

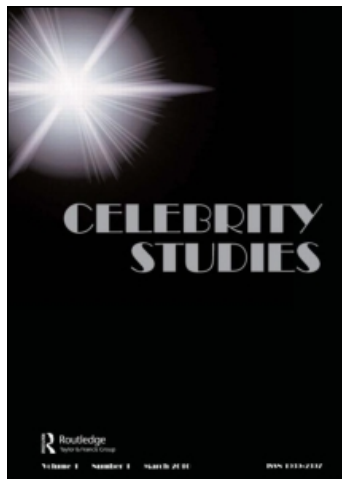
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### Celebrity diplomacy: United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace

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## **Celebrity diplomacy: United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace**

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This article will examine the meaning of celebrity diplomacy. In particular, it will discuss how this phenomenon has emerged from a transition between state-centric to public forms of diplomatic initiatives. This has led to a debate about the credible use of celebrity forms of activism in international political affairs. To analyse this phenomenon, this article will focus on the role and impact of the United Nations' (UN) Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace programmes. It refers to Andrew F. Cooper's concept of 'celebrity diplomacy' as an alternative form of agency and employs John Street's framework of 'celebrity performance' to define how the UN has utilised stars to draw attention to its activities. These examples demonstrate how celebrity diplomats provide focus for causes to become integral in the sphere of international diplomacy.

**Keywords:** celebrity diplomacy; celebrity performance; Messengers of Peace; political aesthetics; UN Goodwill Ambassadors

### **Introduction**

The traditions of diplomacy have been seen predominantly as a co-ordination of state interests with broader conceptions of collective security and economic power. The mechanisms of bargaining, interest and co-operation have been utilised as a diplomatic 'currency' by British Foreign Office mandarins, Ambassadors and United States (US) State Department officials. This has been presented as being part of a realist discourse on international issues in which matters of ethics, emotion and public opinion have been balanced out against the complexities of the global state system.

However, as the nature of media coverage has expanded in the last 20 years with the rise of 24/7 global news programming, in which the decentralisation and fragmentation of opinion has intensified, these traditions of diplomacy are being challenged. It will be the purpose of this article to analyse how the normative values of the Westphalian diplomatic order are being placed under greater pressure through an escalation of less state-centric conceptions of diplomatic practice. In this respect, a new 'currency' of public diplomacy has emerged in which emotion, rhetoric and opinion have become key bargaining tools. Therefore, this analysis will focus on a highly visible aspect of this alternative form of international relations – celebrity diplomacy – by considering how and why the United Nations (UN) has deployed Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace.

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As there has been a re-calibration of celebrity from the domain of Hollywood film stars to an era in which fame has become ubiquitous, there has been an evolution of celebrity engagement which has often been viewed as a dilution of political efficacy. Thus, the most common analysis of celebrity-ness has referred to the notion that stardom operates as a tool through which to manipulate public opinion (Louw 2005). Alternatively, it may be suggested that celebrity diplomacy provides a means through which celebrity activists have defined a reconfigured form of agency:

The power of agency – and both its adaptive capabilities and contentious possibilities – is captured by the continued rise of Angelina Jolie. At the outset of her involvement with the UNHCR, it might have been expected that Jolie would have been a magnified version of the [embarrassment] of Ginger Spice. . . . [and] the initial response among UN field workers was one of profound skepticism. . . . Instead. . . . Jolie has exhibited many of the potential strengths. . . . [by developing]. . . . a growing appreciation of what her role could be. . . . Agency does not mean untrammelled individual autonomy. Part of [her] narrative is about personal growth. But behind her. . . . is a substantive amount of organisational backing (Cooper 2008, p. 116).

Consequently, this analysis will outline the contours of the academic debate concerning the celebritisation of diplomacy. Critical theorists such as Douglas Kellner have provided an analysis of the ‘media spectacle’ which defines celebrity engagement by utilising public relations techniques and media marketing to focus attention to their causes (Kellner 2005, 2009). Kellner suggests that this leads to a form of politics which replaces substance with style and employs symbolic gestures in place of the complexities of diplomacy (Kellner 2010, p. 123). The late Mark D. Alleyne argued the UN’s deployment of Goodwill Ambassadors was both elitist and ethno-centric. He claimed that there was an essential devaluation of the UN’s principles and an assimilation of its beliefs into American-based values of political marketing (Alleyne 2005, p. 182).

