For celebrity communication about development to do good: Reframing purpose and discourses

Lauren Kogen

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an uptick in the practice of celebrities engaging in global development efforts at the political level. This chapter discusses the mass media appearances of two celebrities – Angelina Jolie and George Clooney – and what said appearances might suggest to media audiences about the state of distant sufferers and of global development in general. A critical discourse analysis of Jolie’s and Clooney’s television interviews between 2001 and 2017 reveals that their speech reinforces particular stereotypes that place the US, and by extension the Global North, as the unquestionable “heroes” of development work, and development beneficiaries as the less capable and less comprehensible civilizations forever in need of rescuing. The analysis serves as the basis for developing a framework for more ethical celebrity communication about development. The key principle of this proposed framework emphasizes treating both media audiences and distant sufferers as citizens capable of political thought and action, rather than simply regarding media audiences as emotional fans, or distant sufferers as eternally dependent upon the Global North.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an uptick in the practice of celebrities engaging in global development efforts at the political level. This “celebrity diplomacy” (Cooper 2008) is often performed through the media, raising the question of the extent to which such work is performed, at least in part, as a public relations tool (i.e., “looking good”), in addition to serving as a mechanism for global development (“doing good”).

Acts of celebrity diplomacy performed through the media are part of a wider genre of efforts to use communication to promote development (C4D). While the academic community has increasingly scrutinized C4D efforts, it has paid less attention to communication *about* development (CAD) (Scott 2014; Wilkins and Mody 2001), including the ways development efforts are explained to the general public through the media. Yet how and what the public learns about development merits investigation, because this becomes the foundation upon which they begin to formulate attitudes about international aid, about how development should be addressed, and about audience members’ just relationship with the suffering “other” – the supposed beneficiary of development work.

Celebrity CAD is particularly powerful in terms of impact on the public because, in a world in which citizens of the Global North often pay little attention to far off places that are disconnected from their everyday lives, celebrities offer a potent opportunity to break through that wall. This is why using celebrities to publicize development work is a strategy favored by development organizations.

Celebrity CAD thus merits special attention. In this chapter, I look specifically at the mass communication efforts of two celebrities – Angelina Jolie and George Clooney – in order to analyze what their discourses might suggest to media audiences about the state of distant sufferers and of global development in general. I focus on these two because of their well-recognized star power, as well as their official roles as spokespersons for the United Nations. Jolie serves as Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), focusing her work on the plight of child refugees around the world; George Clooney served as a United Nations Messenger of Peace from 2008 to 2014, focusing on UN peacekeeping missions around the world, and the on-going violence in Sudan and South Sudan in particular. Their roles qualify them as what Andrew Cooper (2008) calls “celebrity diplomats”, meaning they engage with issues of foreign suffering at a global policy level. Their status within the UN

program and on the world stage places them at the forefront of efforts to “do good” via celebrity communication about development.

Based on a critical discourse analysis of Jolie’s and Clooney’s television interviews between 2001 and 2017, I ultimately argue that their discourse reinforces particular stereotypes that place the US and by extension the Global North as the unquestionable “heroes” of development work, and development beneficiaries as the less developed, less capable, and less comprehensible civilizations forever in need of rescuing. While the celebrities seem well intentioned, and their involvement in international development work has the potential to promote positive change, the current form that their mass media appearances take also has the potential to perform significant harm with respect to reinforcing negative attitudes towards the suffering other.

I use my study’s findings to develop a framework for more ethical celebrity CAD. If celebrity diplomats have the power to focus global attention on particular cases of distant suffering, they must also be held accountable for the impact of their discourse on both international audiences and distant victims. They must be aware that their words do more than increase awareness about a particular crisis; they influence how media audiences of the Global North understand the world around them – both the world and character of victims as well as their own role as privileged outsiders. These interpretations have a crucial role in guiding the future relationship between the Global North and South, and whether that relationship is one of mutual respect and support or one which reinforces a pre-existing status quo.

The key principle of this proposed framework emphasizes *treating media audiences and distant sufferers as citizens capable of political thought and action* (rather than simply treating media audiences as emotional fans, or distant sufferers as eternally dependent upon the Global North). This overarching recommendation includes: 1) bringing attention to on-the-ground development contexts, including the causes of suffering (rather than providing reductionist and dramatic descriptions of suffering); and 2) presenting individuals and civil society organizations (both in the Global North and South) as crucial to effecting change (rather than framing governments and international political entities as the sole engines of development).

