The Gender Politics of Celebrity Humanitarianism in Africa

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Abstract

This article examines Anglo-American news media through a discourse-theoretical framework to study first, how celebrities are constituted as gendered humanitarian subjects acting on behalf of African problems, and second, how the concept of 'Africa' is produced, not only as a place, but also as a purpose in the world system. The debate surrounding celebrities is at an impasse, where they are seen as either instrumental or detrimental to African development. To break this standoff, we begin by placing celebrities in their neo-colonial context. We argue that the legitimacy of Bono, Bob Geldof and Angelina Jolie as humanitarian actors is underpinned by particular reproductions of race, class and gender. They are positioned in a heteronormative world political framework in which celebrities recreate Africa and its proper place in the neoliberal international system through a performative perpetuation of historically embedded subjectivities. The analysis then turns to Madonna's Malawian adoption in 2006 as a case that does not entirely 'fit' and probes its subversive capacity. The article argues that the adoption controversy made visible the privileged, neo-colonial position from which celebrities, and western humanitarianism broadly speaking, happens, and gives rise to further questions pertaining to Africa's childlike position in the western imaginary.

Keywords

celebrity, development, gender, humanitarianism, neo-colonialism, neoliberalism, news media, race

Over the past two decades, the role of celebrities in politics has become an increasingly acknowledged and analysed phenomenon (e.g. Street 2001: 187–192; Louw 2005: 172–93; Yrjölä 2008). As in the past as well as the present, the polemic on celebrities in academic and non-academic literature

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has largely been caught up with questions of their legitimacy and accountability in politics (cf. Dieter and Kumar 2008; Richey and Ponte 2008). Are celebrities qualified political actors or not? Do their campaigns, like Live Aid and Product Red, do more harm than good? Are their efforts sincere or are they merely seeking positive publicity by plunging into philanthropic fads? In *Celebrity Diplomacy* (2008), Andrew F. Cooper postulates celebrities such as Bono and Bob Geldof as influential new actors in global governance genuinely engaged with important world problems. Cooper's rather confident view on the prospects and effects of celebrity diplomacy is not shared by all. According to Dambisa Moyo (2009) the celebrity campaigns for Africa, in particular Bono's, do more harm than good to the continent.

Overall, celebrity involvement is seen favourably, especially by major agencies like the United Nations (UN), World Economic Forum (WEF) as well as many western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have taken them on as regular participants and promoters of their activities. Most criticisms of celebrity humanitarianism, like that of Moyo or William Easterly (2007b), question the effectiveness of aid in the development process. The situation leaves little space for alternative questions, for example gendered ones, about the role of celebrities in shaping the practices of everyday life (Foucault 1981: 142–3; Dean 1999: 12; Rose 1999: 42–7). Questions about who should and should not be speaking are often backed by normative assumptions about how the world system functions and what is the best course of action for its improvement. In this kind of oppositional for-or-against setup it is not just celebrities that are subject to evaluation, but also the object of their interest. To interfere correctly in African problems requires a 'real' knowledge of it. Easterly (2007a) asks whether celebrities can 'really explain Africa' since they 'like to portray it as a basket case, but ignore its very real progress'. The debate involves processes of subjectivization (e.g. Butler 1997: 107), not only in discourse on the suitability of celebrities as political actors, but also concerning the authentic status quo of the African Other.

Celebrities who meet with government representatives to promote humanitarian causes are usually men, such as Bono, Bob Geldof and George Clooney while women, such as Audrey Hepburn, Angelina Jolie and Mia Farrow are well known for their engagement with children and women in areas of crisis. Such depictions comply with beliefs of 'rational' men act and understand politics while 'emotional' women care for society. But how does Africa get positioned in this heteronormative framework? How are celebrities constituted as gendered humanitarian subjects acting on behalf of African problems, and how is the concept of 'Africa' produced, not only as a place, but also as a purpose in the world system? To examine these questions means directing the attention to celebrity humanitarianism as a process of subjectivization that produces positions, imaginaries and truths of the so-called Third World. Our objective is to interrogate the racial, class-specific and gendered limits which construct and constitute celebrity humanitarianism. This also involves an investigation of how this 'humanitarianism' repeats or reinvents past

colonial violence in the contemporary narratives of western subjects travelling to Africa on missions of discovery, aid and modernization.

Our research material consists of news articles from 2002 to 2008 that address the African humanitarian work of four prominent western celebrities involved with Africa: Bono, Geldof, Jolie and Madonna. We have selected major articles reporting on their campaigns and approach them through a Foucauldian discourse-theoretical analysis (Shepherd 2008: 16–26) as sites where political meanings are debated, evaluated and exchanged (cf. Marshall 1997; Dyer 1998; Turner 2004). Our British sources are the *Daily Telegraph* and the Internet news of the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC News. *TIME* magazine and *The New York Times* (NYT) serve as our US sources.[1] Both of us are White, well-educated Northern European women. While we speak from a relatively privileged position, we are also closely acquainted with the discourses that we dissect. We cannot claim to speak for others, but we strive to challenge the power structures emanating from our daily environments.

