomes. In this respect, the worthiness of the variety of celebrity humanitarian interventions may be contingent upon a range of structural and personal particularities. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the analytical tools through which to investigate these diverse forms of celebrity advocacy.

Thus, the final section of this chapter has outlined the new directions of travel which have shaped the academic analysis located upon celebrity humanitarianism. In this respect, the interventions concerning the celebrities' affective capacities made by Street (2012) and Farrell (2012) demonstrate how and why figures such as Bono may command credibility through a conjunction of imagery, personalisation and parasocial familiarity to transcend the other agencies of social authority. These analyses go beyond mere description to ask whether the celebrity interventions actually matter in reforming policy agendas. Richey and co-authors (Richey 2016) are similarly concerned with mapping out the intersections between Global North and South in which celebrity interventions occur with reference to matters of politics, place and power. Through these critical approaches, concerns can be expressed about the opportunities, limitations, validity and efficacy of these forms of celebrity intervention.

With the rise of post-humanitarianism, writers such as Chouliaraki (2013) and Brockington (2014a, 2014b, 2016) have demonstrated how the changes within global ideologies are contextualising the relationship between celebrity and human rights. These concerns have demonstrated that celebrity advocates receive acclaim as a manifestation of their self-worth rather than acting as representatives of public altruism. In turn, these interventions reinforce elite values and the collaborative processes of insider policy formation. However, both Chouliaraki and Brockington demonstrate that there are enough performative and diplomatic 'spaces' for celebrity humanitarians to effect reform. Therefore, it is through these more adaptive analytical frameworks that the relations between celebrity, human rights and democratic behaviour may be most effectively measured and investigated.

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## Human rights, democracy and celebrity

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