Conversely, diplomacy scholar Andrew F. Cooper maintains that celebrity diplomats make important contributions to international debates by publicising campaigns, influencing public opinion and intervening within diplomatic circles (Cooper 2008, p. 2). Cooper defines this process as the ‘Bonoisation’ of diplomacy by suggesting that celebrity diplomats, such as the U2 singer Bono, can access key circles of power to make effective interventions (*ibid.* pp. 3–4). He argues that celebrities have forced diplomatic initiatives to operate within a broader public domain and placed their causes firmly on the international agenda.

Secondly, this analysis will tie together Cooper’s concerns about the reconfiguration of diplomatic agency with the work of scholars who have been concerned with the political aesthetics of celebrity activism. John Corner argues that through their ‘mediated personas’ – the individual’s public image – stars have created new forms of identification in which they attain public support to effect political expression (Corner 2003, p. 83). In turn, John Street contends that such a use of fame is a key characteristic of modern political culture (Street 2003, 2004). Most especially, he considers how celebrity works as a form of political capital in which celebrity politicians (CPs) have used their celebrity to encourage their worth, as in the case of politicians utilising more populist techniques (CP1s) and the growing significance of celebrities lending their fame to promote causes (CP2s).

Within this context, Street has defined the concept of ‘celebrity performance’, which provides a framework to assess the worth of stardom in the realm of political activity (Street 2003). Therefore, this analysis will consider how Street’s construct can be used to ‘frame’ information on the origins, development and employment of UN Goodwill Ambassadors

and Messengers of Peace. It will discuss how the UN has developed celebrity relations from *ad hoc* to fully fledged systems of campaigning. These forms of ‘performance’ range from an embryonic period in which celebrities understood themselves to be ‘good international citizens’ into a transformative era in which star power became politicised. In the most recent phase of celebrity activism, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and current incumbent Ban Ki-Moon have deployed a far wider range of celebrities as a means to propagate the organisation’s aims.

Finally, this study will consider what this material shows about the strengths and weaknesses of the UN’s deployment of celebrity activists to make sense of these types of invention. It will conclude on whether the activities of the UN Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace have led to new forms of diplomatic initiatives.

### The mediation of celebrity diplomacy

In the contemporary era there has been an increased involvement of celebrities in the political process; but how far do celebrities influence outcomes? Clearly, politicians and celebrities perceive their usage of the mass media to be an effective means through which to influence public opinion. Moreover, as there has been a convergence of public relations techniques with commercial pressures drawn from the global media over journalism, there has been the inclusion of celebrity built on the marketisation of images in a more identity-driven political process.

In recent years there have been examples of celebrities influencing diplomatic initiatives, e.g. *Live Aid*, *Live-8*, numerous charities in telethons and the employment of celebrities as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Goodwill Ambassadors. While the potent employment of symbolism has always been part of the political process, the proliferation of celebrity representation may be seen to reflect broader social, cultural and international changes. This has led to an increased interest in a growing field of celebrity diplomacy and the worth of these interventions:

We have some very big questions to address. One is to consider whether celebrity diplomacy. . . is really new, whether it is accepted widely legitimate; whether is it more widespread today than it was 15 or 20 years ago; and whether it’s more sophisticated, more institutionalised than it has been in the past. We want to know whether it is a clever use of what is called ‘soft power’. . . We also want to know whether we are investing our emotions, our time and our money in celebrity activities and whether this is a sound investment (Wiseman 2009, p. 5).

To consider the credibility of celebrity diplomacy, critical theorists have been concerned about the interlinkage of media coverage, infotainment and questions of ideological power. Douglas Kellner has employed his concept of the ‘media spectacle’ to suggest that the emphasis on celebrity can lead to a simplistic utilisation of symbolic gestures in place of the complexities of diplomacy (Kellner 2010, p. 123). While noting the potential for affecting diplomatic outcomes, Kellner believes that this form of spectacle ‘frames’ politicians and celebrities as global ‘superstars’. This manufactured form of politics may undermine true forms of democratic engagement. Thus, he demonstrates how US President Barack Obama has become a super-celebrity in defining the international political agenda through the intersection of shrewd public relations techniques with an enhanced degree of media coverage (*ibid.* p. 121). (Kellner writes elsewhere about the possibility of ‘progressive’ spectacle, a point Redmond considers in relation to Obama in *Celebrity Studies* 1.)