With great power comes great responsibility: celebrity diplomacy as ethical landmine

It is well accepted by both political institutions and the development world that celebrities hold great sway when it comes to influencing the public and, by extension, other political figures (Cooper 2008; Street 2004; Wheeler 2011). Indeed, celebrity activism in general, and celebrity diplomacy in particular, are nothing new (Richey 2016). The United Nations started its “Goodwill Ambassadors” program in 1962, recognizing early on the benefits of spreading their messages through well-recognized spokespersons.

What is less well-articulated are the responsibilities that ought to accompany such a level of power. The extant literature presented here aims to demonstrate that the world of celebrity diplomacy presents several ethical dilemmas when it comes to discourse aimed at the general public. A simplistic view that any attention celebrities can bring to distant suffering is beneficial must be tempered by evidence that such attention can cause unforeseen side effects.

The power of celebrities in international diplomacy

Part of celebrities' power to influence audiences stems, in part, from the tendency of publics to see them as cultural symbols. Marshall (1997, 243) argues that celebrities embody an articulation of culture in the public sphere, and therefore that publics grant them the status of "proxy" representative of public opinion. In this way, celebrities make it easier for disengaged publics to latch onto political ideas. Fans of a particular celebrity may assume that whatever their preferred celebrity stands for, on any cultural or political topic, is the appropriate position to take, saving them the time and effort of analyzing the situation themselves. Turner (2004) similarly argues that such heuristics allow audiences a means of understanding and synthesizing the ever-changing world around them, and Smith (The Norman Lear Center 2009) adds that groups enthusiastically support celebrities they feel represent their political ideologies, creating a powerful link between celebrities and the public via the public sphere.

In an international policy context, these phenomena are bound to be even more pronounced. Foreign policy is complex, and often far removed from the everyday lives of media audiences. It involves topics that publics may not wish to, or be able to, fully comprehend. Celebrity diplomats therefore serve as guides, leading the public towards particular political attitudes and courses of action when they lack the ability to adequately assess the situation themselves.

It is for this very reason that politicians, activists, and NGOs seek celebrities to publicly support them and speak on their behalves. Television interviews with Jolie and Clooney have resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations to the UN (Boustany 2007), and international NGOs often state that attaining donations without celebrity endorsements is difficult (Cottle and Nolan 2007). In the set of interviews analyzed here, for example, one *Fox News Sunday* host states he is "embarrassed" to say they would not have covered a story on South Sudan if George Clooney were not a part of it (*Fox News Sunday* 2012) and a *CNN Newsroom* anchor admits that they only covered South Sudan "because of George" (*CNN Newsroom* 2016).

This power to set the agenda when it comes to development discourse is what poses particular ethical dilemmas. These can be roughly divided into two main concerns: reductionist interpretations of development challenges and the promotion of long-standing stereotypes regarding the global other. These are each outlined below.

Reductionist representations of development challenges and solutions

While celebrity communication about development can have obvious benefits, such as fundraising, it also means that development challenges tend to be presented in simplistic, reductionist terms. When audiences use celebrity stances as mental shortcuts in foreign policy decision-making, this means they do not seek or receive in-depth analyses of causes and solutions to development problems, but rather trust these public figures to know what is best.

Several scholars have argued that this results in celebrities distorting foreign policy decisions, for example by rallying the public around "false choices" (West and Orman 2003, 113) and "one-dimensional" recommendations (Dieter and Kumar 2008, 261). West and Orman (2003) argue that this occurs because celebrities are often instinctually "endowed with expertise" despite a lack of political knowledge on complex topics. Sharon Stone, for example, was praised for raising US\$1 million for mosquito nets in five minutes at the 2005 World Economic Forum, during a panel on malaria (Holguin 2005). She was inspired by the panel, and publicly put others in the room on the spot, urging them to donate money specifically for mosquito nets. While the move was well intentioned, Stone likely did not

understand the complexity of the malaria problem, the fact that increasing the number of mosquito nets available was probably not an effective solution, or that mosquito nets are often not used for their intended purposes (Gettleman 2015).

Easy solutions to development challenges are ideal media fodder, but do not adequately capture the requirements necessary to produce effective and lasting social change. Attention to these simplistic choices, rather than to the complex environments surrounding cases of distant suffering, diverts focus, and funding, away from where it is most needed.