Equipped with these restrictions and privileges, the analysis is structured according to three processes of becoming; the rationalities of celebrity action, the production of celebrity subjectivities and the western construction of Africa. First celebrities are considered in a postcolonial context vis-à-vis previous western travellers in Africa and contemporary neoliberalism, followed by an analysis of Bono, Geldof and Jolie as major celebrity humanitarian personalities. The study then asks whether the controversy surrounding Madonna's adoption of David Banda in 2006 was disruptive or contributive to these depictions, before a final problematization of the neo-colonial position from which celebrities act.

CELEBRITY, GENDER AND COLONIAL POLITICS

Celebrity humanitarianism in Africa is not an altogether new phenomenon, but can be considered as a historically and politically predicated practice stemming from popular figures in colonial history that produced narratives from their travels there. In these stories, western travellers and missionaries were often portrayed as heroes of civilization and freedom, the champions of the enlightened world in their crusades against barbarism. Africa was portrayed as a 'dark continent', savage, backward and dangerous, justifying western intervention in the name of progress, reason and civilization (Miller 1985; Brantlinger 1990; van Eeden 2006). In turn, Africa has emerged as an empowered (westernized) continent, a helpless passive victim or a dangerous and chaotic viral ground (Mayer 2002: 256–91; Sontag 2003: 71). The changing nature of these artificial 'Africas' is apparent in analyses of museums and colonial exhibitions, photographs, advertising, Hollywood movies and media images (Coombes 1994; Ryan 1997; Landau and Kaspin 2002; Mayer 2002; Ramamurthy 2003; Chouliaraki 2006).

Indeed the variability of the images tells more about the nexus of European interests pertaining to Africa than they do about the continent (Coombes 1994: 3). If we think of travel writing, the genre has changed in line with global shifts (Holland and Huggan 1998; Lisle 2006), but it is still constantly concerned with the assertion of authority and legitimacy through difference in terms of race, sex and class by establishing social, spatial and symbolic distance (Mohanty 1991: 16). These different representations do not simply disseminate information, or reflect 'reality'. Neither are these stereotypes 'merely false images' (Eisenstein 1996: 22). Rather they can be seen as historical event-making, as 'ambivalent texts of projection and introjections . . . displacement, overdetermination, guilt [and] aggressivity' (Bhabha 1994: 82). As power-invested enactments they produce their discursive objects by containment and capture by waging war on intelligibilities (Foucault 2003).

Colonial travel writing was not a homogenous affair, but imposed order and weight on Africa in complex and ambiguous ways. Colonial women's travel writing both transgressed and conformed to 'anti-conquest' stories of the explorer-man through appearances of accountability, producing an innocent vision of European global authority (Pratt 1992: 32, 213). Sara Mills (1991: 63) writes that while women travel writers were not outside the dominant colonial discourse, their relationship to it was problematic because their subjective boundaries were defined by relations to White men and (usually) Black women. To maintain authority, to signify their mastery of themselves and others, female travellers needed a careful deployment of self-presentation – complex augmentation of racial imaginaries, gender stereotypes and class markers (Boisseau 2004: 2–3). Thus rather than their specific discoveries, the fame of woman travellers such as Mary French Sheldon depended on the diversification of their self-representations of femininity which allowed them to become the representatives of their race, nation and class in Africa over the 'natives' (Boisseau 2004: 2–3). These personas were bolstered by narratives about emancipation or empowered new womanhood, and, more recently, an immersive 'global girl' cosmopolitanism, as portrayed by Meryl Streep in the 1985 film *Out of Africa* (Mayer 2002: 123–48).

While these frames blurred differentiating western binaries by advocating contact instead of contrast (cf. Vickers and Dhruvarajan 2002: 45) and experience as opposed to exploitation, they camouflaged colonialism as an anti-colonialist practice by defining their relationship to Africa as an emotional one; of passions, cosy nostalgia and self-fulfilment (Mayer 2002: 121–62). For Boisseau (2004: 3), these representations and performances played a critical imperialist role by turning African explorations into lessons on national identity and feminist deportment, 'yoking twentieth-century American feminist identity to a colonialist imaginary'.

Western masculinity and femininity converge in the colonial project through a temporal and hierarchical family metaphor that 'offered a single genesis narrative for global history' (McClintock 1995: 40–4). The reappropriation of the institution of the family to a racially stratified social vision

could render Africa beyond history proper as an organic model for hierarchy within unity. African subordination to western actors becomes justified by naturalizing social hierarchy according to interacting categories of gender, race, sexuality, place and class (Crenshaw 1989: 139; Collins 2000: 203; Yuval-Davis 2006: 200–1). The racism and heterosexism of normative power is therefore both a consequence and critical part of liberal governmentality (Dillon and Reid 2009).