In a similar vein, Mark D. Alleyne provides a critique of the employment of celebrity diplomats in which he argues that the UN’s deployment of Goodwill Ambassadors was

elitist and ethno-centric. He claims that there was a misguided assimilation of its beliefs into US-based values of political marketing. Alleyne maintained that the employment of celebrities by the UN was part of a general malaise in the organisation's employment of propagandist values to attract the powers of the international audio-visual complex to provide favourable coverage of its activities (Alleyne 2005).

Essentially, he argues that 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; one that reinforced ethnic stereotypes by perpetuating an imbalanced view of need and offered 'a primarily mellorative approach, giving succor to the incapacitated rather than hope for a better life through programs of education, consciousness-raising and cultural affirmation' (William Over, quoted in Alleyne 2003, p. 77).

Conversely, Andrew F. Cooper suggests that celebrity diplomats make important contributions to on-going international debates. In many respects, these developments have been traced back to Bob Geldof's *Feed the World* and *Live Aid* initiatives, which were forged in the mid-1980s. Subsequently, a range of celebrity-fronted fundraising campaigns have emerged in relation to telethons such as *Comic* and *Sports Relief* and there has been an institutionalisation of celebrity diplomacy. Cooper argues that celebrity activism has created a new diplomatic 'space' between the public and foreign affairs to overcome the traditional 'disconnect' which has occurred as official diplomats have preferred to marshal and husband information rather than share it (Cooper 2008, pp. 113–114).

He characterises these developments as the 'Bonoisation' of diplomacy by showing how celebrity diplomats, such as U2's Bono and Geldof, have placed their causes – such as world debt and humanitarian aid – on the international agenda:

If diplomacy is wedded to everyday activity along a wide continuum and a robust and open-ended version of individual agency, the normative claims of traditional state-centric diplomacy are eroded (ibid. p. 2).

Within this context, Cooper claims that the UN case demonstrates how celebrities can use their guile by providing points of identification to mobilise public opinion for diplomatic reform. Further, he is interested in the institutional back-up that is required to enable celebrities to make credible visits and interventions. Therefore, throughout the extensive coverage of trips made to 'southern' states by Goodwill Ambassadors, the UN has placed considerable value on the impact of the publicity generated and has formulated an institutional infrastructure to facilitate celebrity visits. As Eric Falt, the Director of the Outreach Division of the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) has commented, 'We want to use the appeal of our Goodwill Ambassadors and draw attention to UN issues that we often have difficulties informing the public about' (Falt 2009).

However, Cooper makes greater claims in the cases of Geldof and Bono regarding their abilities not only to draw public attention to major causes but to employ their fame and rhetorical power to intervene into the centres of diplomatic power (Cooper 2008, pp. 119–120). He comments on how Geldof provided a report card commentary on the 2005 G8 meetings and became a policy adviser to the Conservative Party's leader David Cameron in forging his Global Poverty Group. Cooper notes how Geldof's abrasive style at the Gleneagles summit allowed him to play 'Bad Cop' to Bono's 'Good Cop' (ibid. p. 121). In this respect, Bono was able to adopt a more reflexive role allowing him to:

. . . continually play key political leaders off each other, balancing intense involvement with an eye to keeping the boundaries of access open to as many decision-makers as possible. Nudging and cajoling go hand in hand with maintaining a presence in core policy circles (ibid. p. 122).

Cooper notes that Geldof and Bono have gained extended face-time with national leaders in which there is a two-way attraction, as politicians can cultivate a populist legitimacy with celebrities who can advance their causes simultaneously (Vallely 2009). Thus, he has identified this autonomous celebrity diplomacy as an alternative form of agency which utilises points of identification with diplomatic skills to ‘move on’ international policy agendas.

