

# WORKING PAPER

Re-Shaping Diplomacy

## Celebrity Diplomacy and the G8: Bono and Bob as Legitimate International Actors

ANDREW F. COOPER

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## **Celebrity Diplomacy and the G8: Bono and Bob as Legitimate International Actors\***

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## **Abstract**

The last decade has seen an increased accumulation of media snapshots of celebrity activism on the international stage, to a point where world leaders scramble to get access to figures like Bono and Bob Geldof. This paper argues that the global capabilities of celebrity diplomats should not be undervalued or dismissed. Where traditional sites of statecraft, such as the Group of Eight (G8), face a myriad of challenges of legitimacy and efficiency, a new type of transnational advocate has surfaced – one in which movie stars, musicians, and CEOs have eased into quite dramatically. Their ability to gain extended face-time with prominent national leaders, while their message is heard at both the mass and elite level means that they are engaging in the kind of widespread communication that underpins successful diplomacy. This paper demonstrates that above all others, Bono and Bob Geldof have become significant, ascendant diplomatic actors in a global system that is open to their inclusion in ways that very few would have anticipated.

## 1. Introduction

As an exclusive club of the world's richest states, the Group of Eight (G8) wields some considerable declaratory and operational authority. Access to this forum, with its limited membership and selective agenda, is reserved for a privileged few. The exclusive nature of this forum has built a backlash from outside and an anxiety from within, questioning its legitimacy and efficiency.

Given this condition, the G8 has searched for new ways to respond to critical pressures. One significant response has been its recent embrace of 'celebrity diplomacy.' At the 2005 Gleneagles summit, rock stars Bono and Sir Bob Geldof were welcomed like visiting heads of state, gaining coveted bilateral meetings with UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, US President George W. Bush, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. A similar theme played out at the 2007 Heiligendamm summit, where the celebrities grabbed much of the spotlight. In the lead-up, both Bono and Geldof met privately with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on more than one occasion, and are credited with some influence in persuading her to include issues of growth and responsibility in Africa on the agenda. At both summits Bono and Geldof used a sophisticated recipe of personal and shuttle diplomacy to attract attention from state leaders and the mass public alike.

How have celebrities made these inroads to the upper-level of diplomacy? The largely untrained background, and mega personality of celebrity diplomats would at first be thought incompatible with traditional diplomacy, yet it has grown to validate and bring it into the modern age. The attraction here is two-way: in celebrities, G8 leaders find a populist recognition and legitimacy they are unable to cultivate on their own; while in the G8, celebrities find access to the world's powers to advance



their activist agendas. Yet the participation of celebrities at the G8 raises many questions of influence and representation.

Among these personalities, there is some convergence on methodology. Celebrities claim their victories almost exclusively through the media, while the G8 uses photo-ops and pre-negotiated press statements to announce its decisions. Nonetheless, the inclusion of Bono and Geldof has invigorated scrutiny about the workings of the G8, and the need for a more comprehensive agenda with respect to global governance. However unlikely, celebrity diplomacy is an emergent, albeit contested, pathway used to bolster the legitimacy of international public policy.

## **2. The G8's Crisis of Legitimacy**

As is increasingly recognized, the G8 is facing a double crisis of legitimacy and efficiency. The group's under-representation of the global South (via regional participation) is one side of this crisis, as this participatory gap erodes its ability to set priorities for the international community and detracts from its capacity to mobilize governments to broker solutions to pressing global problems. Its inability to deliver effective results on an issue-specific basis, whether economic or foreign policy oriented, has added to the tensions surrounding this 'democratic deficit'.

There have been many different proposals for reform of the G8. One of the most well known of these is former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin's ambitious plan to transform the G8 in composition and, indirectly, on issues. Martin's L20 plan (Leaders' 20) was based on the idea of the annual G20 Finance Ministers' Forum, which he had helped to establish in the 1990s. The G20 has been recognized as having many strengths, including a diverse membership (from the global North and South), a manageable size for decision making and a relatively informal

structure that encourages open and constructive dialogue. The L20 would replicate the G20 by annually bringing together the heads of state or government from these 20 member countries to deal address pressing global issues (English et al., 2005).