The aid and development agenda endorsed by celebrity humanitarians today can be seen as emergent from the same liberal project of civilization culminating in an ostensibly paradoxical relationship to otherness. On the one hand, neo-liberalism acts as value-neutral and impersonal, treating individuals as de-gendered rational economic actors (Gordon 1991: 43–4; Teghtsoonian 2005: 279; Mukherjee 2006: 35–6). Yet, the recognition of difference is central to neo-liberal governance. 'Different' subjects must be regulated in order to operate as rational and free subjects. Kate Bedford (2005, 2007), for instance, has argued that the World Bank's efforts to restructure normative heterosexuality in Ecuador 'is a linchpin of the Bank's current attempts to secure the continued provision of caring labour in the neo-liberal context' (Bedford 2005: 316). Difference is defined by opportunity, rather than restriction (Hardt and Negri 2000: 152), though ultimately more for the West rather than the Other. The need to challenge White supremacy, racism, class and gender hierarchies prevails therefore also in the context of neo-liberal governance (Collins 2000: 207; Mohanty 1991: 14; Russo 1991: 299).

HETERONORMATIVE HUMANITARIANISM AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

Bob Geldof and Bono (Paul David Hewson) are the most visible and awarded male celebrities acting on behalf of Africa today. Their involvement in the Jubilee 2000 campaign established them as central celebrity spokespersons for the cancellation of Third World debt, which was followed by the organization of other Africa-related campaigns and events, such as DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa), Product Red, Live 8 and Make Poverty History. The consumerist basis of many of these initiatives contrasts to their activities in the 1980s, which took the form of charity concerts and records. Jolie's activities on the other hand are largely charity-based, such as the Jolie-Pitt Foundation. She also stands out for her consistent involvement with the UN through her appointment as a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2001.

All three meet with high-profile political and financial leaders, and are celebrated in the press as anti-hegemonic heroes who act against western power elites by speaking the truth about politics and Africa. Yet, their different humanitarian approaches sometimes seem contradictory, resulting in contrasting images of 'Africa'. Indeed, their identities as artists also enable if not require

an ambiguity when it comes to race, class and gender. The men are feminized as artists, but convey a White and hypersexual masculinity through their punk and post-punk rock musical counter-cultures that provides them with the space to act politically, or as *TIME* (13 November 2006) wrote, to 'rock the establishment'.

Likewise, traces of masculinity in Jolie were overcome through confessional acts (cf. Foucault 1981: 60) and specific performances of femininity. Jolie was known in her youth as a misfit who wore her husband's blood in a vial around her neck. She was depicted as repentant of this lifestyle in favour of compassion and generosity. As the *Telegraph* (2 May 2005) reported, 'her days as a Hollywood wild child, with tales of self-mutilation and tattoos appear to be in the past'. Similarly, at a UNHCR press conference, her bodily presentation, her hair style and attire all lent her an air of credibility as a humanitarian actor:

> Ms. Jolie stood poised and serious, her hands clasped behind her back, her sexy, streaky hair pinned up in a compassionate bun. Black was the colour of her pearls, eyeliner, sleeveless silk dress, and the blurry tattoo on her arm that once bore the name Billy Bob.
>
> (NYT 16 October 2005)

Putting the old 'castrated' woman in her past and becoming a desiring subject established Jolie's position as a 'speaking/desiring subject of history' (Boisseau 2004: 205–6). From being decadent, unstable and sexually perverse, she transformed into a figure of humility, propriety and sexual modesty. Although Jolie continued to act in roles where she became known as 'the bodacious babe in a bodysuit' action hero from *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* or was referred to as 'the pillow-lipped screen siren' (NYT 16 October 2005) in the tabloids, these were not regarded as reflections of Jolie as a person, but a part of what she does to earn a living. This made it possible to compartmentalize the confusing blend of masculine and hypersexual qualities that accompanied her violent roles as incidental.

While Jolie had to disengage herself from her hedonistic class privileges, references to Bono and Geldof's working/lower-middle class and postcolonial Irish background strengthened their claims for African representation. Geldof's scruffy and outlandish dress sense, unkempt hair, foul language and life-long perseverance of his rock star dreams gave him 'street cred' as a 'ragged-trousered pragmatist'. From being thrown out of Canada in his youth as an illegal immigrant, to being left alone after his mother's untimely death and father's job as travelling towel salesman (BBC 27 May 2003), Geldof's diligence was celebrated as his 'most defining quality' (*Telegraph* 29 November 2003). Bono too became a 'man' through the absence of femininity and care; he lost his mother as a teenager, and grew up in 'a house of men, numbed by grief, unable to share their feelings' (*Telegraph* 20 November 2003), pushing him towards religion and music.