### **Celebrity politics: aesthetics and popular discourses**

In this respect, Cooper’s concerns resonate with a growing literature within political communication which seeks to consider how and why celebrities seek to influence politics. John Corner and Dick Pels contend that the traditional forms of partisan allegiances have eroded, to be replaced by post-ideological lifestyle choices which foreground matters of aesthetics and style (Corner and Pels 2003). As voters float away from centrist political parties, the public have favoured ‘more eclectic, fluid, issue specific and personality-bound forms of political recognition and engagement’ (ibid. p. 7).

Therefore, celebrities command credibility through a conjunction of de-institutionalisation, personalisation and parasocial familiarity to transcend other forms of social authority. Corner argues that through their ‘mediated personas’ – the individual’s public image – film, television and music stars have created new types of identification in which they attain public admiration, sympathy and authenticification to effect political expression (Corner 2003, p. 83).

John Street contends that such a use of fame is neither an exceptional nor exaggerated form of representation, but a vital characteristic of modern political culture (Street 2003, 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. While this may appear to indicate the marketisation of the political process, Street demonstrates how Schumpeter intended his comparison between business and politics would rescue democracy from the dangers of dictatorship. Therefore, Street suggests that politics should be seen as a type of show business, in which the currency is fame and the products are the stars’ performances; for:

[i]n 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, p. 97).

As celebrities have assumed a moral authority and provide credibility for political agendas, it is necessary to investigate their integral roles in political campaigns. While symbolism and charisma have shaped political communications, can celebrities use their reputations to reinvigorate politics with new ideas?

More specifically, with regard to diplomatic initiatives, it is necessary to marry Cooper’s concepts of celebrity agency with the arguments which seek to determine how celebrity activism has provided meaning within a range of political debates, and it is the contention of this article that celebrity diplomacy should be understood as an increasingly important form of intervention that can transcend the traditional rules of state-centric power. As a multi-faceted phenomenon, this does not mean that scholars should embrace this form of celebrity activism uncritically. Instead, it is necessary to establish the tools



through which to analyse the respective impact of celebrity diplomacy to assess its worth in modern international relations. Most especially, there should be a consideration of the conditions through which celebrities can influence initiatives, and a most effective framework through which to analyse these activities refers to Street's construct of 'celebrity performance'.

### UN Goodwill Ambassadors as good international citizens

While celebrity involvement in politics affairs has been identified as a recent phenomenon, an institutional analysis of the use of UN Goodwill Ambassadors offsets the apparent 'novelty' of celebrity diplomacy. Since 1953, when UNICEF appointed Danny Kaye as its first Goodwill Ambassador, the UN has employed celebrities to raise funds, affect diplomatic agendas and draw attention to development causes:

It's hard to believe that half a century has passed since Danny Kaye ventured out on behalf of UNICEF, with his heart, his humour, his name and his fame as his only weapons, to help make the world a better place for children. On the day Danny Kaye became a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, a new kind of star was born. The kind that shines its light on the hardship and injustices. . . [and] confronts us and melts away our indifference (Annan 2003).

The initial forms of celebrity activism referred to *ad hoc* relationships between film stars and UN officers. It began when Kaye accidentally met UNICEF's Executive Director Maurice Pate on an almost calamitous flight between London and New York which had to return to Shannon Airport. Pate, along with UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and the President of the UN General Assembly Vijaya Lakshmi, arranged to meet Kaye at a lunch to propose to the film star that he act as a spokesperson for UNICEF:

The notion was, since [Kaye] was already planning a trip to Asia, why couldn't he devote some time to visiting UNICEF's health and nutrition projects in the Far East? The visits would attract publicity, and publicity could help raise money for the impoverished organisation (Gottfried 1994, p. 207).

Kaye agreed readily and was appointed officially as UNICEF's Ambassador-at-large. Shortly afterwards, Kaye toured UNICEF projects in Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand and Japan to publicise its activities in alleviating the plight of children. His trip was filmed for a short documentary entitled *Assignment Children* (1954), which was underwritten by Paramount Pictures, shown to an estimated audience of 100 million and whose profits entered UNICEF's coffers. The documentary identified UNICEF firmly with the causes of needy children. Subsequently, Kaye continued to focus attention on UNICEF activities through a range of trips to war-torn or blighted areas. By remaining a newsworthy presence he publicised the agency's programmes, most especially when he performed an improvised victory ballet while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize for UNICEF in 1965.