Martin's proposal, however, called for reform of the 'big bang' kind. Since the failed attempt in September 2004 to have a meeting in New York on the prospects for an L20 – on the sidelines of the UN Millennium Summit, and to use the topic of pandemics as the catalyst – as speculated due to opposition from President Bush, it has become clear that reform is more likely to be achieved through an incremental process.

In the months prior to Heiligendamm, the focus turned to the possibility of extending club membership to an inner group of candidates, being located in the so-called G5-Plus or Outreach Five (O5). In recognition of their statures as major economic players and increasingly engaged global actors, the O5 countries (China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico) have been invited for the past number of years to participate in expanded discussions on selected topics at the annual summit (see Cooper, 2007b; Fues, 2007). Targeting relations with this group as the impetus for reform was promoted by both members of the German coalition government and the government of Tony Blair, with Blair high-lighting the idea at the 2007 World Economic Forum at Davos.

The top-down, essentially inter-governmental contours of these proposals continue to have some attractions (especially on the efficiency side). However, these types of initiative by themselves cannot overcome the legitimacy defect, in that they depart too severely from the tenets of bottom-up 'societal-led' multilateralism (see O'Brien et al., 2000; Cooper et al., 2002). The focus is strictly on international – governance with governments – as

opposed to a more ambitious style of global governance – governance without governments.

The challenge of what Daniel Drache terms the “global politics of dissent” both reflects and exploits this gap (Drache, 2005). If the forces of global dissent could exploit the G8 as a site of exclusion and neglect, however, the G8 leaders and state officials could exploit the differences between the ‘nixers’ (most radical) and the ‘fixers’ (more reform-minded) components (Ostry, 2002).<sup>1</sup> To the nixers, the G8 symbolizes all that is wrong with the global political/economic architecture. This club is based on exclusion, both of the South and of its own citizens. It promises solutions to the world’s problems – including the fundamental structural imbalances in globalization – but is negligent on delivery. International civil society took an active interest in the G8 summits, with massive demonstrations targeting the meetings (including especially violent clashes at Genoa in 2001). In terms of non governmental organizations (NGOs), arguably the best-known fixer is Oxfam that has not only entered the mainstream but which has formed some degree of access to the Blair government with respect to personnel.

To this type of NGO must be added the phenomenon of celebrity activism, which in the case of the Gleneagles and Heiligendamm G8 summits may be elevated to the level of celebrity diplomacy. As with NGOs, the performance of such celebrities in providing a pathway for legitimacy in global governance though enhanced diplomacy vis-à-vis the G8 process is highly contested. It is hard for celebrities to make a claim that they provide speak for a constituency whether defined as a cause or people. Even among

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<sup>1</sup> On differing perspectives on these forces see Keck and Sikkink (1998); Lipschutz (1992); Kaldor (2003); Scholte (2000).

their professional peer group there can be found skeptics, such as Eric Clapton who mused openly about the credibility of Bono and Geldof to perform a role beyond their professional competence; “They’re only musicians” (*Deutsch P-A*, 2005).

Still, if celebrities share some of the legitimacy problems associated with NGOs, they share some of their strengths as well in terms of the problematique of global governance. They combine assertive individualism characteristic of the West with an appreciation of universal or cosmopolitan values. They abhor the use of violence. They engage in continuous dialogue through the power of voice. They are both transformative and results oriented, in that they combine a critical sensibility on social justice issues with a desire to fix things on an instrumental basis.

The rationales that account for the rise of celebrity diplomacy, if including superficiality or faddism, also showcase how this phenomenon fills gaps in the structure and agency of global governance.

On the superficial side the rise of this phenomenon can be assessed as a part of a psychological/emotional development linked to celebrity culture in more generalized terms. Links between celebrities and state leaders are particularly close in Anglo/German culture, both because of a generalized fascination with celebrities in those societies and even arguably to some aspects of a psychological role reversal between state leaders and celebrities, where leaders (for example, Tony Blair) try to embrace celebrity status while some celebrities (most notably Bono and Geldof) embrace some trappings of the diplomatic/policy world.

