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**BETTER (RED)TM THAN DEAD:
'BRAND AID', CELEBRITIES AND THE NEW FRONTIER OF
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

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Abstract

Bono's launch of Product (RED)TM at Davos in 2006 marks the opening of a new frontier for development aid. The advent of 'Brand Aid' explicitly linked to commerce, not philanthropy, reconfigures the modalities of international development assistance. American Express, Gap, Converse and Armani represent the faces of ethical intervention in the world, as customers are encouraged to do good by dressing well. Consumption, trade and aid wed dying Africans with designer goods, as a new social contract is created to generate a sustainable flow of money to support The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Aid celebrities – the bard, the teacher and the healer – guarantee the 'cool quotient,' the management and the target of this new modality. Bono is the rock-star who led his fans to believe that they could solve Africa's problems of AIDS and poverty. Jeffrey Sachs is the recently-radicalized economist who masterminded The Global Fund. And Paul Farmer is the physician who convinced the world that treatment of AIDS was possible in even the poorest communities. The consumer's signification of status through designer RED products does not represent the exploitation of the most downtrodden – it actually helps them. 'Brand Aid' creates a world where it is possible to have as much as you want without depriving anyone else. Promoted as new leftist development chic, compassionate consumption effectively de-links the relations of capitalist production from AIDS and poverty.

Introduction

Bono's launch of Product (RED)TM at Davos in 2006 marks the opening of a new frontier for development aid. The advent of 'Brand Aid' explicitly linked to commerce, not philanthropy, reconfigures the modalities of international development assistance. American Express, Gap, Converse and Armani represent the faces of ethical intervention in the world, as customers are encouraged to do good by dressing well. Consumption, trade and aid wed dying Africans with designer goods, as a new social contract is created to generate a sustainable flow of money to support The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. Aid celebrities – the bard, the teacher and the healer – guarantee the 'cool quotient,' the management and the target of this new modality. Bono is the rock-star who led his fans to believe that they could solve Africa's problems of AIDS and poverty. Jeffrey Sachs is the recently-radicalized economist who masterminded The Global Fund. And Paul Farmer is the physician who convinced the world that treatment of AIDS was possible in even the poorest communities. Reputable 'aid celebrities' negotiate the interface between shopping and helping, yet it is the pivotal role of the consumer that distinguishes 'Brand Aid' from previous modalities of development assistance. The consumer's signification of status through designer Red products does not represent the exploitation of the most downtrodden – it actually helps them. 'Brand Aid' creates a world where it is possible to have as much as you want without depriving anyone else. Promoted as new leftist development chic, compassionate consumption effectively de-links the relations of capitalist production from AIDS and poverty.

Product RED is 'a brand created to raise awareness and money for The Global Fund by teaming up with iconic brands to produce RED-branded products.'¹ The RED genesis story as popularized through press releases and mass media coverage depicts RED as the creative fruit resulting from many seasons of labour by the aid celebrity extraordinaire, Bono.² Bono started DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa) a global advocacy organization in 2002 with activists from the Jubilee 2000 campaign. RED is described as the outcome of Bono's having thought for years that his ideas for helping the poor needed to be marketed in a less 'misty-eyed, bleeding-

¹ Official RED website: www.joinred.com, last accessed September 2006.

² However, RED may be less attributable to celebrity genius and more to advanced international fundraising strategies. The Global Fund's marketing and media campaign which began in 2004 includes 'co-branded product tie-ins' as part of a priority of 'engaging consumer audiences in key donor markets' (from www.theglobalfund.org, last accessed July 2006).

heart way.’³ According to Bono, worthy causes should receive marketing equal to what ‘a sports-shoe company does, or dare I say it, a cigarette company does’ (Ibid.) Development aid has never before been the equivalent of sporting a pair of cool trainers or sneaking a smoke.

According to Product RED’s official website, ‘RED is the color of emergency and the color of blood which is one of the ways HIV enters the system.’ Bono clarified at the RED launch: ‘Philanthropy is like hippy music, holding hands. Red is more like punk rock, hip hop, this should feel like hard commerce.’⁴ And in fact, ‘the real surprise is that Bono turns out to be a card-carrying capitalist. He wants companies selling RED products to make a profit by helping the poor – doing well by doing good’.⁵ In the words of the American Express RED launch representative, it is ‘conscience commerce’ – good for business, good for all. Of course, this ‘all good things go together’ approach to development as a win-win scenario is not in any way new in international aid. In spite of the discursive prominence of aid pessimism, the premises of 1950s modernization theory, in which the poor need a push to help them ‘take off,’ after which they are destined to become modern like the rest of us, still underpin most development aid. Yet, Brand Aid brings modernization theory into postmodern times: consumption becomes the mechanism for compassion.

Giorgio Armani was most explicit in his recognition of the capitalist bottom-line with his speech launching the RED Armani sunglasses at Davos: ‘The new formula is that this is charity to the world of course, but particularly it is the fact that commerce will no longer have a negative connotation.’⁶ Bono explicitly rejected that he was being used by companies to restore their reputations.⁷ ‘We are not endorsing their products, these products endorse us’ Bono claimed.⁸

While modern philanthropists have morphed into postmodern consumers, the stationary supporting cast is dragged back onto the development stage to justify this newest version, the

³ Matthew Bishop, ‘View from Davos: Bono marketing his red badge of virtue,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 2006.

⁴ Tim Weber, ‘Bono bets of Red to battle Aids,’ BBC News website, 26 January 2006. See news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4650024.stm, last accessed March 2006.

⁵ Matthew Bishop, ‘View from Davos: Bono marketing his red badge of virtue,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 2006.

⁶ RED product launch at Davos video, viewed from www.joinred.com, last accessed March 2006.

⁷ For example, converse is owned by Nike, the company notorious for years of using sweatshop labour in the Third World and for sparking university activism against it.

⁸ Tim Weber, ‘Bono bets of Red to battle Aids,’ BBC News website, 26 January 2006. See news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4650024.stm, last accessed March 2006.

rock man's burden. An example from the Product RED launch is telling. Converse introduced their high-top basketball shoes in 'mudcloth' design, linking consumption culture with production culture, while also claiming that not only could RED help fight AIDS in Africa, it could go even further by saving African culture itself.

Mudcloth is the DNA of their culture. AIDS kills culture ... We're going to be working with RED to identify those people who push culture globally and ask them to create products with us. We think that the idea of celebrating global culture on an iconic product to help save African culture is an important part of what we are going to be doing.⁹

What are the images conjured up here? 'Mudcloth' is of course an English translation, and 'mud' is usually something that 'modern' people try to keep off their clothes. Yet, this represents 'the African' who is primordially, biologically, at the DNA level, designed with an inability to defend, maintain or interpret African culture. Therefore, we must 'push culture globally' to get it back to the Africans, and by doing so, through the purchase of a pair of basketball shoes, we can 'save African culture' from AIDS. In fact, Brand Aid is presented as the solution to African AIDS. The American Express RED product promoter explains: 'the only sustainable way that this issue could be addressed by business was if there was a way to generate revenues for companies, then some of the profit could be channeled to Africans with AIDS.'¹⁰ Africans as recipient natives to be helped by the remnants of capitalism is hardly a new representation, but the pivotal roles of the consumer as actor and the celebrity as mediator set Brand Aid apart.