Furthermore, Kellner (2003) argues that celebrity diplomacy efforts such as Stone's have devolved into mere spectacle: media-friendly appearances that make celebrities look good, but do little to promote useful action. Similarly, Chouliaraki (2013, 3) argues that this celebrity spectacle has contributed to an age of "post-humanitarianism" in which humanitarianism becomes about the 'self' rather than the 'other,' in which "doing good to others" is more about how it makes the do-gooder look and feel rather than about addressing our common humanity through actions that "[ask] nothing back" from development beneficiaries. Celebrity humanitarianism exacerbates this trend, argues Chouliaraki, when it shifts the focus of development efforts onto celebrities and their publics rather than the victims of distant suffering. For example, when Angelina Jolie cries during interviews about her humanitarian work, this may "ultimately reproduce a narcissistic solidarity obsessed with our own emotions rather than oriented toward action on suffering others" (2013, 79), and thus allow audiences to escape the hard work of properly understanding what strategies might improve the lives of those suffering.

Different celebrities, same stereotypes

Celebrity communication about development also has the potential to impact the attitudes of publics in the Global North towards people in the developing world. The extant literature suggests two potential concerns relevant here.

The first relates to a tendency by the media to present developing nations as 'other,' or different from the rest of the world. Much scholarship has focused on the idea that developing regions, in particular Africa, are only covered by Western news outlets when there is "bad news" to report such as war or famine (Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger 1987), resulting in an impression of Africa as "AIDS-ridden", "weird", and "falling apart" (Fair 1993, 5).

Second, some scholarship addresses the ways in which the media present the countries of the Global North as saviors and heroes to the Global South, despite the harmful and lasting effects of colonization and decolonization, and the international policies which have maintained and reinforced inequalities between the haves and have-nots. Said (1993, 55) argues that instead of acknowledging this, the US media in particular convey a sort of "moralistic triumphalism" which makes "the average American feel that it is up to 'us' to right the wrongs of the world, and the devil with contradictions and inconsistencies". Others have argued that such rhetoric, when it is used by public officials, works at a fundamental level by suggesting the United States holds a key role in global policing efforts, thereby laying the psychological groundwork for the justification of more palpable acts of imperialism (Hardt and Negri 2000).

These critiques have not typically been tied to celebrity appearances, but rather to development theory more broadly. They are relevant here because, if such tropes persist within common celebrity discourse,

they are especially likely to reinforce long-established assumptions that those in the Global North are politically and intellectually superior to distant sufferers.

With this in mind, the present study examines how Jolie and Clooney “teach” audiences to think about the world of the other, and how to understand that world in relation to their own political environment.

Method

Current patterns of spoken and written discourse embedded in the media have solidified over time, and are thus seen as natural, making the underlying assumptions within them difficult to tease out. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method for identifying such patterns. CDA assumes that a large part of how we understand the world develops through the imperceptible ways the media “construct” reality (Kraidy 2009, 346). CDA attempts to deconstruct this reality by looking at representations of social inequality – either how inequalities are presented through text or how they might arise from particular uses of text if they become accepted and normalized (Van Dijk 1993).

The sample analyzed here includes television interviews only, given that the aim was to evaluate how celebrities construct meaning for mass, mainstream audiences. Transcripts of American television interviews with these celebrities from January 2001 (the first year that both celebrities were speaking publicly on these issues) to May 2017 (the most recent data available at the time of the analysis) were gathered using a LexisNexis search. I include the period leading up to their UN appointments, as both celebrities spoke about these issues widely beforehand, and after, in the case of Clooney, as he continues to embrace his role as celebrity speaker on the crises in Sudan and South Sudan. 18 interviews with Angelina Jolie and 31 interviews with George Clooney were found, and they were all used in the analysis.

Although this study was conducted within the US media, the analysis and findings apply to the larger Global North – those nations that tend to be the designers and suppliers of international aid interventions, rather than the recipients of aid. Indeed, Jolie and Clooney are American stars, but they were chosen by the UN specifically because of their universal appeal, and the recognition that the willingness of citizens to turn to celebrities as symbols of political righteousness is a global phenomenon.