Zine Magubane (2008) argues that Bono gains credibility by conjoining his past with that of Africa by invoking the history of Irish colonial dispossession under the British. Although this was not explicit in our material, the narrative of Irish suffering is relevant to the analysis. Jolie is unable to claim this position of experiential empathy, because as a US citizen she represents the permanent political body of equality and freedom (cf. Arendt 1963). As Bono said, ‘America is not just a country, but also an idea and at the very centre of this idea is the embracing of people who want to be free and equal’ (NYT 21 September 2005). Magubane (2008: 147) argues that ‘the ascendancy of the Irish was also linked to their becoming White’. The reification of an American way of life tended to ‘embrace White supremacy’ (Magubane 2008: 147), connecting Whiteness to the pursuit of liberal values and economic development. The Irish underprivileged background and postcolonial citizenship becomes transferred to Africans and to the African present, following the logic of past colonialist space/time linearity of the movement between spaces as a reversion in time.

Just as Geldof's and Bono's humanitarianism was enabled by these masculinized and underprivileged pasts, Jolie's primary humanitarian credentials were in the discourses of motherhood which intertwined with her humanitarian work. As CNN (20 June 2006) reported, ‘when Angelina Jolie decided she wanted to be a mother, [she approached] it with the same humanitarian spirit that guides the rest of her life; building a global village under her own roof’. She was a humanitarian because she was a mother, and vice versa, producing humanitarianism as the fulfilment of a White feminine destiny. As a sort of ‘mother-without-borders’, Jolie constructed a model of what became referred to as the ‘rainbow family’ (*Telegraph* 29 October 2005). The projection of the rainbow family metaphor onto the international system promoted the vision of a harmonious interracial and multicultural world community, but at the same time the parallel depended on racial and economic differentiation through beliefs attached to biological parenthood. Upon the adoption of her Ethiopian daughter Zahara Marley Jolie-Pitt, the *Telegraph* (18 October 2006) wrote of ‘her big heart’. At times her maternity bordered on holiness, as she ‘wears a scarf and kneels among the needy like Mother Teresa’ (NYT 16 October 2005). The gentleness of her first meeting with her Vietnamese son Pax Thien Jolie-Pitt was proof of her motherliness, cultural sensitivity and internationality (BBC 16 March 2007) by bringing her UN persona to the family level. Furthermore, Jolie was not just a compassionate woman, but an experienced, considerate and well-informed authority able to ‘warn’ western couples against adopting supposedly parentless impoverished children, for example after major natural disasters (NYT 26 November 2005).

Considering that Jolie has been unmarried throughout her humanitarian period, is sometimes construed as a ‘homewrecker’ (NYT 22 January 2007) responsible for the end of Pitt's marriage to Jennifer Aniston and frequently appears in films that ‘glamourize violence’ (BBC 2 September 2008), that she is still able to exercise normative motherhood is somewhat surprising. Like

the ‘underdog’ narratives of Bono and Geldof, Jolie’s non-conformist marital status may provide a point of identification for western women for whom marriage is no longer a matter-of-course. It challenges institutionalized heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner 1998: 553) and thus resonates with a transgressive new womanhood (Boisseau 2004: 5–6), but on the other hand diversifies the subject positions from which western humanitarianism can act. Colonial discourse figured Africans as sexually deviant (cf. McClintock 1995: 182), but Jolie’s case suggests that our era conceives it as intolerant and repressive. In this respect, the ‘rainbow family’ is not about enabling diversity, but disciplining it, as confirmed in stories about Jolie’s biological children. Jolie travelled to Namibia to give birth to her and Pitt’s first child, Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt. While some considered the decision ill-advised, a CNN television programme *Angelina Jolie: Her Mission and Motherhood* declared that the choice ‘showed once again Angelina Jolie’s dedication for countries in need of support’ (CNN 20 June 2006). Arguably, the gesture was not about solidarity, but about making Africa White by giving birth to a White African citizen.

In this light, the adopted children were passive objects of White parental desire to be properly disciplined and made White by making them active, rational and presentable. Africa itself was treated as a child, dependent and naïve, requiring western care and guidance. Yet, like colonial images of Africa, the western images of childhood and Africa as a child are more about western values and desires than about Africa itself (cf. Burman 1994; Aitken 2001). Childhood in research has been seen as a ‘problematic social construction’ (Aitken 2001: 120) because of the varying meanings it can take. Still, Kate Manzo (2008: 649) identifies the western fantasies of childhood dependence and innocence as dominant from context to context. Here this image justifies western intervention, as well as produces hierarchical world positions naturalized by a heteronormative family discourse. While Jolie’s class repentance, US citizenship and motherhood delineated her humanitarian subjectivity, similarly Irish postcolonialism and working class masculinity defined the limits in which Bono and Geldof could act. The projects of the latter are not concerned with care, but catering for the family financially as knowers and doers. Geldof’s scruffy image strengthens his position as a wise man and a seer, whereas Bono is better understood as moving between a contemporary entrepreneurial superhero and nostalgic revolutionary.