Moreover, long-standing UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors such as Kaye and Peter Ustinov (1968–2004) conceived themselves as good international citizens who could engender a 'thick layer of goodwill for UNICEF' (Ling 1984, p. 9). They saw that it was their role to promote UNICEF's activities and made visits to popularise the agency. In 1968, Ustinov was telegraphed by UNICEF to act as a Master of Ceremonies for a concert held at the Théâtre Nationale de l'Odéon in Paris and helped to put together other galas in Italy, Switzerland and Japan. He was impressed by the selfless work of UNICEF officials and admired the moral worth of its activities. Moreover, his appointment as a Goodwill Ambassador appealed to him as a self-proclaimed 'world citizen' who had

Russian, Swiss, French, Italian and even Ethiopian origins. He not only became a tireless worker for UNICEF, but an advocate for the UN:

It is so easy. . . to attack the United Nations as a fertile field for undemocratic or anti-democratic ideas, but such critics conveniently overlook the fact that it was constituted as a democratic forum, and that the ideas of the majority cannot be roughly pushed aside just because they happen to be temporarily out of favour in some influential places. . . .The General Assembly and the Security Council are but the shop window. . . [but] within the shop. . . all is different. . . .Confronted with problems, Christian and Communist, Moslem and Socialist, Buddhist and Conservative do their best within the means at their disposal to solve them. This is a source of confidence even to the most jaded cynic (Ustinov 1977, p. 329).

The celebrity who provided the template for this ‘glamorous. . . conformity’ (Cooper 2008, p. 18) was Audrey Hepburn. Although she did not become a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador until the 1980s, her reputation as a survivor of World War II, international film star and fashion icon meant that she epitomised the credible use of politicised celebrity. She made visits to Ethiopia and Somalia with little fear for her personal safety, met African leaders and took her causes to the US Senate. Hepburn used her fame to promote humanitarian causes and refused to take sides, by insisting the worst violence in Africa was widespread poverty.

### **Transformative celebrity diplomacy**

As there was an increase in celebrity activity in the 1980s and 1990s which reflected the extension of the employment of celebrities by UNICEF and other agencies, notably the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), celebrities felt they should become more politically engaged. A greater consciousness within the celebrity classes emerged with reference to Geldof’s *Live Aid* and *Feed the World* campaigns (Cooper 2007).

Within the UN, this form of celebrity activism can be traced back to 1966 when UNICEF forged relations with Marlon Brando, when the star raised funds for children affected by famines in India. For UNICEF, Brando’s involvement was a double-edged sword. On one hand, he had shown a commitment to international conceptions of justice. On the other hand, Brando had used his celebrity to gain political notoriety. Therefore, UNICEF Director of Information Jack Ling found that the actor’s mercurial nature could be counter-productive (Ling 1984, p. 9). However, while Brando’s relationship with the agency was sporadic, it cast the die, as UNICEF appointed more politically conscious celebrity ambassadors.

In 1978, UNICEF asked the Swedish actress Liv Ullman to become a Goodwill Ambassador. Ullman had visited Thailand previously to add weight to a Swedish mission dealing with refugees. During this trip, she was approached by Ling about working for UNICEF and he accompanied Ullman on her first ambassadorial visit to Sri Lanka. Subsequently, Ullman became a more autonomous figure when representing Kampuchean refugees and the Vietnamese Boat People (ibid. p. 8). She demonstrated a greater political consciousness than her predecessors, and used her status as a serious ‘European’ film actress to be a creditable figure when representing UNICEF in US House and Senate Hearings (ibid. p. 8). Consequently, she re-conceived the role of the Goodwill Ambassador by taking a clear stance on poverty: ‘We must be so outraged. We mustn’t wait and talk about making resolutions; we must urgently start acting now’ (Ullman 1993).