The primary questions addressed in the CDA are whether and how Jolie and Clooney embed assumptions about the global other, specifically with respect to whether global sufferers are presented as inferior or unequal to those in the Global North, and what can be done by constituencies in the Global North to ameliorate suffering. The aim of the analysis is to better understand how celebrity discourse might thus influence television audience’s attitudes towards and assumptions about the global other, as well as how it might shape the nature of the relationship between the Global North and South.

Discourses of inequality and inefficacy: discussion of findings

A close analysis of the interview transcripts reveals the celebrities’ selective construction of the relationship between citizens of the Global North (usually of the United States) and the global other. Two recurring patterns were particularly salient – one pertaining to how the celebrities define the power relationship between the Global North and victims in the Global South, and one pertaining to how they define the viewers’ potential political engagement with the other:

- 1) *Discourse of Inequality* entrenches historical narratives regarding the global other, including presenting the global other as child, as eternal victim and/or as intellectually and politically underdeveloped; as well as narratives regarding the United States or other countries of the Global North as parent, eternal hero, or savior.
- 2) *Discourse of Inefficacy* suggests that political engagement is unproductive or excludes practical pathways to change, thus promoting a message of hopelessness.

The first of these patterns corresponds to an old and ongoing global discourse which frames nations of the Global South as “other”, as described in the literature review (Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger 1987; Fair 1993), but which has not been applied to discourse surrounding celebrity communication about development. The second, emerging from attention paid to how the information implies a “natural” or assumed state of affairs between the Global North and South, suggests that celebrity diplomats may be falling painfully short in their presumed role as advocates for change, and indeed, perhaps, exacerbating the global political status quo.

Discourse of inequality: heroes and helpless victims

Repeatedly in these interviews, the celebrities portrayed the relationship between the Global North and South as one of helper and helpless. Northern countries were never portrayed as having any role in causing the crises, and were almost always portrayed as able to fix them (though exactly how was often left unstated). For example, in an interview on *Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer* (2008), Clooney observed that:

It’s interesting how quickly things aren’t hopeless when people, a group of people, American citizens, European citizens, suddenly stand up and say, wait a minute, let’s take a look at this.

Jolie similarly argues that “we are missing a lot of opportunities to do a lot of the good that America is used to doing, has a history of doing” (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2006).

In these instances and others, Clooney and Jolie frame the countries of the Global North as best placed to help, and as having a reputation for helping. This instantiation of Said’s “moralistic triumphalism” (1993, 55) obscures the role of the Global North in the circumstances leading up to suffering and the policies that reinforce those conditions.

The goal of both celebrities seems to be to make audiences proud of their country, but this construction implies that the United States and others have almost always supported the global poor, and are usually successful in their attempts to do so. By obscuring the role of the Global North in the conditions that foster suffering, celebrities interfere with the ability of media audiences to adequately understand their own role in global poverty and development.

Equally problematic, these descriptions of the US as savior and guardian are often paired with a description of victims as helpless, less knowledgeable, and more child-like. In many cases the problem is not so much what the celebrities say about these victims, but what they do not say. In presenting the innocence of victims, there is a tendency to speak about the global other using adjectives that are almost always associated with basic, primal instincts and emotions: despair, hope, bravery, beauty, etc. There is little to no acknowledgement of the intellectual or political capabilities of those being helped.

For example, when Jolie states that the United States needs to “be there to really support them at that time, to help them to understand how better to govern” (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2006), to “teach them about law; teach them about having their own health care; teach them about ourselves; teach them about the world” (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2009) or to “help them build their civil society... their schools, everything” (*Amanpour* 2010), she explicitly frames the US as more knowledgeable than these countries, and implicitly suggests that it is, at least in part, this intellectual inferiority that is holding developing nations back. If only these countries *knew* about the kinds of systems the United States and others had in place, they would surely recognize them as superior and adopt them post-haste. This frame suggests a hierarchical relationship of Northern superiority and Southern inferiority, one disconnected from structural factors like international trade policies, debt obligations, political institutions, and the political and economic motivations of both domestic and international players.

Jolie did, on four of the occasions under analysis, ascribe a minimal level of agency to sufferers. For example, she told the story of a man in Myanmar teaching others how to farm more efficiently (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2007), and discussed the need to work with local lawyers to prosecute rape cases in the DRC (*Amanpour* 2014). There were no similar examples given by Clooney. In general, however, these were fleeting references, and for the most part victims were described as in need of guidance from outsiders. Neither Clooney nor Jolie make significant attempts to provide examples of individuals or organizations from the Global South creating change. This is problematic if it leads audiences to believe that the countries of the North are victims’ only possible salvation, as it creates a sense that these groups are inferior and do not have their own ideas about, or make efforts towards, development.