A second rationale, however, shifts the attention from societal conditions to the structure or environment in which celebrities operate. Globalization is privileged through this spotlight as is the transformation of information technology as a motor (or in

some cases a brake) towards global governance. Celebrity diplomats have hitched a ride on this technical revolution, or what Geldof termed “an electronic loop around the planet” (Vallely, 1995). Cutting through the complications associated with negotiations and protocol, celebrities can connect immediately with a range of audiences. MTV and other mechanisms – including both text messaging and a proliferation of blogs about Bono and other celebrity diplomats – provide a multitude of connections to a global audience beyond the imagination a few decades ago. Select celebrities have a stretch around the world – and hence some degree of symbolic legitimacy – far beyond what could have possibly been imagined even at the time of a mega-event such as Live Aid in the mid-1980s.

A third rationale – with an emphasis on the individual agency – goes back to the images of failure of the state diplomats themselves. If diplomacy is moving towards a concentrated state based on ‘big’ men and women, as found above all else in the G8, why does this shift have to be located inside government circles? Why can’t diplomacy be opened up to equivalent ‘big’ actors not fully embedded in the state?

NGOs can take advantage of some elements of this gap in legitimacy. But as is increasingly well understood, NGOs have their own efficiency and legitimacy dilemmas. They suffer from periodic bouts of performance fatigue. And they have come under some sustained critiques with respect to their own legitimacy/governance deficiencies.<sup>2</sup> Finally, they are largely ‘faceless’ in terms of their own personnel both on the front lines and at head quarters in the pursuit of a global governance agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> For one academic critique, see Friedrichs (2005).

The common feature from all these rationales is that celebrities have considerable opportunities not only to formulate but to sell their initiatives, targeting not only to the public but to selective state leaders, if they do so in a manner that seems constructive. This access is reinforced when individual celebrities work in tandem, using some types of divergent stylistic tactics but with a similar strategic set of objectives. Through this lens, the efforts of Bono and Geldof stand out. Often considered the soft and hard edge of the celebrity diplomat phenomenon, this dual (and highly nuanced) role is highlighted by their behaviour at both the Gleneagles and Heiligendamm summits.

### **3. Bono and Geldof: Two Sides of the Same Coin of Celebrity Diplomacy**

#### *Bono as Charmer*

Bono is the quintessential fixer among celebrity diplomats. The trajectory of his growing involvement in global activism is quite striking, as he made the major transition from working as a supporter, spokesperson, and “famous face” (Florini, 2005: 166) with the Jubilee 2000 campaign on debt eradication, to creating his own foundation and advocacy network (DATA, or Debt AIDS Trade Africa) in 2002. Geographically while not ignoring Blair’s Britain, Bono shifted the core of his attention to lobbying the state at the heart of the global system, the United States. In doing so he navigated the traditional boundary between diplomacy and policy-making, working through both international forums (most notably the G8) and the corridors of national political power.

Far from being an enthusiastic amateur, Bono stands out as master manipulator. Unlike his counterpart Bob Geldof – whose estrangement with the global justice movement runs much deeper – Bono turned some of the tools in the conventional repertoire

of diplomacy to his own advantage. Bono understands the power of language and communication in a technologically driven age of mass consumption. His words can soothe but they can also sting. By playing to different publics, he can take advantage of elite or personal competition to extract advantage. This approach relies heavily on exploiting rivalries and playing leaders and their advisors off against each other. It is also cognizant of power asymmetries, cutting slack for the most powerful at the expense of relatively weaker actors. Seen through this less idealistic lens, Bono is as calculating as his state counterparts. The ends – albeit for a grander vision than reasons of the state – justify the means.

Still, what stands out about this manipulative style is that it is done in a charming, persuasive manner. Unlike Geldof, Bono paid great attention on how to play the diplomatic game, using his considerable skills of voice to great advantage.

What Bono comprehended more than any other celebrity – although Bob Geldof shared his enthusiasm – was that the G8 created a perfect target site for his brand of public advocacy in terms of global governance. All of the G8 leaders could be lobbied in a discrete but focused fashion according to the same set of deadlines and types of domestic pressure. Key leaders of the G8 were amenable to the possibility of bending to this pressure.