In turn, several Goodwill Ambassadors criticised the moral stance of the UN. One of the more problematic cases referred to Richard Gere, who has represented the UN with reference to World Health/AIDS and ecological matters. As a devotee of the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, Gere came into conflict with the UN over its non-recognition of Tibet. In the late 1990s Gere, as the chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet, made high-profile visits to the UN Headquarters in New York to support Tibetan hunger strikers and backed the US resolution to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) to criticise China's human rights record. He accused the UNHRC, when it voted to take no action, of being shamefully manipulated by the Chinese. More recently, he supported calls for the boycotting of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Thus, the UN's deployment of politically engaged celebrities has proved problematic. In this transformative era of celebrity diplomacy stars have felt that they should use their fame to expose injustices. However, this deployment of celebrity diplomats has led to difficulties, as politicised stars have fallen out with the UN. Moreover, the positive and negative connotations of celebrity diplomacy have intensified with the escalation of the number of Goodwill Ambassadors and the creation of Messengers of Peace.

### **Embracing celebrity culture: Kofi Annan's public relations revolution – restructuring and reform**

When Annan was appointed as the UN Secretary-General on 1 January 1997, he engaged in the ubiquitous employment of Goodwill Ambassadors. By the time of his departure in 2007, there were more than 400 UN Goodwill Ambassadors and the Secretary-General had established a new tier of celebrity diplomats known as Messengers of Peace. In many respects, this demonstrated how the omnipresent creation of celebrity had permeated the diplomatic environment (Drezner 2007).

Annan believed that significant reforms were required to improve the UN's public profile, and he oversaw the wider deployment of Goodwill Ambassadors. This was tied together with the growth in the number of departments in the UN's local, regional and international offices with responsibilities for media and communications, celebrity relations and special events. In turn, the celebrity relations department formalised three tiers for Goodwill Ambassadors – international, regional and national. International Ambassadors are those film, music or sports stars who have brought about a wide degree of recognition from the world's media to their activities. Similarly, regional and national ambassadors are celebrities whose impact is conditioned by more local forms of fame.

When a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador makes a field visit, the agency's media and communication staff seek to maximise publicity through a variety of local, national and media outlets by arranging press conferences, video-shoots and photo-opportunities. To follow up, a press day or conference will be set up after the Goodwill Ambassador returns to his or her home country in consultation with the media section and the celebrity. This might take the form of an informal briefing, a press conference or one-on-one interviews, and can take place in a headquarters location or in a city near the celebrity's residence.

In addition, wherever feasible, a meeting will be arranged between the celebrity and the Executive Director or another member of senior management to discuss the impressions and outcomes of the field visit. Finally, a follow-up package must be sent immediately to the celebrity containing press coverage, a report on any funds raised as a result of the visit and a letter of thanks from the Executive Director or National Committee/field office senior staff person, explaining exactly how the trip made an impact (UNICEF 2006).

### Idealism and universalism: Annan's aims for Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace

Annan's decision to escalate the number of Goodwill Ambassadors 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 US's realist foreign policies (Cooper 2008, p. 28). In 2002, Annan hosted a conference entitled 'Celebrity Advocacy for the New Millennium', which included stars such as the Brazilian footballer Ronaldo<sup>1</sup>, 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, p. 179). He believed that celebrities could influence international public opinion to support the UN's goals of idealism and universalism.

To enhance this process, Annan established the Messengers of Peace programme in 1997 to identify nine individuals who would propagate the UN's mission across the world's media. This group of 'distinguished men and women of talent and passion' are composed from those celebrities whose fame has been understood to provide a global focus to the 'noble aims of the UN Charter: a world without war, respect for human rights, international law and social and economic progress' (UN 2007). They are selected from the fields of art, literature, music and sports and serve as Messengers of Peace for an initial period of three years. Since the programme's inception, more than 10 individuals have been honoured as Messengers of Peace and the current cohort includes Michael Douglas, Jane Goodhall, Daniel Barenboim, George Clooney, Stevie Wonder and Charlize Theron.

In raising the UN's profile for liberal internationalism, 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. Her links with UNHCR were established over several years in which she 'auditioned' to become a Goodwill Ambassador. Jolie became acquainted with the plight of refugees through trips to West Africa, and has used her photogenic qualities to attract the attention of world's media. Similarly, UNHCR has sought to place 'attractive' refugees in the camera frame next to her to provide an iconic representation of displacement.