This is not to say that descriptions of victims were not complimentary. Indeed, Jolie and Clooney go out of their way to emphasize the positive characteristics of victims. In an interview with CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour (*Amanpour* 2010), Jolie notes that Haitians:

are so dignified. They’re calm. They’re helping themselves. They inspire me. I see many children with amputations who are smiling and strong and talking about their future. You realize that these people have suffered so much for so long, that, in fact, they are so resilient.

Likewise, Clooney states that the Southern Sudanese are “like everybody else. They want to... raise their children in peace. They want to have a job. They want to go to work. They want to, you know, have families” (*Larry King Live* 2010). The emphasis on the internal character of these victims, however, while complimentary, suggests that their engagement with problems is limited to their strong resolve and commitment to muscle through the tough times.

Describing victims as people “like everybody else” may have the effect of making audiences feel that distant sufferers are worthy of compassion. Indeed, this may well be why Jolie and Clooney feel this message is important. Yet, victims are only “like everybody else” in their most basic, primal characteristics, not in their intellectual or political pursuits regarding development.

Jolie’s choice to describe victims as innocent, resilient, etc., parallels her frequent discussions of her own children in the media. Jolie’s public persona focuses to a large extent on her family, and this motherhood persona extends as well into her humanitarian work (Wilkins 2016), with maternal references pervading her speech. In her interviews, notions of Jolie as nurturer, protector, mother of her own children, mother to her victims, and the United States as parental guardian to the world, fluidly overlap. When she tells audiences that her children “have come from countries that were in conflict

with each other, a son who's Cambodian, a son who's Vietnamese" and that they "have lots of discussions... about all these things" she makes it quite clear that her own efforts to nurture her children parallel her diplomatic efforts to protect millions more like them. This notion of parenthood manifests in her frequent calls for the US to "protect" victims around the world. In an interview with CNN anchor Anderson Cooper (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2006), she states that the victims she works with:

don't have the protection of their own country. They're somewhere uprooted, without any protection, with their families, relying on somebody to open their doors for someplace for them to lay their head down or get some food or something.

While such descriptions may apply to some victims, repeated suggestions that those suffering are simply waiting for someone to give them food and shelter reinforces the idea that the relationship between the Global North and South is one of helpless victim and generous benefactor. It further suggests that there is no change to this relationship in sight – that these attributes are ahistorical and inherent, unbound by circumstance.

Jolie and Clooney would, perhaps, argue that presenting the global other as innocent and desperate is more likely to promote sympathy among media audiences, and therefore more likely to garner reaction. Indeed, there is some evidence in the literature that describing the sorry state of victims, and de-emphasizing facts and context, does promote greater sympathy and greater willingness to "help" (Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic 2007). At the same time, however, recent research indicates that informing audiences about practical *solutions* to development problems is just as effective in promoting action (Kogen and Dilliplane forthcoming). Furthermore, repeated descriptions of desperation may reduce willingness to help in the long-term if such depictions create a sense that the situation is hopeless and that these problems will never end. This discourse of inefficacy is the subject of the next section.

Discourse of inefficacy

Previous scholars have argued that the public often appears indifferent to media representations of suffering because they simply do not know what to do about it, which leads to a feeling of powerlessness (Hoijer 2004; Kogen 2009). Therefore, one obvious potential that celebrities have is to use their public platforms to break through this feeling of powerlessness by giving audiences information they can use to think about how to ameliorate crises. On the other hand, repetitive media discourse that frames suffering as forever escalating, inevitable and ahistorical, denies audience members the ability to understand the problem, and indeed may send the message that permanent change is unlikely.

Thus, one aim of the analysis was to evaluate whether these celebrities inform audiences about how they might help, either through support of particular policies or through individual action. The analysis reveals that both Clooney and Jolie fall short in this regard. When CNN medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta asks Jolie whether she is optimistic about the future of Pakistan, for example, and she responds by saying that "we have no choice but to be optimistic and to have hope. I think, without that, we're just lost and things deteriorate", this represents a typical type of discourse that suggests little belief that long-term change is possible. In the sample overall, there were few instances in which Jolie or Clooney clearly stated what could practically be done to help distant sufferers, and thus to produce change.