Geldof shares with Jolie his desire to travel to Africa and tell stories about his experiences, but as adventures and discoveries. In the six-part BBC-series *Geldof in Africa* (2005), Geldof travelled across Africa wearing khaki-trousers, a Havana hat and sunglasses – the colonial symbols of modernity and mobility. As if continuing the history of the great British explorers, he rode buses, planes and trains through Africa, slept in rough lodgings and experienced his physical and mental limits. Africa exhausted Geldof, but there he was a free, lone and courageous White man. The imagery of mysterious Africa recalled a wild and strangely exotic feminine nature that

needed to be understood and tamed. Geldof argued that his TV-series was 'not a promo clip for Africa [but] an attempt to explore it the way Africans see it themselves' (10 June 2005). The series was mainly about Geldof, acting in Africa, 'ploughing through jungles, steaming up rivers and tumbling down sand dunes' (BBC 23 May 2006). Although claiming to represent Africans, the series romanticized the place with 'adventure and anecdotes to bring the colours and contradictions of Africa to life' (BBC 23 May 2006). As a feminized object, Africa remained something beautiful to be admired, gazed and tamed, rather than a speaking subject of world politics in charge of its own future or representation. Geldof's first-hand knowledge of Africa allowed him to act as an impartial teacher and judge to western political elites. Unlike Jolie, who acted under the UN umbrella, Geldof was an expert who stood above politics and could criticize it. At a UN summit in New York, Geldof assessed how successful the summit 'really' was, that he was 'not thrilled' with it and graded the UN with 'a mark of four out of ten for failing to make monumental pledges on debt, trade and development' (BBC 15 September 2005).

Where Geldof's image was knowledge-based, Bono's was action-based, shifting between discourses of revolution and superheroism. Bono as a superhero became associated with a US comic tradition where (often) men with extraordinary powers save liberal capitalist civilization from corruption or destruction. *TIME* (4 March 2002) wrote that he was 'like Superman turning into Clark Kent'. The cover showed Bono looking straight into the eyes of the reader/viewer with a serious expression against a clear backdrop as if floating in the empty sky. The headline asked if Bono 'can save the world'. This Messianic imagery was also repeated by *TIME* (19 December 2005), describing him as 'a modern day Samaritan' and 'a televangelist persona who talks with righteously candid words about global justice for Africa' by the BBC (BBC 23 December 2006).

Paradoxically, Bono also tapped into revolutionary imagery. For example, a connection to Che Guevara (and guerrilla warfare) was corporeally transmitted in photographs of Bono wearing a green cap and army jacket while speaking of injustice, oppression, poverty and disease. Although this can be read as anti-capitalist, a more convincing interpretation would be one that focuses on the struggles against colonial power relations that perpetuate economic inequality. In this way the suffering and oppression in Africa is paralleled not only to Irish but also Latin American anti-colonial history. However, Bono's rebellion was not against globalized capitalism, but its unfortunate side-effects. Indeed, neither is Guevara's image a straightforward representation of counter-culture today, since it has been extensively commercialized in popular culture (cf. Biagini 2000). Bono was a fighter for 'making mercy smarter and hope strategic' (*TIME* 19 December 2006) for new and clever humanitarian economics. As a 'card-carrying capitalist' his aim was to 'market his ideas for Africa more like a 'sports-shoe or cigarette company' (*Telegraph* 17 February 2006). Traditional charity and philanthropy were also feminized through musical metaphors, where 'philanthropy is like

hippy music, holding hands' whereas Bono's Product Red scheme 'is more like punk rock, hip hop, . . . like hard commerce' (BBC 26 January 2006).

Bono's humanitarianism is not about undermining the commercial economy, but redirecting its profits to improve the lives of others. When Product Red was launched at the 2006 WEF in Davos, Bono opened by calling the attendees 'fat cats in the snow [or] I should say winners in the snow' (BBC 26 January 2006). This quotation captures the constitutive problem of this agenda. By dividing global regions into winners and losers, the advantaged and disadvantaged, it follows that global winners must help global losers by *helping them turn themselves* into winners. Aid could be a positive force, as a catalyst for African self-transformation, or rather, westernization. If Africa was a masculine penetrative voyage of discovery for Geldof, Bono's adventure was a daring frontier echo of the anti-imperialist philosophy's calls for peaceful and progressive movement towards the 'brave new world of globalisation' (Hooper 2001: 163). As Bono argued 'we need to stop thinking of this continent as a burden, and start thinking of it as an adventure' because 'foreign assistance shouldn't be seen as "aid" but as "investment"' (NYT 21 September 2005).