Yet, the contradictions of capitalism are not the only relations where Brand Aid is intended to bring resonance. Brand Aid promises resolution to a myriad of historical conflicts about the possibilities of being 'donor,' and of confining the most intrinsic problems of development within a geographical demarcation that can be kept separate from the Western self. AIDS provides the quintessential cause as the outlet for Brand Aid's hard commerce approach to doing good, because, like fashion, rock music, or celebrity, it is about money, power and sex. As described in *The Sunday Times*, 'the sex appeal of red' comes also from stars like Scarlett Johansson, 'the sizzling face of Bono's new ethical brand.' 'Johansson is peeling off her clothes in a photographic studio in LA, in preparation for becoming the pin-up for Bono's

⁹ RED product launch at Davos video, viewed from www.joinred.com, last accessed March 2006.

¹⁰ Ibid.

new plan.’¹¹ Johansson’s interpretation of why the new product is called RED is that ‘It’s a sexy, hot color that’s vibrant and attention-grabbing. It has been since the 1940s, such a time of high glamour and red lipstick and red nails. That’s probably why they chose it for this campaign –glamour!’¹² While a first reading suggests that the messages promoted by RED are not only unrealistic, but in total contradiction to the ‘Abstain, Be Faithful or use Condoms’ (ABC) approach to African sex, a closer examination suggests that RED may be offering sexual alternatives. Individuals are encouraged to express their sexuality, their attractiveness and their desire through consumer choices, not through intimate actions.

‘And that’s what RED is all about, the knowledge that desire – the desire to shop – and virtue – the wish to see the world a better place – are not always contradictory.’¹³ The mass appeal of RED is quintessentially described by Debbie K. in the ‘Reader Comments’ online section of the *BusinessWeek*:

I think this is a BRILLIANT IDEA! With RED, consumers can show through their purchases their support of an eminently important humanitarian issue - the AIDS pandemic and its horrendous effects in Africa. Corporations can ‘win’ the goodwill of a skeptical public who view corporations as the ‘bad guy’ rather than as the ‘good guy’. They also get to expand their market base to consumers who may not have been interested in them otherwise. And the People of Africa get the chance of a longer and better life for themselves, their families and their communities through increased and better health care. Everyone wins - and what can be better than that? THANK YOU, BONO.¹⁴

This quote may suggest that Product RED is equivalent to the reality television of international assistance. However, RED can not be easily dismissed this way. The newest RED product, launched on 5 August 2006, is a special issue of the most prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet* – specially termed (*The Lancet*).^{RED} As explained by the journal’s editorial:

¹¹ Tiffanie Darke, ‘The sex appeal of red,’ *The Sunday Times*, 26 February 2006. women.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,18030-2046382,00.html, last accessed March 2006.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ‘Shop with Bono,’ *The Sunday Times*, 26 February 2006. women.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,18030-2045580,00.html, last accessed March 2006.

¹⁴ www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/jan2006/nf20060127_5254.htm?campaign_id=rss_daily, last accessed March 2006.

For the first time in its 183 year history, this week's issue of *The Lancet* is black and white and (RED) all over. The journal also contains, rather unusually, advertisements for a Motorola mobile phone, an American Express card, and clothing by GAP. This is because *The Lancet* has joined (PRODUCT) RED. . . . *The Lancet* is taking part in this exciting initiative and is contributing \$30,000 to (PRODUCT) RED in support of this important project. We hope that other medical and scientific journals and publishers will join this cause.¹⁵

Brand Aid provides a new mechanism for development finance that weds doctors with rockers, consumers with celebrities, and business with help. In the next section, we narrate a very brief history of development assistance, aid for AIDS and the innovative mechanism called *The Global Fund*. Then, we introduce the 'aid celebrities' who are critical functionaries performing the totemic work of Brand Aid. Afterward, we describe the relations constituted by development capitalism and the place of RED and Brand Aid more generally as a new development modality. Finally, we conclude on some of the material and representational ambiguities of Brand Aid.

Aid, AIDS and The Global Fund

Foreign aid to the world's poorest countries, most of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa, has been mired in controversy since its inception. US Senator Jesse Helms notoriously disparaged aid to poor regions such as Africa as throwing money 'down a rathole' (Goldstein and Moss 2005: 1289). In spite of such perceptions, when the then US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill returned from his tour of Africa in 2002, he declared that more money would be given to poor countries, but that this money must be used with more efficiency than in the past. The companion for the US money master's vision quest was the celebrity spirit-guide Bono. The efficiency argument has been closely linked with the assumption that African countries are the paradigms of 'bad governance.' Corruption, nepotism, the 'big man' theory of leadership, and a dearth of accountability have become synonymous with notions of aid in Africa. Yet, recent regression analysis conducted by a team including the celebrity economist Jeffrey Sachs show

¹⁵ Editorial, 'The Business of HIV/AIDS' in (*The Lancet*)^{RED} vol 368, August 5, 2006: 423. Note that Motorola joined RED after the launch of the four original RED products.

that 'Africa's governance, on average, is no worse than elsewhere after controlling for income levels' (McCord, Sachs and Woo 2005: 24).

However, Africa is locked into a 'poverty trap' resulting from a complex web of structural and socio-political factors that interact to produce 'the bad equilibrium in a multiple equilibrium world' (Ibid.; see also Sachs et al. 2004). One major factor in the bad governance that results from the poverty trap is that 'Africa carries a disease burden unique in the world' (McCord, Sachs and Woo 2005: 28). To undo the trap a 'big push' is needed and the well-governed African countries should be given a big expansion in official development assistance aimed at implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But this is limited to the worthy recipients: 'Official development assistance should be scaled up significantly only for countries that can help themselves' (Ibid.: 39). The Lord, Adam Smith and bilateral aid donors only help those who can help themselves.

To raise more funds, however, donors must be convinced that the 'efficiency condition' is being met. As de Janvry and Sadoulet (2004) argue, this can be done in two ways: either through limiting aid to those countries which follow good economic policies, or to fund 'good programs' whether or not they are in the context of 'good policies.' The latter, easier option has been embraced by donors and includes the creation of a semi-autonomous distribution mechanism that allows programs to be set up even where policies are weak. These social funds, like Product RED's beneficiary, The Global Fund, are neither state, business, nor civil society but can be a mix of any of these in varying proportions. Private interests working for the public good are appealing: donors trust business to meet the efficiency condition because that is what business does.

Efficiency and governance continue as the buzzwords of international aid. Yet, historically, foreign aid has provided a very high percentage of government budgets in precisely the countries where governance records have been poorest (Brautigam and Knack 2004). In weak states, large amounts of aid and the way that it is delivered make it more difficult for good governance to develop (Ibid.: 256). While there has been a clear trend toward funding toward support of 'proven, developmental governments,' and some donors have moved toward 'common basket funds' or 'sector investment programs' in an attempt to alleviate the negative impact of too many uncoordinated donor efforts on recipient countries' governance, it remains to be seen how countries with poor governance and weak states can be motivated to adjust their side of the aid interdependence (Ibid.: 277).

