



Routledge Advances in Health and Social Policy

CELEBRITY PHILANTHROPY AND ACTIVISM

**MEDIATED INTERVENTIONS IN THE GLOBAL
PUBLIC SPHERE**

Hilde Van den Bulck



Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism

In recent years, celebrity philanthropy and activism has attracted much attention from the media, sparking a great deal of public interest. As exponents and endorsers of the marketisation and corporatisation of philanthropy and activism, globally renowned super-celebrities habitually lend their name, time and energy to a range of causes. They help raise awareness, generate funds and endeavour to evoke social and political responses to crucial societal issues. These can range from domestic violence, cancer prevention, climate change and transgender acceptance, to refugee problems and fighting poverty at home and abroad. But in what ways do (mediated communications about) these celebrities have the power to define what is going wrong in the world, who or what is to blame, how this can be solved and how this is to be evaluated morally and ethically? Does celebrity humanitarianism and activism serve to reinforce postcolonial power relations or does it help solve social problems, advancing traditional views on how society is, and should be, organised? Importantly, more than conceptual and empirical exploration of celebrity philanthropy and activism as such, this book analyses the mediated communication, the mediatised narratives that these endeavours provide.

Combining insights from philanthropy and welfare regime studies, international politics and diplomacy, postcolonial studies, but also from marketing, from celebrity, star and fan studies, and from media, communication and cultural studies, this book critically analyses the mediated discourses and debates that celebrity philanthropy and activism provokes, and considers wider ethical and theoretical perspectives. It will be of interest to all scholars and students working in sociology, health and social care and social policy.

Hilde Van den Bulck (Ph.D.) is full professor of Communication Studies and head of the Media, Policy & Culture research group at the University of Antwerp. She holds an MA in communications from the KULeuven (B), an MA in mass communications from the University of Leicester (UK) and a Ph.D. in social sciences from the KULeuven (B). She combines complementary expertise in media structures and media cultures. For the past ten years, an important part of her research has focused on the cultural significance and societal role of mediated communication from and about celebrities in general, and celebrity philanthropy and activism in particular.

Routledge Advances in Health and Social Policy

Titles in this series

Planning Later Life

Bioethics and Public Health in Ageing Societies

Edited by Mark Schweda, Larissa Pfaller, Kai Brauer, Frank Adloff and Silke Schicktanz

Effective Interventions for Unemployed Young People in Europe

Social Innovation or Paradigm Shift?

Edited by Tomas Sirovatka and Henk Spies

Social Research in Health and Illness

Case-Based Approaches

Constantinos N. Phellas and Costas S. Constantinou

Ethnic Identity and US Immigration Policy Reform

American Citizenship and Belonging amongst Hispanic Immigrants

Maria del Mar Farina

Research and Evaluation in Community, Health and Social Care Settings

Experiences from Practice

Edited by Suzanne Guerin, Nóirín Hayes and Sinead McNally

Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism

Mediated Interventions in the Global Public Sphere

Hilde Van den Bulck

For a full list of titles in this series, please visit <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Advances-in-Health-and-Social-Policy/book-series/RAHSP>

Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism

Mediated Interventions in the
Global Public Sphere

Hilde Van den Bulck

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2018 Hilde Van den Bulck

The right of Hilde Van den Bulck to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bulck, Hilde van den, author.

Title: Celebrity philanthropy and activism: mediated interventions in the global public sphere / Hilde Van den Bulck.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017058512 |

Subjects: LCSH: Philanthropists. | Celebrities—Political activity. | Celebrities in mass media. | Humanitarianism.