Both Bono and Geldof located political will in the West, especially in the UK and USA. Africa became a place lacking politics, at least of the right kind. Geographical space again translated into historical time by tying African development to European post-war deprivation. 'It was time for the Old Economies to come to Africa', Geldof argued, 'to protect Africa through aid for trade scheme as US did for Europe after the WWII' (BBC 30 November 2007). On BBC Radio Four, Bono referred to his strategy as a 'Marshall Plan for Africa' to 'liberate' and 'build' it (BBC 21 September 2004). The fight against poverty in Africa was spurred by anxieties about maintaining the inheritance of neoliberal values and economic growth that the USA had fought for since the Second World War, or even the New Deal (cf. Foucault 2008: 216). Africa became an unstable and rowdy place and a global danger (cf. Dillon and Reid 2009: 151) that had to be stabilized by educating it in the western ways. 'To help create the conditions for Africans to help themselves' (NYT 21 September 2005) meant transforming the inert and dependent (feminine, infantile, Black) African horde into dynamic and self-governing individuals, specifically (masculine, mature, White) neoliberal subjects. It affirmed a worldview of White male privilege where 'whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, average and ideal' and so when they aim to benefit others, 'it is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us"' (McIntosh 2005: 110).

The divergent, and even contradictory portrayal of these three celebrities produce different 'Africas' by bestowing and enacting race, class and gender through humanitarian discourse. The men assumed subjective racialized colonial histories of oppression and economic struggle in Ireland, then externalized them as contemporary 'African' problems. Jolie's struggle for appropriate Whiteness and femininity was personal, but just as successful in legitimating her humanitarianism. Each of them were also sufficiently class

and gender amorphous to enable sufficient mobility and legitimacy for their actions. For example, Bono and Geldof were described as 'peerless' (*TIME* 13 November 2006), whereas the nannies of the Jolie-Pitt children as instant give-aways of class privilege/exploitation were absent from texts and images. Despite these ambiguities, Jolie was consistently positioned as being 'inside' politics, for example working for existing development bodies like the UN, or absent from it as a private parent. By contrast, Bono and Geldof were 'above' or 'outside' it as expert advisers for politicians. All were however portrayed as individuals in total control of their private and public lives, 'masteries of self and others' (Boisseau 2004: 3).[2]

'Africa' took on contradictory meanings just like the celebrities that spoke for it. It was a dark place of suffering, illness, godlessness, poverty and destruction, but also an exotic site of untapped resources and economic potential. In this way, Africa became constructed as child-like, either as immature or an erratic adolescent, in order for interventions to be possible. The setting plays out much like a western White middle-class heterosexual family, which as Berlant and Warner (1998: 554) state, is a discourse that informs 'a whole field of social relations', including contemporary humanitarianism, as we argue here. Bringing up child-Africa becomes a parental (western) responsibility and not doing so would reflect badly not only on the parents, but it would be disadvantageous for the entire world family.

MADONNA: DISRUPTING OR RECONSTRUCTING CELEBRITY HUMANITARIANISM?

This section tackles the media discourses on Madonna as a case that does not quite 'fit' into the above scenario, prompting us to ask to what extent Madonna subverts this project. Queer theory provides useful analytical starting points for this discussion. 'Queer' is often conceptualized as a challenge to the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality, but it can also be used to interrogate normative heterosexuality (Rossi 2003: 121–2). Previously Madonna has been hailed as a postmodern feminist because of her chameleonic reproduction of gender (Schwichtenberg 1992), but many have disagreed, pointing to the voyeuristic and commercial interests of her career (Kaplan 1993; Robertson 1996). We show how Madonna repeatedly failed to embody the right kind of heterosexuality (Repo 2007: 13; Tuori 2009: 165), but simultaneously remain apprehensive about the extent of her deviancy. Considering her proper postcolonial context and the selective focus of the media criticism, she remains embedded in the colonial framework, but with paradoxical appropriations of femininity (cf. Repo 2008) with contradictory effects.

Madonna's activities in Africa are focused almost exclusively in Malawi. In 2006 she co-founded the non-profit charity foundation Raising Malawi to aid impoverished Malawian orphans, and adopted 1-year-old David Banda later that year. Neither project was considered sincerely humanitarian. The organization

was seen as a ploy to facilitate the adoption, which was dismissed as a 'fashionable philanthropic whim' (NYT 26 October 2006). An adopted African baby was apparently the new 'celebrity accessory du jour' with a 'price tag [of] . . . $3 million to antipoverty programs and $1 million to produce a documentary on the plight of Malawi's children' (NYT 21 October 2006). Journalists saw her UNICEF and Raising Malawi fundraiser as farcical when the event coincided with the opening of co-organizer Gucci's new Manhattan flagship store (BBC 7 February 2008). Unlike Jolie, Madonna's unapologetic use of class privileges was too vain to be seen as sincerely motivated humanitarianism. She did not exercise Jolie's normalizing self-control (Bordo 2003: 202–3), but displayed her bodily desires openly, something especially (and paradoxically) frowned upon with women of Madonna's age and status who refuse to age gracefully. As Franckenstein (1997: 19) writes, 'women are held back by the threat of stigmatization from presenting publicly their investment in beauty'.