Although the core of Bono's G8 activities was directed at the leadership level he took a more comprehensive approach. He maintained a strong relationship with Condoleezza Rice who he met at the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa). In the wider context of the G8 he penetrated at least one of the Sherpa meetings concentrating on drawing up the agenda and communiqué for the Gleneagles summit.

Much of his power of attraction for the G8 leaders was the expectation of a positive appraisal. But they did not get this seal

of approval just through symbolic actions. When disillusioned, Bono has been quite willing to make examples of leaders who fell short of (his) expectations. A case in point was his yo-yo relationship with Canada's Paul Martin. Galvanized by a meeting of the minds on debt relief, Bono heaped accolades on Martin through the 1990s for his "vision and his willingness to stick his neck out [in taking] a moral stance" (Ward, 2000). In 2003, Bono was the guest speaker of honor at the political party convention that confirmed Martin's elevation to prime minister. Yet, when Martin refused to embrace the 0.7% of GNI figure for official development assistance (ODA) campaigned for by Bono as part of his Africa/poverty campaign, this relationship took a dive. In the aftermath of Gleneagles, Bono was ready to put the boot to the relationship: "I'm mystified by the man...I just think it's a huge opportunity that he's missing out on" (Sallot, 2005).

Bono's use of positive/negative reinforcement, nevertheless, also consolidates his streak of manipulation. He has played off political rivals in all of the major countries at the top of his target list, whether Presidents Clinton and Bush or Prime Ministers Blair and Gordon Brown. His harsh treatment of leaders from the lower tiers of the G8 hierarchy can be contrasted to his 'softly, softly' approach to those at the apex. When Paul Martin, refused to meet the 0.7% target, Bono applied discipline. Alternatively, Bush's failure to deliver on either his promises of foreign aid or AIDS relief was met by frustration by Bono, but no public breaking off of the relationship.

### *Geldof as Provocateur*

In contradistinction to Bono, Geldof can be considered the quintessential anti-diplomat. He neither talked, looked, nor acted like someone who took the diplomatic culture seriously, never mind embracing its mode of operation.



Yet, if not ‘of’ the diplomatic world, Geldof decidedly wanted to push ‘in’ to it. He courted its approval even as he acted belligerently. His major triumphs – the presentation of the Live Aid and Live 8 events separated by a span of two decades in 1985 and 2005 – were a testimony to his sense of public spectacle as much as his organizing skills. So was his operational embrace and ritualistic endorsement of the entire Gleneagles G8 process.

To a far greater extent than Bono, Geldof targeted Tony Blair as the champion of a process that privileged the establishment under Blair’s auspices of a Commission for Africa. Blair, from Geldof’s perspective, embodied the perfect vehicle for delivery. Tony Blair, whom Geldof remembered as a young parliamentarian in the mid-1980s who had been influential in setting up a Band Aid cross party parliamentary group, appeared to be the ideal choice to associate with the Commission. To get the idea off and running, Geldof peppered Blair with phone calls – and at least one breakfast meeting – on the subject of Africa from the time of the 2003 Evian G8.

Astutely, Geldof recognized from the experience of other projects of this type – most notably the Brandt Commission on North/South relations – that ideas do not float freely over time. There was a narrow window of opportunity through which the agenda could be promoted. As a serving prime minister, and the host of the 2005 G8, Blair had a moment of opportunity that would be hard to replicate. The frustrations of the Brandt Commission, which saw its influence as a template collapse with the shift towards new political leaders of a different ideological persuasion in the early 1980s (Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan most notably), could thus be avoided. The essence of any such new endeavor on Africa was thus the speed by which it could be implemented (preferably in six months). Such a timeline avoided the possibility of regime change as had occurred

with Brandt. As Geldof wisely acknowledged – albeit with still grandiose trappings – in the run up to the 2005 G8 summit, even if he wanted to run with the project himself the idea wasn't viable without Blair. To move without this indispensable cog was to meet the fate of the Brandt Commission: “Brandt and his commissioners...were no longer in power. They weren't in a position to implement their recommendations. So I knew that a Live Aid commission or a Geldof report wouldn't be enough” (Vallely, 2004; see also Thakur et al., 2005).