Classification: LCC HV16 .B85 2018 | DDC 361.7/4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017058512>

ISBN: 978-1-138-23445-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-30687-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by codeMantra

To Sofie, Super Girl



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Why this book?</i>	1
<i>Roadmap for the reader of this book</i>	2
PART I	
Celebrity philanthropy and activism: Origins, celebrity and the media	5
1 Philanthropy and activism	7
<i>Introduction</i>	7
<i>Defining philanthropy and activism</i>	8
<i>Looking back: the history of philanthropy and activism</i>	11
<i>Marketisation and corporatisation of philanthropy and activism</i>	14
<i>Criticism of marketisation and corporatisation</i>	20
2 Celebrity philanthropy and activism	27
<i>Introduction</i>	27
<i>Conceptualising celebrity</i>	28
<i>Types of celebrity</i>	32
<i>Celebrity philanthropy and activism</i>	33
<i>Philanthropy/activism and the celebrity construct</i>	41
<i>Engaging celebrities: advantages and disadvantages</i>	45
3 Mediated celebrity philanthropy and activism	53
<i>Mediated communication and the celebrity construct</i>	53
<i>Celebrity journalism and celebrity news</i>	54

Covering celebrity philanthropy and activism 60
Mediated 'stories' of celebrity philanthropy and activism 65
A look at audiences 67

PART II

Celebrity philanthropy and activism in international relations and diplomacy, development and humanitarianism 75

4 The white man's burden: Celebrity philanthropy and activism in world relations and development issues 77

Introduction 77

Roots of celebrity engagement in international relations, development and humanitarianism 78

Humanitarian traditions, marketisation, the West and the Rest, and celebrity engagement 80

Celebrities and marketised philanthropy and activism in world relations 83

Conclusion 90

5 Celebrity philanthropists as authoritative voices: Framing world relations and development issues 96

Celebrity philanthropic and activist documentaries: a framing analysis 96

Stories of celebrity philanthropy and activism in world relations 110

6 The white woman's burden: Taking home world relations 117

Introduction: the celebrity-construct, the political persona and gender 117

Marrying the Political 119

Taking it home: celebrity transnational adoptions 123

Conclusion 135

Postscript 145

Index 147

List of tables

2.1	Issue by celebrity's claim-to-fame (in percentages)	38
2.2	Issue by celebrity's role (in percentages)	39
2.3	Celebrity's claim-to-fame by celebrity's role (in percentages)	39
3.1	Topics covered in celebrity news	57
3.2	Domains of celebrity	59
3.3	Nationality and ethnicity of celebrities covered in the news	60
3.4	Issue by celebrity's role (in percentages)	63
5.1	Overview of analysed documentaries by title, year or production, celebrity featured and destination	98



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Acknowledgements

Writing a monograph often feels like the loneliest of undertakings. It is, in fact, very much a group effort. Therefore, some heartfelt thank you's are in order. First of all, academic knowledge is built incrementally and one study's groundwork is based on insights developed by others. So, while trying to add to the conversation, the book is very much based in an interdisciplinary exercise to bring together the work of key authors in the fields of philanthropy and welfare state studies, celebrity and star studies, as well as media, communication and cultural studies. Going through the book, the reader will come across the names of key influential figures I am indebted to. I am particularly grateful for the insights provided by those working specifically on celebrity philanthropy and activism in the field of international relations and diplomacy, development and humanitarianism, including Annika Bergman Rosamond, Dan Brockington, Lilie Chouliaraki, Stefano Ponte, Lisa Ann Richey, Mark Wheeler and many other inspired and inspiring colleagues. A special thank you to Dr. Koen Panis and Dr. Nathalie Claessens, my former Ph.D. students and partners in crime in my early exploration of the topic. Further gratitude is due to my colleagues at the Department of Communication at the University of Antwerp for their continued interest in my work and their patience while I went 'underground' to write the book. Sincere apologies to various academic collaborators who patiently waited for me to finish the book so I could dedicate myself to our joint projects. These are now at the top of my to-do list.

I very much like to thank Lianne Sherlock, then assistant editor at Ashgate, for the wonderful support and feedback while developing the book's outline and for guiding me in securing the book contract. Gratitude is due to the anonymous reviewer of the book's outline, who provided valuable feedback. Thank you also to Georgia Priestley, editorial assistant at Routledge for the continued support during the writing of the book and to the editorial team for their excellent handling of the manuscript to turn it into this book.

