

Brockington, D. 2014: *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development*. Oxon: Routledge. xxii + 210 pp. £90.00 hardback, £20.19 paperback, £19.18 ebook. ISBN: 978 0 415 70719 0 (hardback). ISBN: 978 0 415 70721 3 (paperback). ISBN: 978 1 315 88697 8 (e-book).
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With *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development*, Dan Brockington has made a valuable empirical contribution to the growing field considering the mediation of development issues. His book adds critical weight to the debate surrounding the role of a celebrity in the humanitarian and developmental sphere and is delivered in an eminently readable text that is both balanced and insightful.

The crux of Brockington's thesis is that while the performance of celebrity activists in the development arena is both relevant and influential, the nature of their influence is highly complex and manifests in a number of ways that remain largely separate to the media content that is produced. Indeed, his own quantitative research, involving two large sample surveys, shows that the majority of the British public, while highly aware of the celebrity-charitable frame, struggle to link specific celebrity-advocates to the causes that they support. He finds that the majority of the public claim to be relatively uninterested in celebrities as a media product, but critically, they also believe that celebrities matter more to most others than to themselves. This grants the celebrity industry a certain appearance of legitimacy when speaking for the public, but without the actual weight or support to force changes in the relevant political systems.

Considering that the public remain largely unmoved and ill-informed by the plethora of celebrity humanitarian endorsements, it is pertinent to consider what it is that drives their popularity. In order to examine this question, Brockington has conducted over 140 in-depth interviews with various actors within the celebrity-charity-corporate complex. These interviews, with highly engaging excerpts

well placed throughout the text, illustrate that the relationship between celebrity and development organizations requires far more commitment from all parties than may be immediately obvious from the media texts produced on field trips to developing countries or disaster regions. These relationships, and the importance of celebrity liaison officers in effectively negotiating positions or 'getting it' (pp. 95–110), show the level of complexity inherent in balancing the goals of the celebrity and charitable stakeholders in a framework where the balance of power is heavily weighted in favour of the celebrity industry.

Indeed, the author goes to great lengths to establish the manner by which celebrities do, in fact, have influence within the development frame, thereby illuminating what it is that makes them so valuable to the contemporary NGO. Quite simply, celebrity advocates are highly valuable assets as their elite status provides access to other elites, a process Brockington links to Crouch's concept of post-democratic politics (p. 35). In sum, post-democratic politics is characterized by political decision making wherein the majority of the population remains disinterested, disengaged and ill-informed, while elites guide the process to suit their own and other elitist goals. In a post-democratic system, access to decision makers is highly important for lobbyists, and since the 1980s celebrity has played an increasingly important role for charitable and humanitarian organizations in providing access to the corporate and political elite. Simply put, politicians and corporate leaders enjoy meeting and want to engage with celebrities, as do members of the public. The power of the celebrity it seems is not in having effective mass outreach, but rather a high level of social standing, with which individuals from all walks of life desire to be associated.

The public attention afforded by contact with media-friendly celebrities can, in many cases, be enough to force the hand of politicians into making commitments towards environmental or humanitarian goals. This

is due to the widespread belief held by not just the public as discussed earlier, but also amongst elites, that the majority of the public is, in fact, paying attention. According to Brockington's own research, this principle is at least somewhat misplaced, and it is entirely feasible that celebrity advocacy can act as a conduit for vacuous public posturing, aiding the brand image of celebrities, NGOs and political–corporate interests alike, yet achieving little end product. Unfortunately, as has been seen with the Make Poverty History campaign (to cite just one example), firm commitments to development issues often fade with time, as does public interest.

In the end, it is hard to find major criticisms of the book, with the author answering several minor ones throughout the text in a reflexive manner. Brockington's research into the topic is comprehensive and well supported by both quantitative and qualitative data which roundly support and inform his position on the role of celebrity advocacy in both the historical and contemporary instance. He also acknowledges shortcomings in this research that could potentially be filled in the future. If anything, my primary critique of the book is that the author fails to take the opportunity to produce a more radical narrative of the relationship among celebrity, corporate and charitable interests, and their role in creating the world as we know it. He addresses this frame, citing Ilan Kapoor on occasion and particularly in the final chapter, but reserves a more neutral position for himself. Yet, this is now *the* book

on celebrity advocacy, one likely to remain a reference point for students of media studies, celebrity studies and development studies for years to come. In a world still characterized by increasing inequality, environmental degradation and shocking injustices, it is surely incumbent upon writers of such skill and learning to call for radical change, to incite the passions of students and teachers alike.

Despite this, *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development* remains a valuable text, with a clear vision for a world in which the relationships and motivations for actions are often obscured by the product they produce. A product that calls for a fairer world, and satisfies a certain social responsibility, but ultimately is an agent of the dominant system, not a catalyst for change. As with many genuinely insightful academic texts, Brockington's findings present new concepts to the reader, but ones that are immediately recognizable and, in fact, entirely unsurprising. The intellect and communicative skill to unpack the world we live in, in many ways reminiscent of Foucault's power working laterally and vertically throughout societies and institutions, makes this a compelling read, and essential for those with a particular interest in the field of mediated humanitarianism.

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