International development assistance has always been linked to donor countries' need to give aid in particular ways and to concerns that the funds given are used as intended. The current basis for all development assistance rests under the three pillars of the 'Monterrey Consensus':¹⁶ country ownership, a comprehensive and long-term approach, and partnership (World Bank 2003a: 2). This framework is meant to direct aid toward reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by 189 states. Included among these goals is to 'halt and begin to reverse the spread of AIDS by 2015' and also to 'provide, in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.'¹⁷

Over the past three decades, rich countries' levels of foreign aid as a share of their GDP have plummeted. Only a few 'good world citizens' such as the Danes, the Dutch and the Swedes actually meet the UN 0.7 percent goal. The Americans' current aid spending amounts to only one tenth of one percent of GDP (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2004), reflecting a reluctance to become too heavily involved in poor countries and to use foreign policy as social work (Mandelbaum 1996). Sachs characterizes the 'drop in the bucket' approach of the superpower: 'In 2002, the United States gave \$3 per sub-Saharan African. Taking out the parts for US consultants, food and other emergency aid, administrative costs, and debt relief, the aid per African came to the grand total of six cents' (2005: 310). In spite of the comparably low proportion of its money given in development assistance,¹⁸ the US has recently embraced aid to Africa under President George W. Bush, with a \$15 billion African AIDS initiative as its flagship.¹⁹

Foreign aid is given for a variety of purposes including health, AIDS, population, social infrastructure (i.e. schools and water projects), economic infrastructure (i.e. banking, transport), sector aid (i.e. agriculture, industry), commodity and general programmatic assistance (i.e. food aid, structural adjustment funds, budget support), multi-sector assistance (i.e. for women, the environment) and debt (i.e. debt forgiveness, rescheduling). International development assistance funding sources have been bilateral aid (government to government), international NGOs, UN-organizations, development banks, and private foundations. The actual amount

¹⁶ In March 2002, 171 nations pledged their commitments toward funding international development at the UN's international conference on financing for development.

¹⁷ General Assembly, A/55/L.2, 18 September 2000.

¹⁸ Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) transfers from the US are the largest among OECD members in absolute terms, but the smallest as a percentage of national income (Goldstein and Moss 2005: 1300).

¹⁹ Pressure from the increasingly-powerful Republican right wing on a few African causes, including their 'recent conversion' to the fight against HIV/AIDS is likely to have been the biggest factor in George W. Bush's 'newfound enthusiasm' for African aid (Goldstein and Moss 2005: 1300).

of money given has grown by 5.9 percent per annum between 1993 and 2003, and the share of funds devoted to health, AIDS and population increased from 5.5 percent to 6.7 percent of total development assistance (MacKellar 2005). The most dominant trend among donors is the shift toward funding that targets sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV / AIDS. If money given for HIV/AIDS is taken out of the calculation of funding, then health has actually declined as a share of ODA, from 5.4 percent in 1993 to 5.0 percent in 2003 (Ibid.: 308). Donor initiatives make up 68 percent of all funds, public and private, spent on AIDS in developing countries for 2005 –60 percent more than the 8 percent share agreed upon in Cairo in 1994 (van Dalen and Reuser 2005: 36).

HIV/AIDS accounts for almost all development assistance for control of sexually-transmitted diseases (MacKellar 2005). In fact, most of the development money spent on ‘health’ is actually directed toward AIDS. Activists and the many affected by HIV/AIDS would argue that this is a reasonable response to the disease-burden of AIDS. However, it is being allocated a much higher share of official development assistance than can be explained by its share in the burden of disease as measured by the DALYs (disability-adjusted life years)(Ibid.: 301).²⁰ AIDS receives far more dollars per DALY than any other cause (Ibid.) Why? Effective advocacy, the fear factor that if not controlled in developing countries, AIDS could have a greater impact in rich countries, and a well-publicized ‘efficiency’ argument – slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS was the highest-priority cost-effective development intervention as rated by the Copenhagen Consensus of Economists.²¹

The most well-known initiatives in public health development assistance are public-private partnerships such as The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative; the US President’s Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization; Stop TB; and Roll Back Malaria. In spite of the publicity given to these new modalities, they are financed mostly by the traditional sources of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA): donor-country governments as represented in the Development Assistance Committee and to a lesser extent, multilateral institutions like the World Bank (MacKellar 2005: 294).

²⁰ The disease burden of HIV/AIDS is 84.5 million compared to lower respiratory infections at 91.3 million, and there is an extensive overlap between diseases occurring in developing countries (Hotez et al. 2006: 102).

²¹ See www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=158, last accessed September 2006.

Product RED's beneficiary, The Global Fund, is an independent, private foundation governed by an international board that works in partnership with governments. It is strictly a funding and not an implementing agency. The Global Fund differs from bilateral initiatives in its more balanced decision-making process of including donors and recipients. Financing comes to The Global Fund primarily from nation-states, but also from foundations and individuals on a completely voluntary basis, and thus commitments are not legally binding. One of the largest contributors to The Global Fund, the US government, is not permitted by law to contribute more than 33 percent of the total paid-in funding. Officially, there are attempts to 'harmonize efforts' to fight HIV/AIDS with the US PEPFAR, and to 'prevent overlapping efforts and conflicting priorities.'²² PEPFAR is also a major financier of The Global Fund, providing \$200 million in 2005 (van Dalen and Reuser 2005: 16).²³ However, unofficially, PEPFAR is perceived by some of its implementers as replicating many of The Global Fund's existing activities.

Not only have public health issues in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular, been increasingly favoured by donors, they have also gained mass appeal as popular global causes. This unusual level of popularity is epitomized by the November 2005 TIME Global Health Summit, flagged by Bono as 'The Woodstock of Global Health.'²⁴ Product RED gives the impression that the work that it funds to combat AIDS is innovative, outside of the usual bureaucratic mire of development aid, and reliant on individuals. However, like the major suppliers of development funding to combat HIV/AIDS, The Global Fund receives most of its revenue from donor governments, not from young fashionistas. Reiterative consumption of luxury products by Western buyers is not likely to carry the burden of generating a sustainable flow of money to support The Global Fund, but standard allocations of ODA might. However, the point, we argue, lies not in the effectiveness of Product RED as a funding modality, but in its innovative characterization of the relations of consumption and donation.

²² 'Confirmation of U.S. Pledge for 2004 Boosts Global Fund Resources for Fourth Proposal Round to \$900 Million,' The Global Fund, Press Release, 26 February 2004.

http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/media_center/press/pr_040226.asp, last accessed September 2006.

²³ PEPFAR spending is allocated by programs: 55 percent for treatment, 20 percent for prevention (one third of which goes to controversial abstinence-only programs), 15 percent for palliative care, 10 percent for orphans and vulnerable children, \$1 billion over 5 years to The Global Fund and \$5 billion to bilateral HIV/AIDS programs.

²⁴ www.time.com/time/2005/globalhealth, last accessed March 2006.

The Bard, the Teacher and the Healer

The celebrity is constitutive of what we are calling 'Brand Aid.' Legitimacy in the process of conscientious consumption is guaranteed by aid celebrities. Among the many possible definitions of 'celebrity,' we have chosen Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991: 222-230): a state of superiority in a world where opinion is the defining instrument for measuring different orders of 'greatness.' In this approach, being a celebrity is characterized by having a widespread reputation, being recognized in public, being visible, having success, being distinguished, and having opinion leaders, journalists and media as your testimonials. The test of celebrity is the judgment of the public (Ibid.). The best celebrities are 'masters or very experienced people at managing their own brand,' according to Jamie Drummond, head of Bono's DATA. Celebrities' engagement with social causes mainstreamed international development issues into the mass media. International development experts, associated with celebrity activists, also became 'aid celebrities' themselves. Celebrated development icons embody a new positive, 'win-win' approach toward solving poverty and disease. 'One of the things that happens when your organization signs up with celebrity is that personality can become policy.'²⁵ After more than three decades of defeatism in development, aid celebrities are the new totems of possibility.