Jolie and Clooney did imply, in about half of their interviews, that the United States as well as other countries ought to do *something*, but what exactly should be done was typically unclear. Given their high-level positions within the UN, it may seem odd that they do not explicitly advocate particular plans of action, but as we will see shortly, neither Jolie nor Clooney see this as their role.

In more recent interviews, Clooney, far more often than Jolie, does discuss particular policy recommendations regarding economic sanctions against Sudan and diplomacy efforts towards China. After 2011, Clooney mentions these specific policies in seven of nine interviews indicating, perhaps, an increased effort to bring long-term policy change into the media spotlight.

However, policy recommendations in two of these interviews were undermined by his repeated suggestions that the Obama administration was already adequately responding to policy needs (*Fareed Zakaria* 2011; *Fox News Sunday* 2016). When *Fox News Sunday* anchor Chris Wallace asked Clooney what President Obama should do, for example, he stated only that: “We’re not going to him and saying, ‘Surprise.’ This is something they deal with, you know, every single day they have a conversation about it” (*Fox News Sunday* 2016). Such responses raise the question of what policy, if any, Clooney is advocating. In this case it is left to the broadcaster to explain to the audience, via voiceover (presumably via information gathered off screen before or after the interview), that Clooney wants “the US and other countries” to impose economic sanctions on Sudan.

Avoidance of clear responses to television interviewers’ questions about policy suggests that Clooney is working hard behind the scenes, but that he does not feel that the details of this work are appropriate television fare, or think that viewers would have any interest in such information or have any role to play in promoting sound policy decisions. This raises once again the question of the purpose of his appearing on television aside from his own publicity.

When it came to individual actions by television viewers, Jolie and Clooney seemed loathe to mention what could be done, even when asked directly by interviewers. There were five instances in the analysis in which the interviewer directly asked what audience members could do, and in no case did either celebrity provide a straightforward answer. In one instance, Clooney did say that audience members could call their congressmen, but failed to mention particular policies that individuals might mention or support:

Each little person making that effort and making those calls to their senators, to their congressmen... this is one of those moments where... your voice can truly make a huge difference in this. (*Connect the World* 2010)

Such responses provide little guidance to audience viewers moved by the celebrities’ stories of suffering. Overall, Jolie’s rhetoric suggests a lack of awareness of what individuals can do, while Clooney’s suggests doubt that anyone other than governments can accomplish anything useful. Indeed, Clooney more or less asserts that his role is not to tell the public what course of action to take. Instead, his purpose when appearing in front of television audiences is simply to “shine a light” on atrocities occurring in other parts of the world:

My asking others to get involved I don’t think would make much of a difference. I think that people are involved.... Let me tell you: you go to... a camp [in South Sudan] that’s been set up with some internally displaced people, and there sits a 22-year-old girl... from Kansas, who came

there because she worked in a mission. And the minute you see that... it gives you nothing but hope in the youth of America. (*Larry King Live* 2010)

Clooney suggests here not only that his *role* is not to address individual action but: 1) that “it [wouldn’t] make much of a difference” if he did; and 2) that the public is already doing enough. On one occasion, on *Larry King Live* (2010), Clooney even seems unfamiliar with the individual actions promoted on the very website he was supposedly promoting. King suggests that Americans have interests at home, not in Africa, and Clooney responds by saying: “We’re e-mailing and Twittering and Facebooking. Write an e-mail to the White House saying, ‘Please do everything you can diplomatically’”. John Prendergast, co-founder of the Enough project – an anti-genocide organization – and a guest along with Clooney, has to jump in to add: “We have made it easy for people. SudanActionNow.org, just sign on there. You find a form. You can customize an e-mail and send it straight to the White House, literally in and out in two minutes”.

Similarly, during an interview with then *Today* show co-host Ann Curry (*Today* 2010), Curry has to tell the audience the name of the SudanActionNow website, because Clooney fails to do so.

That Clooney does not see his role as addressing individual action raises the question of what function “raising awareness” among millions of viewers serves. Clooney’s rhetoric suggests that he firmly believes that his role is simply to “shine a light on an area that needs it” (*Larry King Live* 2010) and that by doing so, governments will receive support and things will change: “We are going and standing where people are shooting rockets at us... and that helps get attention to the story that we are trying to tell” (*Fox News Sunday* 2012).