At the time of David's adoption, it seemed like she was trying to straddle both the men's and women's humanitarian roles, as 'Lady Bountiful-come-lately trying to compete with Bono in the world of philanthropy in Africa and with Angelina Jolie in the arena of celebrity mothers without borders' (NYT 26 October 2006). Indeed, like Jolie her activities were limited to the realm of motherhood, charity/fundraising and UNICEF. But, Madonna fell short of properly disowning her unruly diva behaviour and continued to flaunt her wealth unbecomingly. David was 'whisked out of Malawi on a private jet', 'carried off the flight by the female assistant accompanied by a male bodyguard' and subsequently 'whisked away . . . in a silver Mercedes car' (*Telegraph* 17 October 2006). There were no emotional stories about Madonna's and David's first encounter or praise from orphanage employees, merely hurried and businesslike impressions of David being hustled from Malawi by Madonna's private entourage. The scene was altogether too ostentatious and nonchalant.

It is important to note that it was the circumstances of the adoption that incited consternation, rather than the adoption itself. First, a Malawian child rights organization Eye of the Child accused Madonna of 'fast-tracking the whole process' (*Telegraph* 17 October 2006). It called for the Malawian courts to abide by their adoption laws 'to avoid a situation where criminals with money might take advantage to abuse our children' (BBC 16 October 2006). This conflicted with reports of Malawi's virtually non-existent international adoption laws. Then the Malawian Human Rights Consultative Committee challenged the adoption in Malawi's High Court on the grounds that 'residency rules were flouted' and that 'the ruling could set a human-trafficking precedent' (BBC 22 October 2006). At best, Madonna was a self-indulgent superstar, at worst, a slave trading babysnatcher.

The press discovery that David's father Yohane Banda was still alive caused further indignation. First, he defended Madonna, asking where 'these so-called human rights groups . . . [were] when David was struggling in the orphanage' (NYT 19 October 2006). A few days later, Banda was quoted as having misunderstood the procedure, that if he 'had been told [that David would no

longer be his son], [he] would not have allowed the adoption' (BBC 22 October 2006). Then, a few more days later, the 'uneducated' and 'illiterate' (BBC 22 October 2006; *TIME* 24 October 2006) farmer and scrap metal worker said he was grateful to Madonna for taking David (*TIME* 24 October 2006). Banda's statements to the press were ambiguous and conflicting, but his confusion was taken as evidence that Madonna had 'taken advantage' (*Telegraph* 16 October 2006) of a poor and ignorant man and tricked him out of his child. Banda was the only African to be given a voice in our research material, but even that voice was disparaged and explained away as too underdeveloped, too dependent and ignorant to know itself or its own good. Madonna also infantilized Banda when she explained on The Oprah Winfrey Show that he had been 'terrorized by the media', who were 'manipulating' him and 'put words in his mouth' (BBC 26 October 2006).

Madonna, therefore, may have the realities of postcolonial humanitarianism visible, but was also complicit in their perpetuation by upholding a childlike image of Africa, seeing it as a nest of orphans and depreciating Banda's speech. In a sense, she herself also became a colonized subject, a woman not able to represent herself perfectly, but presented, and made intelligible, by others. Bono told *NME* magazine that David was 'lucky' and that Madonna should be 'applauded for helping to take a child out of the worst poverty imaginable' (*NME* 13 November 2006), confirming Africa as a desolate hovel from which any rescue to the West was welcome. This interpretation is strengthened if we consider the lack of criticism of Jolie's adoptions. Jolie too, although reportedly apprehensive about adopting from 'a country where there is no legal framework' for it, supported Madonna and was 'horrified by the attacks [that Madonna] has been subjected to' (*Telegraph* 2 January 2007). These arguments disciplined not only Africa but also added to Madonna's divisiveness.

Madonna nonetheless actively produced counter-narratives through interviews with mainstream media. The limits of her success show the difficulties of enacting subjective reinterpretation. Her self-consciousness and inability to perform womanliness correctly did not allow her to put the 'subjectifying mechanisms of fetish (desire) at her disposal' (Boisseau 2004: 205). She tried to express her disappointment with the press reaction, which was 'a great disservice to the orphans' ... 'because it discourages other people from doing the same thing' (BBC 26 October 2006). Still, the NYT continued to doubt her authenticity, claiming that 'her clipped duty-free British diction undercut some of the poignancy of her appeal' (NYT 26 October 2006). *TIME* (25 October 2006) also teased her 'strange, inexplicable Britmericanese':

> Was Madonna trying, sub- or fully consciously, to borrow a little aura from Bono and Sir Bob Geldof? If so, nicely played, Ms. Ciccone! No one does charitable unimpeachability like the Irish! When you want to go saintly, Go Bragh!