Product RED is fundamentally different from the current spate of certifications, labels and codes of conduct that characterize ethical trade, compassionate consumption and corporate social responsibility. It is contradictory to the 'audit culture' that underpins these processes (Power 1997; Strathern 2000) and that aims at 'impersonal' and systemic solutions to problems of quality, food safety, environmental impact, and social conditions of production. Product RED is based on 'celebrity validation', which is based on personal capacity.

FROM 'BAND AID' TO 'BRAND AID'

Celebrity activism has been taking place prominently since the 1960s. Before then, musicians and actors engaged in only the safest social causes. Two world wars, music and film's escapist entertainment of the 1930s, and the post-WWII anti-communist witch-hunt in the US worked against artists taking up prominent social causes – with the notable exceptions of Paul Robeson and Woody Guthrie (Huddart 2005: 21). According to Huddart, celebrity activism

²⁵ Time Global Health Summit, 1 November 2005, media transcript from 'Rock and Roll Philanthropy: How Can Mass Media Campaigns Make a Difference?' www.time.com/time/2005/globalhealth, last accessed March 2006.

bloomed from the 1960s onwards and can be constructed as a succession of 'waves'. A first wave took place during the US civil rights movement. It took inspiration from Martin Luther King and combined 'heroic voices' (such as Joan Baez and Bob Dylan) with 'convenors' (Harry Belafonte), who enrolled a group of celebrities (Marlon Brando, Burt Lancaster) to add moral weight to just causes, increase public interest, and reduce anxiety with familiar faces (2005: 31-32). A second wave coalesced around the anti-war movement and opposition to the draft in the US from the mid-1960s. During this time, the first 'benefit concerts' took place. A third wave followed from the 1970s, where activism aimed at responding to global concerns: from George Harrison's 'Concerts for Bangladesh' in 1971, to the 1974 'Evening for Salvador Allende' and the 'No Nukes' concerts of 1978-79. But perhaps the most important events that marked the growth of celebrity activism were Bob Geldof's recording of 'Do they know it's Christmas' in 1984 and the related Live Aid concerts of 1985. An estimated two billion people watched the concerts, and the telethon raised almost \$150 million, the largest ever at the time. Geldof's use of sponsorship at Live Aid made it possible to minimize costs and maximize the amount of donations to the cause. 'Live Aid's use of highly emotional televised images to stimulate donations . . . subsequently changed the face of international fundraising' (Huddart 2005: 37). Now, we are saturated with these images, so much that we do not need to refer to them, they are always out there in the collective subconscious. This allows Bono and Product RED to focus on cool, sexy branding rather than on poverty, inequality and disease.

Following Live Aid, celebrity activism and charity work have become much more widespread. From the mid-1980s to the early-2000s, the focus shifted back and forth from addressing systemic problems to coalescing attention around 'urgent issues'. From the late 1990s onward, celebrity activism, reinvigorated by Bono's 'oxygen of publicity,' culminated in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, and the 2005 Live8 concerts. The popularity of these initiatives permitted celebrity activists to become increasingly involved in political lobbying from the stage.

We contend that the Product RED initiative opens a '4th wave' of celebrity activism that marks a fundamental break with the past, moving from 'Band Aid' to 'Brand Aid'. Although sponsorship had become accepted practice after Live Aid, with Product RED the marriage of consumption and social causes has become one and indivisible.²⁶ Bono brought the work of Geldof and others to new heights, and indeed with Product RED, to a new form. The primary

²⁶ The marriage of branding and celebrity activism per se is not a new phenomenon. 'Newman's Own' range of food products has been around for 20 years, and its cumulative profits of \$125 million have been donated to charities.

goal of Product RED is not to push governments to do their part, but to push consumers to do theirs through exercising their choices.

The Global Fund owes its existence to the three aid celebrities – Jeffrey Sachs, Paul Farmer and Bono. Interestingly, it is not written on either the history of the Fund or in Sachs' *curriculum vitae* that he began the fund,²⁷ probably reflecting how critical it is that The Global Fund not be associated with any individual or partisan interest.²⁸ However, in Sachs' (2005) popular audience book *The End of Poverty*, he describes Bono as an 'enthusiastic supporter' of the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, chaired by Sachs for two years from 2000.²⁹ Sachs describes how 'none but the incomparable Bono has opened the eyes of millions of fans and citizens to the shared struggle for global equality and justice' (2005: xii). It was in the context of the WHO commission that Sachs began to push the idea of a global fund to fight AIDS and malaria. However, 'one more piece was missing' (2005: 205): it was still believed that AIDS treatment was impossible to implement in poor countries. As told by Sachs, 'my colleague Paul Farmer put those arguments to rest for me and, in some ways, for the world' (Ibid.). Sachs, Farmer and two other colleagues from Harvard prepared the Consensus Statement by Members of the Harvard Faculty to show that treatment was possible and scale-up could be practical in poor countries (Ibid.: 206). On the basis of Sachs' advice, the UN secretary-general announced at the Abuja Summit on AIDS in April 2001 his support for the creation of The Global Fund. This was followed in the coming months by support from US President Bush, the UN General Assembly and the G8 leaders – and thus The Global Fund was born.

More than simply exercising their networking capabilities, celebrities act as emotional sovereigns, in the classical republican sense where the sovereign manifests the true will of 'the people.' Aid celebrities are called upon to speak truth to public health. Their field experiences are recounted as narrative devices in various and dissimilar publications. For example, a recent World Bank working paper authored by a team of macroeconomists outlines a monitoring model for the MDGs (Agenor et al. 2005). As a text, it is characterized by decimals, Greek

²⁷ See www.theglobalfund.org/en/about/road/history/default.asp06/07/2006 and www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/about/director/fullbio.html, last accessed July 2006.

²⁸ Sachs' Earth Institute at Columbia University must apply to The Global Fund or PEPFAR for grants like any other organization.

²⁹ Interestingly, Sachs also credits Bono's 'reading of scripture with Jesse Helms' and charismatic lobbying of the US religious right for the introduction of PEPFAR (Sachs 2005: 344).

letter coefficients and tables of regression results. Yet, the introduction consists of a lengthy quotation from Bono's interview with a popular American news program, 'NBC's Meet the Press.' The celebrity totem says the things that the economists cannot – 'it is the most extraordinary thing to watch people dying three in a bed, two on top and one underneath, as I have seen in Lilongwe, Malawi' (cited in Agenor et al. 2005: 3). Sanitized sensationalism is intended to link the arduous work of constructing quantified targets for monitoring each goal of the MDGs with the 'avoidable catastrophe' of human suffering. The same story is told in slightly different words in the first chapter of Jeffrey Sachs' *The End of Poverty*. What distinguishes this vignette is not its description of an African clinic mired in poverty, but that repeated like a mantra by an aid celebrity. The transformative magic of the celebrity totem brings the possibility of an improbable faith: that macroeconomic models of MDG's will improve the plight of sufferers in this Malawian clinic.