His implicit assumption, then, is that if media audiences *know* about these issues, no matter what exactly they “know” about them, this will produce positive results, though he is unclear about how A leads to B. He elsewhere similarly states that: “If 150 million people know [Kony’s] name now, that can only be good.... The first power we have is knowledge” (*Fareed Zakaria* 2012). Clooney’s assumption that simply spreading awareness of atrocities “can only be good” is questionable, for the reasons elaborated thus far. Simple knowledge about distant suffering may promote sympathy, but on its own: 1) is insufficient to equip audiences with the knowledge of how to create sustainable change; and 2) may reinforce ideologies of inequality between the Global North and South.

While Clooney seems almost dismissive of the role of individuals in promoting positive change, Jolie seems to not have considered the question in much detail. When she is asked directly by interviewers what individuals can do, her responses are flippant and vague. In one instance, CNN anchor Anderson Cooper (*Anderson Cooper 360* 2006) asked Jolie what audiences can do when “it becomes this blur of sort of endless suffering in Africa... and... people sort of throw up their hands”. Jolie answers: “Well, I think to acknowledge that and say, yes, it is another – we understand that”.

Jolie provides equally opaque responses to CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour (*Amanpour* 2010). When Amanpour poses to Jolie, following her post-earthquake trip to Haiti, that Americans “have a very short term look at things like this” and asks what can be done in the long term to pull Haiti out of its poverty trap, Jolie responds by saying that:

I think... it is our responsibility – both of ours – to try to continue to do stories.... I often wonder if the media can handle more than one conflict at a time. I think the American people can. I think the more we

continue to give them information and remind them that it's important. They are a very feeling people, they are a very understanding people, and it's not their lack of interest, it's our lack of explaining why it's important sometimes.

It seems unclear however, even to Jolie herself, how she can better explain "why it's important" or what can be done. She offers no response to how Haiti might escape "its poverty trap".

When Amanpour presses on this, asking specifically what Jolie can do, through her status as a celebrity, Jolie states:

I do feel... passionate about Haiti and the place and the people, and I'll continue to come back and I'll continue to express what I'm learning.... I've been spending the last few days really just trying to gain information and put the pieces together myself and learn about best practices. And when I think I know what they are... I'll certainly express them as strongly as I can to the people I'm in contact with.

Here, Jolie admits that she is not sufficiently knowledgeable to prescribe solutions. While this is honest and fair, it raises the question of why she has chosen to speak to the public about the topic before she is prepared to do so. Furthermore, no evidence was found in the data that Jolie ever re-appeared in the media to clarify her stance on what is needed in Haiti, therefore leaving the public with the impression that no efficacious solutions are available.

Celebrities' inability to articulate to the public what can actually be done constructs the long-term problem as hopeless. When interviewers ask pointed questions about what their audience members can do, this suggests that they believe their audience *wants* to help, and *desires* to know what they, as individuals, perhaps as voting citizens, can do. Indeed, suffering presented in the media implicitly urges audiences to consider what can be done to alleviate it (Kyriakidou 2015, 217), and it is this emotion that these celebrities seem to be intentionally eliciting in their speech. In some cases, as mentioned above, the interviewers even insert the information on how to help when these celebrities do not, in the interests of their audience members. For Jolie and Clooney to offer an image of atrocities, to speak as experts, and then hesitate when asked what can be done to help, borders on irresponsible. The underlying message can easily be interpreted to be that there are no answers, or that the celebrity does not believe that the public has any role themselves in creating change.

A framework for ethical celebrity communication about development

To say that a celebrity's role is simply to "raise awareness" is to deny the consequences that particular constructions of awareness-raising may have. As the analysis and literature review above demonstrate, this includes providing inadequate information on causes and solutions to suffering (promoting a discourse of inefficacy) as well as reinforcing stereotypes about the global other (promoting a discourse of inequality). These two effects are mutually reinforcing: Not saying what audience members can do suggests that nothing can be done, and that distant sufferers are helpless, hopeless, and backward, which thus reinforces ongoing status quo inequalities and assumptions about the "natural" order of things in a globalized world.

Based on the preceding analysis, celebrity advocates must be more thoughtful about the *purpose* of speaking publicly about human suffering and what they would hope audiences do with the information provided. Celebrities can accomplish this by *treating audiences and victims as citizens capable of political thought and action*. There are at least two distinct ways in which celebrities could modify their

discourse to this end: 1) addressing the causes and context of suffering; and 2) addressing potential solutions.