The risks of engagement through the G8 process for Geldof were inevitably far higher than for Bono. Having branded himself as a provocative anti-diplomat since the 1980s, buying into a more orthodox script contained dangers, echoes of support for official state-based diplomacy came at a cost. Nevertheless with the same energy as he used for attacks, Geldof strenuously defended his association with what he considered worthwhile initiatives for global governance within the context of the Gleneagles summit. Geldof said early on in the process: “At the risk of sounding complicit with the Government, both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have been incredibly brave and incredibly radical so far in what they have put before the G8” (Vallely, 2002).

#### **4. Contesting Celebrity Diplomacy**

In the United States, the main source of a critique of celebrity culture comes from the right, and is tied in with the image of a radicalized Hollywood. Conservative authors such as James Hirszen (2005) are given extensive coverage on *The O'Reilly Factor* (2005) to target the global activities of Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, and George Clooney. But this breed of attack dog has far less to bite into in terms of the diplomatic front than on domestic politics. The sense of commitment developed by

Angelina Jolie has made it far harder to attack her on her public life (although there is still open season on her private life).

Alternatively it is the left in the UK and (later) in Germany – albeit with celebrity champions of their own – that has sustained the strongest campaign against the intrusion of celebrities into global affairs. Far from being a benign set of activities the celebrity diplomatic enterprise is taken to be a dangerous endeavor. For by re-routing mass action on such issues as poverty and debt into the mainstream it legitimizes the status quo. Bianca Jagger – no stranger to celebrity herself – provides one well-known voice to this type of backlash against Bono and Geldof for their work on Live 8 and ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History, suggesting that cozying up to politicians leads to co-option: “I know that we need to persuade politicians, but do we really need to sleep with the enemy? Although one cannot deny that Bono and Geldof have succeeded in bringing attention to Africa, one feels betrayed by their moral ambiguity and sound-bite propaganda, which has obscured and watered down the real issues that are stake in this debate” (Jagger, 2005).

Geldof's highly impulsive style made it easier to attack him. Geldof's personal agenda was paramount with little or no consideration made to the other 450 or so groups that had been mobilized into the Make Poverty History coalition. The most obvious illustration of this approach came in the timing of Geldof's Live 8 enterprise. On the one hand, the date of Live 8 (2 July 2005) ran up against the mass gathering scheduled for the same date that was supposed to be the largest ever demonstration in the UK against global poverty. His unilateral call for the Million Man March to Edinburgh on July 6 also clashed with the plans of the social justice movement as this date was the first day of the actual G8 summit, again a prime time for a major rally of protest.

Another element of this left-wing criticism expresses frustration for the very attractiveness of celebrity diplomacy. In providing a new vehicle for a counter-consensus, it defuses, drains, or even suffocates more radical forms of protest and political mobilization. Because of its ability to act as a magnet for attention any success of this form of celebrity activity comes at the expense of alternative voices not only from the North (the anti-globalization or social justice movement) but also those from the South. Collectively it has subordinated substitute sites such as the World Social Forum (WSF). Individually, it has enhanced the status of stars from the North over the fortunes of those potential celebrity entertainers from the South – a gulf highlighted by the marginalization of Africa performers even at an African-centered event such as Live 8.

## 5. The Adaptive Quality of Celebrity Diplomacy

The act that did so much harm at Tony Blair's 2005 summit was his decision to endorse the Gleneagles communiqué as "mission accomplished" (with a mark of 10 out of 10 for the doubling of aid and 8 of 10 for debt relief). For many of the smaller NGOs this decision was simply a case of flying too close to the sun of official statecraft: "He got too close to the government, and he got burned" (*IPS*, 2005). In the same vein another activist added that: 'Mr. Geldof has become too close to the decision-makers to make an objective view of what has been achieved at this summit' (*ibid*).