In the rest of this section, we describe the aid celebrities – the bard, the teacher and the healer – who guarantee the 'cool quotient,' the management and the target of the 'Brand Aid' modality. Bono guarantees the 'cool quotient' of the aid modality. Jeffrey Sachs is 'the advisor of the cool guy,' whose intellectual demeanour and neo-liberal credentials guarantee that the brand aid modality will be well-managed and efficient. And Paul Farmer's lifework in a rural Haitian clinic guarantees that the problem of HIV/AIDS in the developing worlds causes sufficient suffering among the deserving poor to merit global attention and action.

THE BARD

Only Bono, the quintessential ambassador, could have started Product RED. 'Bono is a bit unique and in some ways he is American just as French people think he's French and Germans think he's German. That's how he manages his brand and gets away with it,' according to DATA founder, Jamie Drummond.³⁰ Bono is compelled to reconcile the 'divides that separate Northern Ireland from the Irish republic, rich from poor, Catholic from Protestant, Democrat from Republican, aggressor from victim, Christian from Muslim' (Huddart 2005: 54). Now he has reconciled corporations and inequity, branding and disease. Bono's social activism record, while much more visible in the last couple of years, goes back at least to the early 1990s (Ibid.: 52-53). His letters to newspapers, public challenge to Tony Blair and meetings with world leaders are thought to have had a direct impact on debt cancellations that

³⁰ Time Global Health Summit, 1 November 2005, media transcript from 'Rock and Roll Philanthropy: How Can Mass Media Campaigns Make a Difference?' www.time.com/time/2005/globalhealth, last accessed March 2006.

the G7 offered in 1999 and on the US contribution to the HIPC initiative. More recently, Bono joined the campaign against pharmaceutical companies to lower their prices for Anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment against AIDS. He was photographed with G.W. Bush in Monterey in 2002, when the president announced that the US was to increase its foreign aid budget to \$5 billion between 2004 and 2006 – in what was termed a Compact for Global Development. Within such a compact, US money is destined to ‘countries with good governance’ and ‘sound economic policy’ to ‘advance economic freedom’ and ‘enhance productivity’.

Later in 2002, Bono and then US Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill took a ten-day tour of Africa, also known as ‘The Odd Couple Tour of Africa 2002.’³¹ They swept through foreign aid projects in Ghana, Uganda, South Africa and Ethiopia. The itinerary included AIDS clinics, schools, clean water schemes and orphanages. O’Neill, Bono said, is ‘the man in charge of America’s wallet ... I want to open that wallet.’ Interestingly, Bono prepared for his tour with O’Neill by having a similar one with Jeffrey Sachs.

Bono’s and Bob Geldof’s initiatives have overlapped several times in the last few years. Geldof was a member of the Commission for Africa, set up by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in early 2004. Its final report, ‘Our Common Interest’, was published shortly before the G-8 summit in 2005. Its goal was to propose measures for a ‘a strong and prosperous Africa.’ Although it was Bob Geldof who organized the Live8 series of concerts in 2005 to put pressure on G8 leaders meeting in Gleneagles, Bono played a key part as well. Geldof and Bono at the press conference praised the G8 summit for pledging to double aid to Africa to \$50 billion, saying that ‘the move will save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who would have died of poverty, malaria or AIDS.’³²

‘The G8 leaders have it within their power to alter history. They will only have the will to do so if tens of thousands of people show them that enough is enough. By doubling aid, fully cancelling debt, and delivering trade justice for Africa, the G8 could change the future for millions of men, women and children. LIVE 8 is calling for people across the world to unite in one call – in 2005 it is your voice we are after, not your money.’³³ Interestingly, Bono’s Product RED turns this statement on its head, implicitly suggesting that ‘we are after your money,

³¹ O’Neill was fired by President Bush in December 2002, apparently in response to poor communication strategies, and for not having handled the Enron affair of corporate corruption appropriately.

³² Source: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8512632/#story, last accessed March 2006.

³³ Source: www.live8live.com/whatsitabout/index.shtml, last accessed March 2006.

not your voice.’ Product RED is about individual consumption, not about public engagement in activism or advocacy. It is a private commitment showcased by wearing Red products in public, with Bono guaranteeing the cool quotient.³⁴

THE TEACHER

Jeffrey Sachs is the economist behind many of the initiatives to cancel debt and ‘eradicate poverty’ that have emerged in the public realm in the last decade. The Harvard-trained economist, who in 1983 became full professor of economics at Harvard at age 29, has piled up an impressive number of high-pedigree positions in the development arena. He is director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University, Professor of Sustainable Development, and Professor of Health Policy and Management at the same university. He is director of the UN Millennium Project and Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals. In such capacity he has been influential in setting the MDGs to reduce extreme poverty, disease, and hunger by 2015. Sachs is a true celebrity, and not only in development circles. He was named in the list of top 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2004 and 2005. He has been advisor to IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Development Program. He was deemed ‘most important economist in the world’ by *The New York Times Magazine* and ‘the world’s best-known economist’ by *Time* magazine. Bono identified Sachs as ‘Jimi Hendrix’ at the ‘Woodstock of Global Health.’

The status he has achieved as a ‘progressive’ economist is even more striking, considering the fact that in the late-1980s and early-1990s, Sachs spent most of his time advising Eastern European and former Soviet Republics on ‘shock therapy’, a series of economic reforms that were meant to help former communist regimes to find the path of capitalism painfully but quickly. Generally, Sachs in the 1980s was part of the wave of economists that criss-crossed the world to advise developing and transition country governments on structural adjustment and market liberalization. He was a key advisor to Solidarity and to the first post-communist government in Poland. From 1991 to 1994, Sachs led a team of economic advisors for Russian President Boris Yeltsin on issues of stabilization, privatization, and market liberalization.

³⁴ In this, Product RED is different from initiatives such as Lance Armstrong’s wrist-bands. The main point of wearing these bands is not to appropriate their aesthetics – they only become ‘cool’ through their association with the celebrity and his cause of funding cancer research. The co-branding of Product RED with established brands and products allows wearers/users to both make an aesthetic statement and to signal the ‘good’ factor in ways that are more subtle and perhaps even not evident to the ‘public’.

Then, in the mid-to-late 1990s, Sachs went through a populist transformation, re-packaging himself as a progressive economist. He became interested in the macroeconomics of public health and went back to his early career interest on debt reduction and restructuring, now modified into debt cancellation. He also became more interested in Africa. He collaborated with Ann Pettifor in raising the public profile of the Jubilee 2000 debt cancellation campaign, to which he was economic advisor. He became friends with Bono, accompanying him on many occasions – both of them embodying the image of relatively young, successful professionals that carry the torch of ‘soft capitalism’ and Western values. Both men, in separate occasions, met with Pope John Paul II – Sachs did it twice. Bono, in the foreword of Sachs’ book *The End of Poverty*, writes: ‘[Sachs] is an economist who can bring to life statistics that were, after all, lives in the first place. He can look up from the numbers and see faces through the spreadsheets.’ Yet, many of the poor and diseased Africans Sachs is now trying to save became so at least partly as a result of the reforms he advocated in the 1980s – public sector retrenchments, roll-backs from the provision of public goods and services, and the elimination of parastatal entities that controlled commodity trade and exports and that used to cushion farmers from commodity price shocks.