Address the causes and context of suffering

Jolie and Clooney rarely discuss the political and economic factors exacerbating humanitarian suffering, instead focusing more on dramatic descriptions of suffering removed from their wider context. The choice to exclude this information implicitly suggests that the public is not suited to understand the political and economic factors necessary to create positive change. Even more, descriptions of these victims as innocent and child-like may suggest that the victims *themselves* and their lack of knowledge are a large part of the problem.

If these celebrities brought history and political, economic, and social context into their speech, this would go a long way towards helping audiences understand the problem and ways to address it. When Clooney explains that state corruption has led to poverty among the South Sudanese, for example, this helps viewers comprehend the purpose and potential impacts of his Satellite Sentinel project, which records the activities of Sudanese politicians through satellite cameras.

But when celebrities discuss how individuals on the ground must change – e.g. when Jolie talks about helping people learn – there is an embedded implication that problems lie with the victims themselves, not with the wider institutions and contexts in which they find themselves. Such rhetoric is reminiscent of 1960s development efforts, in which citizens of poor countries were seen as backward, underdeveloped, stubborn, and unwilling to modernize (Thomas 2008). There is a lack of recognition that it is often political institutions and policies within these countries (many of which are supported by the Global North) that prevent citizens from leading more productive lives.

Address solutions to suffering, including the role of individuals and non-governmental organizations

If celebrity diplomats feel it is important to communicate about development to publics, it would seem to suggest that they feel the public has a role to play. This should be explicitly addressed in their speech. To do otherwise – to simply make audiences “aware” of suffering – suggests that the only role of the public is to express sympathy for distant victims. Sympathy, of course, has the potential to develop into concrete action, but on its own it is unlikely to do anything more than support short-term handouts or motivate charitable donations.

It also suggests the limited efficacy of the beneficiaries of aid. There is increasing recognition among development scholars that individuals living in poverty are sources for understanding how to *solve* problems, much more so than sources of the problems themselves (Quarry and Ramírez 2009), yet at no point in these interviews did either Jolie or Clooney suggest that they or the UN agencies that they represent had actually spoken to sufferers on the ground and asked what *they* believed was needed to effect change. While civil society in the Global South is admittedly weaker than in more industrialized parts of the world (limited to a large extent by domestic institutional forces), this does not mean that there are not local groups with a strong stance on how best to create change in their own countries. Much work on transnational civil society and on participatory development interventions focuses precisely on how effective these local actors can be (e.g., Khagram 2000; Quarry and Ramírez 2009). Providing this information would not only alter the status quo discourse that silences the global other and inherently places the Global North *above* the Global South, but would allow Northern audiences to

better understand development issues and decide for themselves what kinds of efforts they want to support.

Celebrities' adherence, to the extent possible, to the above framework would allow celebrities to address audiences and distant sufferers as politically capable global citizens. Without this shift, their media appearances are more akin to "spectacles" in the sense described by Kellner (2003), meant to provide moving, horrifying, passionate, or emotional moments for the audience (and positive publicity for the celebrity), but which only allow for superficial engagement with the topic, limiting the viewer's experience to an emotional moment, rather than an action-oriented one.

Conclusion

When they address the *public* on television, celebrity diplomats should have a clear and articulated reason for doing so if they wish their appearances to accomplish anything more than garner publicity.

I have argued that these celebrity diplomats do harm to the global other when they: 1) entrench historical narratives of the other as child, as victim, and as politically underdeveloped, and of the United States as savior and hero; and 2) fail to tell audiences how they themselves can engage politically with the global other.

Denying audiences the information they need to become politically engaged distances the viewer from the global other. It allows audiences to ignore their everyday relationship with the distant sufferer and the policies, practices, assumptions and attitudes that exacerbate poverty and global inequality.

Future work on celebrity communication about development and distant suffering should address how the ethical framework proposed above can become institutionalized and accepted as a norm within CAD. Discourse analyses of celebrities or other well-known political figures that do address audiences and sufferers as suggested here would contribute to this conversation. Additionally, interviews with figures such as Jolie and Clooney regarding their reaction to this framework would both provide insight on its practicality as well as begin to move it from the realm of theory to one of practice.

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