Jolie's emotive responses to the needs of refugees have led to her writing an open editorial in the *Washington Post* about the crisis in Darfur in February 2007. Subsequently, in her press junket to promote her film *A Mighty Heart* (2007), she included interviews with *Foreign Policy's* website and a glowing profile in *Newsweek*, which was entitled immodestly 'Angelina Jolie wants to save the world'. In that story, former US Secretary of State Colin Powell described Jolie as 'absolutely serious, absolutely informed. . . . She studies the issues' (Smith 2007). Further, the cover of the July 2007 *Esquire* featured a sultry picture of Jolie with an attached story which suggested something even more provocative:

In post-9/11 America, Angelina Jolie is the best woman in the world *because* she is the most famous woman in the world – because she is not like you or me (Junod 2007).

Therefore, Jolie's activism epitomised Annan's belief that through celebrity diplomacy the UN's mission for universalism would be enhanced. The same could be said for George Clooney, who became a UN Messenger of Peace as a consequence of his support for non-governmental organisation (NGO) projects in war-torn Darfur. Like Jolie, Clooney became well acquainted with the issues and was effective in fronting a humanitarian campaign which was forged from a coalition of groups ranging from political liberals, the African American community and the Christian Right. In 2006 he visited Darfur with his father Nick, a former television journalist, and provided a credible commentary on how the

international community should define a co-operative response to the atrocities committed there. Subsequently, he narrated and acted as executive producer for a documentary entitled *Sand and Sorrow* (2007) and co-founded a non-profit organisation called *Not on Our Watch*, composed from influential players in the US film industry to bring resolution to the conflict in Darfur.

### UN celebrity criticisms, failures and institutional responses

However, despite the successes of Jolie and Clooney, the UN has undoubtedly suffered in terms of credibility in relation to some of its choices of Goodwill Ambassadors. In part, this may be an inevitable effect of celebrities providing an emotive response to the complexities of state-centric power. Even in the case of Jolie, it can be argued that her activities have been mitigated as she has entwined her emotional rhetoric with her position as a celebrity diplomat. Invariably, her response to thorny international problems has been framed in 'terms of scenario, in which, once certain key scenes are linked. . . the plot will proceed inexorably to an upbeat fade' (Dideon 1998, p. 519). Thus, Jolie has accelerated the process of star power, but may be seen to have succumbed to some naive interventions which have been indulged by a compliant media (Cooper 2008, pp. 34–35).

Moreover, the increased employment of celebrity diplomats has, in certain cases, been one of ever-diminishing returns. Most notably, the UN suffered from the indignities, both before and during Annan's tenure, associated with the celebrity failures represented by Italian film star Sophia Loren, former Princess Sarah 'Fergie' Ferguson and Geri Halliwell ('Ginger Spice'). Infamously, Loren arrived at a UNHCR appointment ceremony for starving Somali refugees in a brown Rolls Royce and dressed in a matching fur coat. When criticised by a journalist, without any hint of irony Loren commented: 'When someone asks a question like this I don't know why you should be in this place. This is something very serious' (Naughton 1992). In the case of Fergie, her financial collapse caused by her divorce from Prince Andrew meant she could not afford to perform pro bono tasks for the UN. With regard to Ginger Spice, her inability to perform her tasks as an advocate for family planning on a disastrous visit to the Philippines and her decline in fame meant she did not stand the test of a comparatively short period of time (Cooper 2008, p. 30).

Consequently, these difficulties have led to concerns being raised that the greater deployment of celebrity diplomats has led to a trivialisation of the UN's mission. In 2003, the Secretary-General issued the first ever 'Guidelines for the designation of Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace' to specify the functions, conditions of services and termination of contracts with celebrity diplomats. This marked an institutional concern to maintain control over the escalating use of stars and was an attempt to affect guidelines across the whole of the UN system (Fall and Tang 2006, p. 2). Subsequently, the UN's Joint Inspection unit reported back to the Secretariat there should be a significant rationalisation of the numbers of Goodwill Ambassadors, greater quality mechanisms, self-generated funds for travel and finite periods of operation (ibid. p. 4). More recently, Falt has commented:

We still have one or two Agencies who think the magic lies in numbers (one even has 42 Goodwill Ambassadors and many other perceived celebrities of convenience) but the accepted wisdom, as we learn to better manage this type of activity, is that we should all work with a small number of dedicated celebrities, carefully assessing each appointment and discontinuing those relationships which prove to be unproductive. (Falt 2009)