THE HEALER

Paul Farmer, physician and medical anthropologist, has shown by example, that ARV treatment can resurrect patients suffering from the late-stages of AIDS, even in the poorest circumstances. In 1990, he received doctorates from Harvard. He is an accomplished scholar, with over 100 publications and a clinical physician with dual practices in the US and Haiti. And, according to at least one of his former patients, he’s a god. Farmer began his lifework while still a medical student at Harvard when he set up a community-based healthcare delivery system in Cange on the central plateau of Haiti, the poorest country in the West. To support the work, he founded a Boston-based charity called ‘Partners in Health’ in 1987 which supported the work of the Haitian centre *Zammi Lasante*. Its mission, according to Farmer, is both medical and moral and it is based on solidarity, rather than just charity. He began with a one-building clinic. ‘Today, the well-equipped facility, with its operating rooms, blood bank, satellite communications, laptops, and other components of modern medicine, is a global model for delivering public-health services.’³⁵ Farmer’s work in Haiti was a pivotal factor in

³⁵ Michael Satchell, ‘Wiping out TB and AIDS,’ U.S. News and World Report, 31 October 2005. www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/051031/31farmer.htm, last accessed September 2006.

the country's selection as the first country in the world to receive money from The Global Fund.

Farmer's revolutionary tactic of 'social medicine' includes providing lifesaving medicines and surgical care together with clean water, food, housing, education and social services. Partners in Health tackles the most daunting challenges in infectious disease control including multi-drug resistance tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS affecting the poor in Boston's inner city, as well as in Haiti, Guatemala, Peru, Rwanda, Russia and Mexico. In 2005, they received the world's largest humanitarian award, the \$1.5 Hilton Prize, for their multi-faceted and unconventional approach to aid. When granting the Heinz Award for the Human Condition to Farmer in 2003, Teresa Heinz, chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation described: "To say that Dr. Paul Farmer is a life saver does not begin to describe the impact of his work."³⁶

Farmer's books link his medical and moral missions with an important political message of 'putting the poor first' (Farmer 1992; 1999; 2003). He has become the first 'global doctor,' known through the anecdotes and photographs of his Haitian community members, but substantiated with science, effectiveness and efficiency.³⁷ Thousands of people around the world have seen the photograph of Joseph, who was dying of AIDS and tuberculosis at age 26, but after receiving access to antiretroviral drugs through one of Farmer's Global Fund expansion sites, is shown as a healthy man with his daughter propped on his hip. Farmer's presentations then show Joseph when he was *really* a changed man, a year later as he gave a talk as a prevention activist at a health and human rights conference.

When Bono claimed at the 'Global Health Summit' that 'a world without malaria or TB is no longer unthinkable' the reference was to Paul Farmer. Farmer himself was invited to this 'Woodstock of Global Health' to address the case for optimism. He proclaimed that 'doing the right thing for people living in poverty and facing disease will allow us to start a "virtuous social cycle," even if we began by attacking AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria or maternal mortality.'³⁸ While Farmer's moral tone and ascetic lifestyle do not at first glance seem compatible with the flashy, bling image of Product RED, such an approach would have been impossible without his revolution in the potential of AIDS treatment, embodied in his own totemic role

³⁶ www.brighamandwomens.org/socialmedicine/aboutfarmer.aspx, last accessed July 2006.

³⁷ Paul Farmer has even been the subject of a popular audience book (Kidder 2003).

³⁸ Time Global Health Summit, 'The Case for Optimism,' 1 November 2005. Downloaded from www.time.com/time/2005/globalhealth, July 2006.

as the healer. Doing global health differently, in ways that work, under the logic of pragmatism not ideology, can be taken up by very different kinds of approaches toward international development.

Collectively, the three celebrities totemically embody the 'good' and have their lives' stories to guarantee for that. After more than three decades of development pessimism burdening the conscience of left-leaning development enthusiasts, and increasing suspicion of the vacuity of neo-liberal consumerism among mainstream upmarket brand consumers, totemic aid celebrities merge disparate longings into a new modality for resolving the disparity between rich and poor, well and diseased.

Development Capitalism

PRODUCT RED AND 'BEST PRACTICES'

Product RED is a quintessential concoction of current understandings of 'best practice' in corporate strategy, aid delivery and trade. In relation to corporate strategies, it promotes the concept that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is good both for societies/environments and for business. A decade plus of civil society action against corporations' labour practices, environmental mismanagement, predatory extraction of natural resources, absurd pricing of medical treatment against HIV/AIDS, and unfair trade practices have pushed the agenda of CSR. To a large extent, corporate responses have been reactive, rather than pro-active. In contrast, Product RED pro-actively seeks to engage businesses in its version of responsible corporate initiatives on the grounds that it will make money for participating corporations, raise funds to help Africa, and achieve CSR objectives. The fact that such successful brands participate in this co-branding exercise implies for others that it meets their financial, social and environmental objectives (the so-called 'triple bottom line'; see World Bank 2003b). Also, Product RED's architecture takes its inspiration from the currently favoured form of corporate organization – the 'network' company. This is not the large, vertically-integrated corporation of the 1960s or 1970s, based on an 'industrial' and meritocratic logic and economies of scale. The new 'ideal firm' is flexible, organized by projects, lean, and generally better able to plug into several different networks (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999).

In relation to aid delivery mechanisms, Product RED fits the aspirational model of delivering aid efficiently and with a lean and flexible structure. It is a private initiative providing funds to a public-private fund. Product RED is an initiative that is not burdened by additional bureaucracy. All the elements are present already: The Global Fund, which prides itself of having overhead costs of only 3 percent; DATA (Debt, AIDS, trade, Africa), Bono's own 'lean' organization from which Product RED springs out, and the flexible, lean, and compassionate corporations that produce the fashionable goods (or rather, they market them). The Global Fund notes explicitly that 'the agreements with RED and its partner companies do not add significant administrative work for The Global Fund or its recipients, ensuring that the funds raised go to where they are needed most' (press release, 26 January 2006).³⁹

Finally, Product RED fits a newly consolidated paradigm that both aid and trade are central to development. Oxfam's campaigns of the last few years for 'fairer' trade rules are based on the assumption, shared in many development circles nowadays, that trade can promote growth, development and poverty alleviation. Far removed from the old days of leftist tirades against trade (aid, not trade) and the opposing neo-liberal stance against aid (trade, not aid), the 'consensual' 2000s have marked the rise of the 'trade and aid' mantra. The 2005 Hong Kong WTO ministerial meeting has given much bigger visibility (and pledged greater funding) to trade-related technical assistance and capacity building, now termed a sound-bite-friendly 'aid for trade' (or, even better, A4T).⁴⁰ In this approach, fairer trade rules are not sufficient to stimulate development through exports – other improvements are needed, such as better supply capacity, easier compliance with standards that are required in consuming markets, and improvements in the trade infrastructure.

But Product RED sees trade and investment in low-wage countries with poor environmental and labour regulation (and enforcement) in very peculiar ways:

In addition to its contribution to the Global Fund, Gap is making an even deeper level of investment in Africa by producing some of its products there. The (Gap) RED T-shirt, for example, was produced entirely in Lesotho – a small country in sub-Saharan Africa in which 25-30 percent of young women are HIV-positive. A woman working in a Lesotho garment factory that produces Gap products

³⁹ www.theglobalfund.org/en/media_center/press/pr_060126.asp last accessed June 2006.