For the larger, more accommodation-oriented NGOs such as Oxfam UK, the issue was as much to do with style as substance. Akin to Geldof, these NGOs had become embedded in the official diplomatic process, becoming the targets of criticism themselves. In assessing this mix of results, they could take some comfort that the campaign centered on the Gleneagles

dynamics – with the help of Geldof and Bono – had produced sustained pressure on government and this momentum could be built on in the future. The issue was whether Geldof was a useful asset in this ongoing campaign or not?<sup>3</sup>

According to the well-rehearsed script along the lines of soft/hard analogy it may be speculated that Geldof should have been the celebrity diplomat who called the leaders of the G8 out for not getting it completely right in terms of the Gleneagles communiqué. Bono should have then firmly but gently coaxed this group to ratchet up the advances to another stage. By reversing these roles, Geldof estranged himself from global civil society. Geldof's main worth for society groups was his ability as a provocative master of spin. When he diluted this emotional appeal the attraction faded, as witnessed by the reluctance of any of the large NGOs to come to his defense amidst the fallout from the Gleneagles Summit.

In some ways the role of Bono and Geldof at the Heiligendamm summit provided a repeat of their mode of activity at Gleneagles. As at Gleneagles, both celebrities used personal and shuttle diplomacy. Both had access to, and what appeared to be a high comfort level with, President Bush on the first day of the summit. As at Gleneagles, the main public critiques of G8 leaders were

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<sup>3</sup> Oxfam's ambivalence towards Geldof is captured by its paper on outcomes from the summit. Geldof was not mentioned by name in the document. And the tone of the assessment tried to capture the middle ground between Geldof's positive perspective and the negativity expressed by much of the rest of civil society: "No previous G8 summit has done as much for development, particularly in Africa. However, along with other organisations and fellow campaigners, Oxfam is disappointed that in the light of undisputed need and unprecedented popular pressure and expectation, neither the necessary sense of urgency nor the historic potential of Gleneagles was grasped by the G8" (Lawson and Green, 2005).

directed to those from smaller countries, mainly Canada (Laghi, 2007). And like Gleneagles, an attempt to move beyond their role as insiders through popular culture, through the ‘Raise Your Voice Against Poverty’ concert (dubbed the ‘Poverty 8’ or P8) in Rostock, the major city near Heiligendamm.

In a number of other ways, though, Bono and Geldof tried to build on their original script. At the celebrity press conference at the end of the Heiligendamm summit, Geldof left the detailed criticism of the communiqué to Bono. What he did was inject an emotional sense of disappointment about the failure of the G8 leaders to live up to their Gleneagles promises. Bono commented on the technical deficiencies of the summit outcomes document, dismissing it as having been “deliberately designed not to communicate.” Geldof loudly and sweepingly condemned the proceedings as a “total farce” (Brogan, 2007).<sup>4</sup>

This reversion to the original soft/hard approach was complemented by the use of a number of other adaptive techniques that reinforced the impression that their activities provided an innovative pathway to global governance. One technique was accentuated by the willingness of Bono and Geldof at the Heiligendamm summit to give equal standing to representatives from the global South. Youssou N’Dour was given a prominent place in the lobbying of G8 leaders with Geldof and Bono. And in an attempt to cleanse the memory of the closed, Anglo-centric environment of the Live 8 concert, musicians from the global South were given ample time on stage at the huge concert in Rostock.

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<sup>4</sup> For background, see Williamson (2006). DATA released its own compliance report just before the Heiligendamm summit. See <<http://www.thedatareport.org>>.

A second technique came in the shift in public relations. No longer content simply to be the subject of interviews, Bono and Geldof moved to try to shape the media content on the global governance agenda. As Bono went up market, editing special editions of the *Independent*, the French newspaper *Libération* and *Vanity Fair*; Geldof reproduced this activity through the tabloids. Most dramatically, he edited the best-selling German tabloid *Bild Zeitung* on the eve of the summit, redirecting the attention of its audience away from its usual fare of sports scores and scantily clad models to the crisis in Africa. Moreover, on the second day, Bono turned his focus to grab the attention of the assembled media away from the G8 leaders towards the anti-poverty message delivered at a parallel celebrity press conference. Such a tactic was deemed a “redistribution of the cameras” (Bock, 2007).