I am much obliged to Rebecca Tekula at Pace University for the introduction to the literature on philanthropy studies; to Greg Murphy, head of resources and librarian extraordinaire at the Henry Birnbaum Library at Pace

University for his guidance in my research; to Timothy Robeers for his fantastic work in tracing and indexing sources and as a sparring partner, and to everybody at the McGannon Centre of Fordham University for interesting conversations and a refuge to write. A big thumbs up goes to Laurence Verheijen for the wonderful animation and Aaron Hyzen for the beautiful music and excellent voice-over for the video that accompanies the book. Working on that side project proved an excellent antidote for the affliction known as Book Writer's Despair. Finally, a warm thank you to Bernd, Griet, Hans, Jan, Trui, Alexander, Roeland and, of course, Ronny for their never-ending support in this and all my endeavours, and to all who keep me abreast of the latest in celebrity gossip – you know who you are!

Introduction

Why this book?

This book deals with the mediated communication about celebrity philanthropy and activism, analysing how it provides inroads for audiences and society to discuss societal issues through the complex spectre that is the celebrity construct. In particular, it focusses on a specific range of issues that dominate celebrities' societal engagement: international relations and diplomacy, development and humanitarianism. Indeed, under the watchful eye of media and audiences, celebrities – of global fame and local appeal, from the fields of entertainment and other spheres of life – engage in philanthropy and activism aimed at making the world 'a better place'.

Examples abound and flood our media feeds on a daily basis. *People Magazine* reports on US pop star Madonna's emotional speech at the opening of a children's hospital wing in Malawi, named after her adopted daughter Macy James and funded by her *Raising Malawi Foundation*, and provides a discursive space for Madonna to publicly look back on the struggles surrounding her transnational adoptions and philanthropic endeavours. Irish singer and Live Aid founder Bob Geldof calls out Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi for the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people. US actress-turned-director and proclaimed Earth Mother Angelina Jolie raises awareness for the plight of refugees across the world as special envoy of the UNHCR, speaking to world leaders and appealing to wider audiences through interviews, opinion pieces and documentaries. These are just some of the still growing number of highly mediated stories regarding celebrities engaging in philanthropy and activism on the global stage, the focus of this book. Crucially, the book wants to provide not so much a conceptual and empirical exploration of celebrity philanthropy and activism as such but of the mediated communication, the mediated narratives that these endeavours provide. These are ideological stories about world relations, what is going wrong in the world, who and what are to blame, who and what are to solve it and how this must be evaluated. The topic requires a multi-disciplinary approach, as a thorough analysis hereof requires an understanding of various aspects that have

been studied from different perspectives. As such, the book pays tribute to, as well as brings together, insights from philanthropy and welfare regime studies, over international politics and diplomacy to postcolonial studies, but also from marketing, from celebrity, star and fan studies, and from media, communication to cultural studies. An important motivation to write this book was the observation that scholars have not yet fully explored how the combination of knowledge and analytical tools from these various disciplines furthers our understanding of the crucial societal and cultural functions that (mediated communication about) celebrity philanthropy and activism performs, something this book wants to help rectify.

Roadmap for the reader of this book

The first part of the book analyses mediated communication about celebrity philanthropy and activism in its various relevant contexts, tapping into insights from different disciplines. Chapter 1 is based in philanthropy and welfare regime studies, political science and marketing. It takes a look at the historical roots and contemporary developments of the key domains of philanthropy and of activism which are considered, respectively, top-down and bottom-up efforts to rectify societal shortcomings, inequalities and injustices. In the process, they create discursive views on the relationships between individuals, society and the State. Mostly, the chapter explores how celebrities' societal engagement fits contemporary trends of marketisation and corporatisation of philanthropy and activism, both as an exponent and an endorser hereof. These trends and celebrities' role in them are assessed critically. Chapter 2, in turn, aims at understanding the other main concept in this book, celebrity, and takes inspiration from celebrity, star and fan studies as well as media, communication and cultural studies. It analyses celebrity philanthropy and activism as part of the characteristics of celebrity culture, starting from the idea of celebrity as a construct. Celebrity is seen to result from negotiations between a set of actors in the celebrity apparatus: the person wanting to be/remain famous, his/her entourage, the media and audiences. It is argued that both our contact with and understanding of celebrity philanthropy and activism crucially hinges on the various negotiated relationships between these actors. The chapter subsequently relates this to the dynamics and motivations as well as the pros and cons of a celebrity's philanthropy and activism, effectively exploring how these endeavours fit in with other aspects of a celebrity persona and elaborating on the notion of a celebrity's legitimate standing. Contextualisation is completed in Chapter 3, which analyses the mediated nature of celebrity in general and of celebrity philanthropy and activism in particular. To this end, it takes inspiration from media, communication and cultural studies in general and journalism, framing and critical discourse studies in particular. It analyses celebrity journalism and the key values, selection criteria and routines that underpin it, before looking at these