⁴⁰ At the time of writing, it was not clear whether the 'aid for trade' pledges would materialize, as WTO negotiations were in crisis following the failure to agree on a package by July 2006.

becomes part of a cycle of hope ... She works for an employer that offers her services and support and access to HIV testing and treatment. And she's making a product that's being sold around the world, the profits from which will be invested back into her country.⁴¹

Labour conditions, the environmental impact of production, and the real or threatened mobility of the location of production all disappear in the 'cycle of hope'. It is almost as if the Gap was in Lesotho to do women affected with HIV/AIDS a favour. This is the same Gap that was the scourge of international labour activism in the 1990s for the practices of its manufacturing contractors in the developing world. Similarly, Motorola disregards the coltan controversy linking mobile phones with African conflict in Eastern Congo and environmental devastation, and instead states that 'our support of The Global Fund is one way that we're able to give back to the region.'⁴² Thus, Product RED, in its positive spin, masks the social and environmental relations of trade and production that underpin poverty, inequality and disease. This process is also known as 'commodity fetishism', a Marxist term indicating 'the necessary masking of social relations under which commodities are produced from which capitalist commodity production gains much of its legitimacy' (Guthman 2002: 296).

MI(RED) IN COMMODITY FETISHISM: COMPASSIONATE CONSUMPTION, CELEBRITIES AND AID

In contemporary debates on trade and development issues, the concept of commodity fetishism is used to distinguish between what is hidden and what is communicated about products' composition and their origins. Appadurai has argued that 'when the spatial, cognitive, and institutional distances between production, distribution, and consumption are great' (Appadurai 1986: 48), specialized mythologies about commodity and commodity flows are generated. 'Mythological understandings of the circulation of commodities are generated because of the detachment, indifference, or ignorance of participants as regards all but a single aspect of the economic trajectory of the commodity' (Ibid.: 54). Therefore, transparency in trade suffers when there are discontinuities in the distribution of knowledge and creations of mythologies. However, and to some extent counter-intuitively, transparency may also suffer when information on commodity production and circulation is embedded in standardized and

⁴¹ RED product launch at Davos video, viewed from www.joinred.com, last accessed March 2006.

⁴² Press release 'Motorola joins (RED) to help eliminate AIDS in Africa' www.joinred.com, last accessed July 2006.

externally-verified labels and certifications, such as organic, 'child-labour free' and 'sustainable'. The label may become a global, superficial substitute for local, in-depth knowledge of the commodity and of producers.

For 'sustainable' products, (i.e. Fair Trade coffee, Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) products, and Rainforest Alliance bananas) transparent information about the processes that lie behind the products is communicated by the sustainable label. Consumers and trade operators are supplied with much more information on the 'where, when, how and whys' of the product, production processes and conditions of exchange. This is intended to 'lift the veil' of commodity fetishism by ensuring transparency and traceability. However, critics claim that the increasing codification of social and environmental concerns through these standards, codes of conduct, and labels actually results in a 'double fetishism' – the masking of social relations of production combined with the commoditization of the knowledge about the commodity itself (Freidberg 2003). When we drink certified organic coffee, we do so with the faith that this makes it 'better' than other products, without recognizing that there may be trade-offs between various 'goods' (see Gibbon and Ponte 2005).

Product RED manages both to achieve commodity fetishism and to use aid celebrities as a totem. It is fetishist in the sense that it embeds information about the 'quality' of the product in the most powerful instrument of codification, branding, without actually releasing significant information on the trade and production relations that are behind these products. Bono, at the Product RED launch explicitly stated that labour issues are of second importance to people dying with AIDS: 'We do not think that trade is bad. We are for labour issues. Labour issues are very serious but six and a half thousand Africans dying is more serious.'⁴³ At the same time, Bono is the totem of 'compassionate consumption', steering away attention from the causes of poverty, such as the inequities of systems of production and trade, by focusing on one outcome, HIV/AIDS.

Celebrities constitute the new fulcrum of a new, and bizarre, social contract. In its classic form, the social contract was based on tripartite negotiations among state, capital and labour. In a more recent version, the state, rather than being directly involved between the parties, provides a form of external guarantee while NGOs and corporations are left to hammer out the bargains by themselves (Giovannucci and Ponte 2005). Now, the celebrity substitutes the state as the external guarantor. Celebrities act as a bridge between development assistance

⁴³ RED product launch at Davos video, viewed from www.joinred.com, last accessed March 2006.

organizations and corporations. By guaranteeing that the Product RED initiative is 'lean', 'effective' and 'financially sustainable', celebrities provide a basis of legitimacy to both aid's goals and corporations' profits. The state disappears from this configuration, even though much of the funding going into The Global Fund actually comes from the state itself.

While The Global Fund officially 'warmly welcomes this important new initiative from the private sector,' the actual percentage of funding they expect from the private sector is minimal. The Global Fund's statement continues: 'Through RED and other initiatives, the Global Fund hopes to increase the private sector share of Global Fund income from *less than one percent* currently to ten percent or more in the long term.'⁴⁴ Thus, Product RED, together with all other private sector initiatives, is slated to eventually (and perhaps) amount to 10 percent of total financial needs of The Global Fund. Yet, Product RED has created an imagery of The Global Fund as being substantially funded by private consumers as they talk on their RED mobile phones and purchase sexy RED sunglasses with their RED credit card. This has two possible perverse effects: first, the consumer/citizen may feel entitled not to contribute to 'old style' charity, since they are 'consuming compassionately' anyway; and second, politicians (in the name of consumers) may feel justified to cut aid budgets to finance yet more tax breaks for the rich, since Product RED takes care of aid. Thus, indirectly, Product RED may be used to de-legitimize taxation and redistribution through the public purse. Beyond any doubt, it is more fun to whisk out your RED card to pay for t-shirts in the Gap than to spend hours filling in tax forms to assume your fiscal responsibility to the state.

Compassionate consumption is a repository of societal values and an ideal type. Product RED's consumers can position themselves as holding a status above everyone else with designer products that do not represent the exploitation of the most downtrodden – these products actually help them. Brand Aid creates a world where it is possible to have as much as you want without depriving anyone else – the antithesis of Marx's view of capitalism. Promoted as new leftist development chic, compassionate consumption effectively de-links not only products from the social relations behind capitalist production, but also trade and the international political economy more broadly from the scourges of AIDS and poverty.

⁴⁴ From The Global Fund's official website: www.theglobalfund.org/en/partners/private/red, last accessed July 2006, emphasis added.

Better (RED)TM than Dead

These issues, I believe, are our true grab for greatness. We are the generation, the first generation, that can look disease and extreme poverty in the eye, look across to Africa and elsewhere, and say this and mean it. We have the power. We have the money. We have the technology to turn this around. We can change the world. Some say we can't afford to. I say we can't afford not to. – Bono⁴⁵

In this paper, we have argued that the aid celebrities, RED bloggers and *BusinessWeek* readers are all speaking with the same voice on this 'grab for greatness.' 'Brand Aid' rescues international development assistance from its dour predictive graphs and disappointing 'lessons learnt' and spins it as young, chic and possible. HIV/AIDS in Africa is epitomized as the problem to be solved and The Global Fund is the mechanism in place that can do the job, if enough money is made available. Aid celebrity totems Sachs, Farmer and Bono mediate the relations between the RED cotton t-shirt made in Africa and the 'women at risk' for HIV / AIDS who make that shirt. The totemic value of Brand Aid is that it reconfigures the world of possibility in what might otherwise be rationally impossible ways.