And thirdly, the ‘intellectual’ component in support of the global governance agenda was expanded in the lead-up to the summit. Going beyond consultations with select academics (most notably, Jeffrey Sachs) an attempt was made to host an Intellectual Live 8: Forum for Africa, hosted at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin. Stating that the German government was far more receptive to this approach than the British, this effort combined a well-attended press conference (with the presence of Geldof) and promises that the Heiligendamm process should be provided with fresh ideas.

## **6. Taking Celebrities Seriously – both as Advocates and Problems for Global Governance**

For some sociological theorists the logic of celebrities entering the domain of diplomacy is unassailable. Under the accelerating forces of globalization the distance between citizens and sites of power has widened. Celebrities provide a convenient surrogate

for, and a conduit in response to, the traditional bonds that hold society together, performing a mobilizing, interpreting and most importantly mediating function that have been eroded within traditional institutions (McDonald, 2006: 81-3; see also Touraine, 2000: 304).

As rehearsed above, in many ways celebrities have similarities with components of the NGO sphere in what has been termed the struggle to “occupy the mind space” of people around the world (Smith and Sutherland, 2002: 158). However, on the basis of this comparison, celebrities possess some clear presentational advantages especially in the form of branding and popular appeal.

Although the extent of the impact of Bono and Geldof in terms of substance on the G8 process remains contested, their impact in popularizing an agenda for the G8 that (from their celebrity perspective) was workable. Rather than emphasizing the obstacles, the means forward should be emphasized. As Geldof (2007) declared with his usual confidence at the May Intellectual Aid event in Berlin: “Don’t argue with us whether health and education work...just do it.”

Viewed in this more expansive fashion, it is not the superficiality of celebrity diplomacy that needs closer examination but the superficiality of the dismissal by its critics. The sweep of questions associated with celebrity diplomacy may actually be more expansive than what the most visible critics have related, in that celebrity diplomacy needs to be examined in relation to more serious deficiencies when scrutinized through the lens of governance.

One obvious point of contention is whether or not celebrity diplomats (most notably Bono and Bob Geldof) have been co-opted by the state authorities. This reverts to Bianca Jagger’s notion of ‘sleeping with the enemy.’ Through this alternative per-



spective the dots are connected up in a very different fashion than the image of networked boundary-spanner. Instead of privileging the dynamics of Bono's own hub via DATA and other activities the exclusive focus is on what is taken to be the cozing up behavior towards Bush, Blair and the G8.

Such a view, if accurate at all, mixes up the boundary spanning network of Bono and the more idiosyncratic activities of Geldof. To his credit Geldof brought to the enterprise a good many positive attributes, above all his marvelous if often over the top sense of public relations. His vulnerability was his love of attention by the high and mighty. His report card on the G8 reflected this craving.

Bono's own approach was far more astute. His mantra was to continually play key political leaders off against each other, balancing intense involvement with an eye to keeping the boundaries of access to as many as decision makers open as possible. Nudging and cajoling went hand in hand with maintaining a presence in core policy circles. Open rebukes were reserved for the smaller players or those that were on their way out of power. The G8 provided a state-centric target.

The potential problem with celebrity diplomacy is not the intrusion into public space. The bilateral relationship Bono forged with Bush and Blair – and his privileged access with Geldof at the 2005 and 2007 summits both physically and symbolically may indicate an appreciation of the mobilization, channeling, and mediation role highlighted by the sociological theory. But these events in themselves did not create a crisis in governance.

The far greater potential difficulty with celebrity diplomacy is not the dynamics of its relationship with state officials at the apex of power but the nature of its own inner workings as an expression of the ascendancy of private authority on global public

policy (see Grande and Pauly, 2005). The role of celebrity diplomats as a filter or conduit between citizens and sites of authority is one thing. Questions about accountability and the representative form of this phenomenon – when it is linked up to a more extensive network of business celebrities (as may be developing with the links between Bono’s network and the Gates Foundation) with its combination of popular legitimacy and massive material resources, is another thing entirely.

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