aspects for news regarding celebrity philanthropy and activism, combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence. Subsequently, the chapter introduces an understanding of the mediated communication about celebrities' societal engagement as stories, i.e. narratives about celebrity and about society. It explains how this can be studied by means of inductive, qualitative framing analysis, the main analytical framework for the case studies in the second part of the book. Finally, this chapter takes a look at how audiences deal with celebrity stories, bringing their own relationship with the celebrity, interaction with peers and personal experiences to the interpretation of mediated communication about celebrity philanthropy and activism.

Celebrity philanthropy and activism cover a wide range of topics and issues both in the domain of the private and of the public, from speaking out about domestic violence, to lobbying green energy or raising money to treat illnesses. Part II of the book focusses on a broad area that has generated a lot of attention and efforts from celebrities: the fields of international relations and diplomacy, development and humanitarianism. Celebrity's societal engagement in these issues is praised for raising awareness to all kinds of problems in international relations and development, for sourcing funds to help solve these problems through humanitarian action and for lobbying politicians to help improve the plight of the underprivileged through diplomacy and development efforts. Critics suggest that this celebrity involvement bears witness and further contributes to the spread of neoliberal modernisation and cultural imperialist paradigms with regard to global inequality. It is believed to effectively emphasise a postcolonial continuation of notions of 'The West and The Rest', while ignoring alternative views of international relations and development based on structural changes, self-reliance and an understanding of development as equal partners. The second part of this book empirically studies and evaluates these claims through analyses of the mediated communication about celebrities' efforts, dissecting the stories about world relations that accompany it. Chapter 4 discusses how celebrities are part of and endorse the marketisation of philanthropy and activism in this particular domain. It shows how celebrities, through their philanthropic and activist efforts, express wider held views on world problems and relations, appointing blame, suggesting solutions and implying relationships between various parts of the world that echo neoliberal agenda's and colonial notions of 'the West and the Rest'. It explores how celebrities' persona and actions affect these mediated stories. This is done by focussing on a range of high profile cases of involvement from an elite of so-called celebrity visionary leaders. The next, fifth, chapter further elaborates on the meaning created by these mediated communications through the lens of celebrity philanthropic and activist documentaries. Analysing twenty documentaries in which the celebrity features as the author and authoritative voice, it presents the framing of international political, development and humanitarian issues as stories about world relations, power and responsibility. This shows that a majority of frames confirms

uneven power relations between ‘the West and the Rest’ and that many celebrities consider their involvement as a duty, echoing the notion of ‘the White Man’s burden’. Finally, Chapter 6 focusses on (the gendered nature of) a particular set of stories about celebrity ‘taking home’ their engagement in international relations and diplomacy, development and humanitarianism, presented as the merging of the political and the private persona. On the one hand, analysis is provided of romantic relationships, focussing on US actor and philanthropist-activist George Clooney’s relationship with human rights lawyer and activist Amal Alamuddin and, on the other hand, transnational adoptions by US pop star Madonna and actress-director Angelina Jolie. Analysis of the later issue of transnational adoptions shows different interpretations of racial issues, world relations and ‘good parenting’. At the same time, it is a story about the responsibility of these female celebrities, i.e. ‘the White Woman’s burden’. As such, contemporary female celebrities’ efforts are related to the historical role of women in global processes of imperialism and to notions of motherhood and parenting.

Part I

Celebrity philanthropy and activism

Origins, celebrity and the media