Product RED is about helping the poor and curing global problems, but it is also about redeeming sex and stylizing gender relations. The defining characteristic of HIV/AIDS in Africa is that it is a sexually-transmitted disease. Much of the mythology surrounding African AIDS has been based on stereotypical neo-colonial depictions of the sexual savage. Representations and images of AIDS in the West have never before been cloaked in Armani glasses, but their function has been similar. 'If we as a society continue to desire a "face of AIDS," it will not be to show that we are basically the same but, rather, to show that those who are already projected as deviants do not live here' (Patton 2002: 121). Brand Aid takes a new twist in which sexuality is being reclaimed by the West as healthy: Bono provides the healthy and sexy body to contrast with the 'African woman dying from sex' body. As the totemic celebrity, he redeems sex, while reclaiming masculinity, and restoring a social hierarchy where cool, rich, white men save poor African women and children. All of this is managed within a discourse of concern, care, and ethics. The sensationalism of this 'rock man's burden' is moderated by the other members of the aid celebrity trinity: the economist and the doctor.

⁴⁵ Time Global Health Summit, 'Guest Speaker', 1 November 2005. www.time.com/time/2005/globalhealth, last accessed July 2006.

Product RED, as a co-branding exercise involving The Gap, Armani, Converse, American Express and Motorola, focuses on compassionate consumption as a vector of financing aid. Aid celebrities guarantee in their personal capacity its management, the seriousness of the target, the feasibility of the solution, and in its cool quotient. Bono wants 'Red to have a certain sex appeal, smartness; it doesn't talk down, or attempt to guilt trip people.'⁴⁶ The resulting phenomenon, Brand Aid, has positive spin wrapped all around, and gives the impression that corporations can be major contributors to development aid, without suggesting that they pay a larger portion of their profits in taxes. At the RED launch, Global Fund director Richard Feachem stated that of \$4.7 billion raised so far, only \$5m had come from corporate donors. The press reported: 'If product RED was successful, the fund could count on a innovative, large and sustainable income stream.'⁴⁷ However, even in the best scenario, private contributions are likely to make up only up to 10 percent of the financing of The Global Fund. Also, Product RED's silence about the social relations of production and exchange that are behind the products it endorses helps shift the focus away from the causes of poverty and disease and towards 'solving' their manifestations.

'In the 21st century, commerce is the catalyst of change, good and bad. Marketing people, marketing brilliance, marketing budgets; we wanted to work with them. We wanted to make the fight against HIV/AIDS sexy and smart.'⁴⁸ If the focus is on solutions, and if one sets aside corporations' profit maximizing objectives, the negative externalities of their production processes, and their short-term perspective, then corporations can be seen as efficient and effective problem-solvers. As Sachs emphasizes: 'The antiglobalization movement is wrong to suppose that private companies are the ones to design the rules of the game. If governments would do their job in setting up the right rules, major international companies would play a vital role in solving problems. After all, these companies employ the world's best technologies, leading internal research units, and organizational and logistical operations that are superior to almost any public organization in the world. They know, in short, how to get the job done when the incentives are in place for them to do the right thing' (Sachs 2005: 358).

Successful businesses are also good at stimulating consumption. The cultural insecurity of Western consumers *vis à vis* their own standing among their peers paves the way for com-

⁴⁶ Matthew Bishop, 'View from Davos: Bono marketing his red badge of virtue,' *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 2006.

⁴⁷ Tim Weber, 'Bono bets of Red to battle Aids,' BBC News website, 26 January 2006. See news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4650024.stm, last accessed March 2006.

⁴⁸ 'Shop with Bono,' *The Sunday Times*, 26 February 2006. women.timesonline.co.uk, last accessed March 2006.

passionate consumption as a vector for empowering them within an imagined global community of the needy. You can look chic enough in Armani, hip enough in Converse, pay for your goods with AmEx and feel good about yourself ethically. If consumption cannot address exploitation and inequality, at least it can do something about tackling disease. 'Shameless exploitation in pursuit of the common good,' the slogan of 'Newman's Own' company, would be a perfect slogan for Product Red as well.⁴⁹ But can one benefit from and challenge exploitative relations at the same time? The representative from American Express launched the RED card at Davos noting: 'It starts with building a profitable and sustainable product for the consumer, and ultimately that's where our success will lie.'⁵⁰ Clearly, commercial success will not be lying three in a bed as in the ubiquitous description of the sufferers in the AIDS clinic in Malawi. One of the only voices to have spoken critically of the RED launch in Davos was a Professor of marketing from the Said Business School at Oxford University who suggested that such efforts 'may build awareness, but what we need is a new social movement' that makes direct contact between the consumer and the producer.⁵¹

Product RED, a lean, network solution to aid financing, takes funds from consumption – not taxation. It is an individual effort, the result of consumer power – not of collective/public will. It can also be tailored to individual significations⁵² and co-produced with consumer feedback through blogging⁵³ and focus groups. It shapes and is shaped by a community of cool, educated, and compassionate consumers. Product RED brings together AIDS activists and businesspeople, rockers and doctors, but its relations to the producers, unless they are Africans smitten by a deadly disease, remain opaque.

Pre-1989 critiques of capitalism from the left were occasionally counter-argued from the right with the catchy proposition of 'Better Dead than Red'. Thereafter, much of the critical argumentation on capitalism has been focused on how to soften its rough edges, rather than

⁴⁹ Tim Weber, 'Bono bets of Red to battle Aids,' BBC News website, 26 January 2006. See news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4650024.stm, last accessed March 2006.

⁵⁰ RED product launch at Davos video, viewed from www.joinred.com, last accessed March 2006.

⁵¹ Jack Erwing, 'For Bono, Star Power with Purpose,' *BusinessWeek* online, 27 January 2006. www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/jan2006/nf20060127_5254.htm?campaign_id=rss_daily, last accessed September 2006.

⁵² The RED homepage includes a section where readers can submit their own videos on 'What does RED mean to me?' in the hope of being featured in a 'video wall' of people, including celebrities, talking about what RED is. See <http://www.joinred.com/you.asp>

⁵³ See: <http://joinred.blogspot.com>

on how to get beyond it as a system. In this context, 'Better (RED)TM than Dead' captures the spirit of a moderate project of 'soft capitalism'. Through Product RED branding, something can be done about poverty and against deadly disease without undermining the basic cultural or economic structures of the capitalist system. It is, in effect, an anti-Marxist crusade. Product RED focuses on capitalism and the consumer, instead of the collective and the state. The urgency of consumption is an anti-horizon concept: instead of constantly receding into the future, it is re-imagined as emergent and reiteratively re-presenting the present, the 'now.' To succeed, consumption must be insatiable. That this translates into notions of 'sustainable funding' to combat HIV/AIDS, a disease of global excess, is more than ironic.

Whether Brand Aid will be *the* new mechanism of development financing or simply a parallel option for engaging those who otherwise would not normally engage with aid – those who care but sublimate – will depend on the usual predictor of development success: sufficient and sustainable financing. Product RED provides the first test-case of such possibility. So far, as indicated by Product RED, 'Brand Aid' looks sufficiently different from the 'development business as usual.' Its 'hard commerce' sex appeal approach may engage individuals from previously-untapped constituencies in funding The Global Fund's work against HIV/AIDS, but in doing so, it will perpetuate the disengagement of 'needy' recipients in order for us to become benefactors with bling.

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	Antiretroviral
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DALYs	Disability-adjusted life years
DATA	Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa
FSC	Forestry Stewardship Council
G8	Group of Eight (G8): Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and US
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
WTO	World Trade Organization