However, despite these problems, a more nuanced understanding of star power needs to be effected in relation to the UN case. In a commercially dictated global media, the escalation

of Goodwill Ambassadors has been one of the few realistic responses open to Annan and his successor Ban Ki-Moon to promote the UN's activities (Kellner 2010, p. 123)<sup>2</sup>. Undoubtedly, some celebrity diplomats have existed beyond parody. However, in terms of celebrity performance, the ability of Jolie and Clooney to bring focus to international campaigns, to impact on diplomatic agendas and to advocate the UN's principles has been of significant worth in a period of international conflict.

## Conclusion

This article has analysed the development of the celebrityisation of international politics. It has outlined the academic debates which have emerged between critical theorists, diplomacy scholars and writers who argue for a more holistic approach to political aesthetics. In particular, it has shown that celebrity diplomacy has brought about new forms of engagement which indicate a transformation from state-centric to more populist forms of international relations. Thus, the celebrityisation of politics should not be dismissed as an erosion of diplomatic culture, but can be understood within the framework of a change in political aesthetics in which there will be both positive and negative outcomes.

In terms of star power and diplomatic initiatives, Street's typology of celebrity performance has provided a means through which to analyse the three stages of the UN's star activism (Street 2003, 2004). In the early stages of solely UNICEF activity, celebrity diplomats such as Kaye, Ustinov and Hepburn defined themselves as 'good international citizens' whose activism was conformist. In an era of transformative celebrity diplomacy, as there was an expansion of Goodwill Ambassadors across the UN system their behaviour was characterised by a greater deal of politicisation. This led to the rise of celebrities who were often critical of many of the UN's member states and the organisation itself. It was reflective of a how a gulf had occurred between celebrity and diplomacy in which populist 'narratives' clashed uncomfortably with realist forms of international power. It led to criticisms that while star power brought attention to international affairs it affected little in the way of real change.

These concerns came into greater focus during Annan's intensification of celebrity involvement. This phase of celebrity diplomacy referred to a re-calibration of fame within an expanding range of global media sources and an attempt to raise the UN's public profile to enhance its principles of idealism and universalism. It has had both positive and negative connotations in terms of celebrity performance; as one journalist put it, '[t]he UN has become a celebrity hotel. . . and anyone in Hollywood who wants to show there is nothing trivial about them checks in with Kofi' (Bielenberg 2006).

The successes of stars such as Jolie and Clooney may be seen to indicate that Annan's vision of politicised celebrities advancing the UN's idealist values across the world's media has been effective. Jolie has sought to use her fame to pressurise recalcitrant states to accord with agreements they have made in the General Assembly. None the less, it should be noted that her influence may prove counter-productive, as her leading role in UNHCR's campaigns reflects an over-estimation of her powers to effect lasting change. Moreover, the celebrity failures associated with Sophia Loren, Sarah Ferguson and Geri Halliwell provided a salutary lesson in widening the numbers of Goodwill Ambassadors.

Therefore, in analysing the political aesthetics involved in defining the UN's experience of celebrity involvement, a mixed picture has emerged which also has implications for Cooper's redefinition of diplomatic agency. Undoubtedly, Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace have lent weight to the public campaigns waged by the UN in a commercially driven global news media. They have provided a definable focus for public

engagement and have utilised their star power to affect pressure upon diplomats, international policy-makers and national leaders but, as Annan's tenure indicated, there are dangers in over-simplifying complex forms of international diplomacy and utilising emotional responses. However, the UN experience demonstrates that celebrities have promoted new or alternative discourses, and by occupying a public space have affected credible diplomatic interventions across the international community.

## Notes

1. It should also be noted that in 2006 Futbol Club (FC) Barcelona made an exclusive five-year deal to wear the UNICEF logo on their football shirts in place of any commercial advertising.
2. These initiatives have continued to be carried out by the current UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who visited Hollywood to negotiate for favourable representations of the UN in feature films as part of the Creative Community Outreach Initiative which is run by Eric Falt, the Director of the Outreach Division of the Department of Public Information.

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