



‘Good’ celebrity: more harm than good?

written by Allegra
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A while back our contributor [Antonio de Lauri](#) drew our attention on the myth of the ‘good poor’ and how we may have collectively thought to have left it behind us. We were wrong, he concluded.

“It has simply multiplied. A controversial rhetoric of the good poor, the good migrant, even the good woman, nowadays constitute the main plot of humanitarian actions and good Samaritans’ reports, articles and books.” It turns out that he had his eye on the pulse of the moment if judged by the heat that one of the archetypes of the ‘good celebrity’ has received recently, namely U2 frontman Bono. In a blog article titled [‘Elevation’](#) published in the [Guardian on June 18th, 2013](#) author and columnist [George Monbiot](#) argues how “Bono’s positioning of the west as the saviour of Africa while failing to discuss the harm the G8 nations are doing has undermined campaigns for justice and accountability.”

Monbiot’s stinging text continues by noting how “It was bad enough in 2005. Then, at the G8 summit in Scotland, Bono and Bob Geldof heaped praise on Tony Blair and George Bush, who were still mired in the butchery they had initiated in Iraq. At one point Geldof appeared, literally and figuratively, to be sitting in Tony Blair’s lap. African activists accused them of drowning out a campaign for global justice with a campaign for charity. But this is worse. As the UK chairs the G8 summit again, a campaign that Bono founded, with which Geldof works closely, appears to be whitewashing the G8’s policies in Africa.”

The main point becomes: “Bono can’t help Africans by stealing their voice. Because the U2 frontman and others like him are seen as representatives of



the poor, the poor are not invited to speak”

Ilan Kapoor’s latest book, entitled [Celebrity Humanitarianism](#) (Routledge, 2013) argues that ‘bling’ charity legitimates, and indeed promotes, neoliberal capitalism and global inequality. Far from being altruistic, ‘celebrity humanitarianism’ is significantly contaminated and ideological: it is most often self-serving, helping to promote institutional aggrandizement and the celebrity ‘brand’; it advances consumerism and corporate capitalism, and rationalizes the very global inequality it seeks to redress; it is fundamentally depoliticizing, despite its pretensions to ‘activism’; and it contributes to a ‘postdemocratic’ political landscape, which appears outwardly open and consensual, but is in fact managed by unaccountable elites.

Relevant points with which we can hardly disagree. What do you think, dear Allegra reader: the good celebrities – doing more harm than good?

References:

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