The quip, albeit satirically, confirms 'the Irish' celebrities as beyond reproach. It also draws one's attention to the silence on Madonna's immigrant and

working/lower-middle-class background. Rather than being identified as an embodiment of western postcoloniality, she became someone without a past before fame, and failed to show proper gratitude for her present privileges like Jolie. Confessions of wealth, Whiteness and femininity were not made, nor performed. This resulted in an inability for Madonna to establish 'a distinction between (a subjugated) past and (a liberated) present' (Boisseau 2004: 204) which provides colonial women travellers, like Jolie, with the legitimacy to act. Ironically, in this way Madonna fulfils exemplary neoliberal subjectivity by refusing to see gender, class or race as obstacles to individual success. The paradox is, of course, that neoliberalism is an essentially gendered mode of governmentality, and accusations of dilettantism (*TIME* 5 November 2006) duly sidelined her gender-disruptive behaviour that exposed these power relations.

GLOBAL IMAGINARIES OF HUMANITARIANISM

While this article may seem to offer mere abstract theorizations, today humanitarianism has become the key frame through which multifarious world actors evaluate each other's legitimacy in the current world (Aaltola 2009). The value base of this humanitarian regime draws on the principle of humanity that inspires an allegedly apolitical commitment to alleviate the suffering of people still outside universal equality. The individual and global levels are intertwined in the stories of Bono, Geldof and Jolie as selfless western individuals on personal moral crusades to 'make poverty history' in Africa. They become the ideals of cosmopolitan humanitarian individuals – altruistic, self-sacrificing, apolitical world-citizens – promoting equality and empathy for Africans, who are outside the processes of development, progress, peace and human security of the North. On an individual level their stories define how true humanitarianism is constituted. The negotiation of identity as a practice of liberal governance culminates in the cementation of celebrities and 'Africa' into assumed spaces and subject positions as their logical and natural positions in world politics.

For humanitarianism to work as a practice it has to be seen as apolitical and impartial to class and race, yet clear gendered divisions of place and purpose remain firmly in place. Madonna's actions were problematic because her defiance of these prescriptions undermined the self-righteous basis of western humanitarianism. The myth of sacrificing westerners was displaced along with the prevailing assumption of humanitarianism as transcendent of boundaries such as race, class, religion, gender, sexuality and nation. Humanitarianism – the self-sacrificing offering and gift– turned out to be self-validating and privileged action of the few. This uncomfortable truth about western humanitarianism was an affront to the humanitarian world order. For it to be able to continue operating, Madonna's deviancy needed to be discredited and cured. And in the end she exercised and performed self-disciplined and

self-reflective womanliness. Later, in 2008 when she spoke to the BBC, the adoption had become a maternal ordeal:

> In the end I rationalized that, when a woman has a child and goes through natural childbirth, she suffers an enormous amount . . . so I sort of went through my own kind of birthing pains with dealing with the press on my front doorstep accusing me of kidnapping or whatever you want to call it.
>
> (BBC 22 May 2008)

In these televized interviews, the self-representation of the only speaking African subject, Yohane Banda, was also repossessed. The historical myth of Africa and Africans became embodied in Banda. He became an ignorable savage, an impulsive and childish subject who eventually embraced 'progress' by acknowledging that the future of Africa, through his child, a future African, was in the North. In order to undo Africa as a site of global danger and ensure the survival of self and others, it must reject its past by denouncing its own blood. David's adoption became a symbolic event for 'which blood is passed on and from which new blood must come from' (Carnegie 2002: 34). By giving up a child of his blood and flesh, the progressive, adaptive and transformative Whiteness became the superior Race of the future, on which the hopes of the world for liberty and progress rests.

As history has shown, there are many 'true' Africas to be made out of words and images. These images reflect the changing western objectives, reorientations, desires and wants to political mythmaking in which the popular notions of gender, national identity and humanitarianism have all played a central role. In this article our objective has been to make a case for the importance of global celebrity humanitarianism in the wider liberal political agenda and its governmentalized objectives. The critique of how celebrity humanitarians police, maintain, produce or displace the barriers of race, gender or ethnicity through their humanitarian performances is a crucial task for political scientists to undertake. We hope that this article is a contributive step in that direction.

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Notes

1 All four have broad international circulation: *Daily Telegraph*: 857,871; *TIME* EMEA: 526,913 (source: ABC UK Jan–June 2008), *TIME* US: 3,399,967 (source: ABC US Jan–June 2007); NYT 1,077,256 (source: March 2008 ABC Fas-Fax; NY Times Internal Records).

2 This does not mean that the actions of the celebrities are universally eulogized. For example, the NYT (5 March 2007) sarcastically described Bono as 'a rock star with a touch of the messiah complex'. The *Telegraph* (30 July 2008) reported on a US artist that depicted Jolie was dressed as the Virgin Mary holding her newborn twins and surrounded by the rest her children. While this parodied the people that had made Jolie into a Holy Mother figure, Bono was ridiculed for seeing himself as Jesus, again with implications on gender and agency.

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