

## **Global citizenship as showbusiness: the cultural politics of Make Poverty History**

*We make a declaration of inter-dependence today that we hold to be a self-evident truth: that we are all in this together.* Will Smith opening Live 8 in Philadelphia

*We the fortunate, let us remind each other this is what we stand for, this is who we are.*  
Brad Pitt at Live 8 in London

### Cultural politics and global citizenship

'Make Poverty History' was an extraordinary campaign: historically unprecedented, indeed impossible without the new structures of the emerging 'cosmopolitanising state', global in reach and yet national in focus. Studying the aims, means and achievements of Make Poverty History has much to teach us about the practical possibilities for a more cosmopolitan orientation to citizenship within and beyond national borders. As a campaign which took place not just through but in the media, investigating Make Poverty History is also important for media studies, enabling understanding of the importance of national media and popular culture to emergent possibilities of global citizenship.

Make Poverty History is the name given to the UK branch of a global alliance of NGOs coordinated by the Global Call to Action against Poverty to put pressure on the leaders of the richest countries to achieve the concrete, measurable Millennium Development Goals they'd already signed up to achieving. The Global Call to Action against Poverty had different names in different countries: ONE in US, 'Plus d'Excuses!' in France, Maak Het

Waar in the Netherlands and so on. Although, as we shall see, Make Poverty History was very carefully managed as a media campaign, it was also genuinely grassroots insofar as it was led by a coalition of over 500 NGOs which receive their funding from donations and membership. They ranged from the large, international NGOs like Oxfam and Save the Children to smaller, often more radical organisations, like World Development Movement and Womankind.

In a very well-known article, Craig Calhoun has criticised theorists of cosmopolitanism for conceiving of it in elitist, over-rationalist and individualist terms, and for neglecting the social and cultural bases of solidarity (Calhoun 2003). Bryan Turner has made a similar argument with respect to the weakening of citizenship as a result of globalisation, arguing that, as membership criteria become more diffuse and the benefits of citizenship are eroded, individualist cosmopolitan virtues become dominant, at least among elites and those who aspire to be part of them (Turner 2000, 2002). The campaign to 'Make Poverty History' is interesting in this respect as an attempt at 'actually existing', popular cosmopolitan solidarity across borders. It aimed to transform national citizens into global citizens by creating obligations towards people suffering outside the nation. In order to do so, Make Poverty History performatively created public space within national media for the formation of consensus to extend citizenship beyond national borders (see Dayan 2001 on performative publics). Citizenship is understood here in sociological terms: it is a set of legal and political rights and responsibilities and also an inter-subjectively recognised status (Marshall 1992). As an inter-subjectively recognised status, citizenship is reflexive, containing the logical and practical possibility of reaching beyond itself, beyond existing schedules of rights and responsibilities to create new relationships between individuals and groups. It is in this respect that culture, and especially popular culture, is essential to the creation, maintenance and extension of meanings of citizenship

(see Couldry 2006 for a similar understanding of the relationship between citizenship and culture). In this sense cultural politics provide the conditions of citizenship, of its weakening and displacement on the one hand, or of its recreation, its transformation beyond the usual boundaries of the nation, on the other. It is in culture, as much as in law and structures of global governance, that global citizenship must be created if it is to become a reality rather than a normative ideal.

The aims of the Global Call to Action against Poverty are complex and far-reaching, involving all the Millennium Development Goals (including achieving democratic governance, ending discrimination against women, establishing liberal human rights etc). But the global strategy ('think globally, act locally') meant that each national campaign took up the themes most relevant to its own government. The campaign aimed to be especially prominent in 2005 in all the countries involved because the UN was due to review the Millennium Development Goals that year. Its main focus was the G8 summit in July – as the most powerful forum of global economic governance; followed by the UN summit on Millennium Development Goals in September; and the WTO forum in December. In 2005 the UK was the host of the G8 summit, held in Edinburgh, and Make Poverty History focussed on putting pressure on the government to achieve three clear and simple economic goals: aid – increase it to come close to the 0.7% of GDP target promised in the 1970s; debt - cancelling 100% of debt to multilateral institutions for those countries eligible under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country rules, widening of the criteria of eligibility for debt cancellation, and setting up fair and transparent processes for cancelling or repaying other debt; trade justice – enabling developing countries to take control of their national economies by ending subsidies on Northern agricultural goods, tariffs on importing manufactured goods from the South and the dumping of surpluses in the South. The slogan of the campaign was 'justice not charity': the demands were for the

restructuring of international institutions and socio-economic relations, not for Northerners as individuals to give money directly to those suffering the effects of injustice.

Global Call to Action against Poverty aimed, then, to work with the structures of global governance rather than to destroy them. It is an anti-poverty campaign, not anti-capitalist or anti-globalisation (and it was criticised by radical groups as such). Indeed, Make Poverty History presupposed that structures of capitalist global governance made the goal of ending poverty possible for the first time, and this was one of the platforms of the campaign. Most important of the conditions that made it possible is what we can call the 'cosmopolitanising state'. As an ideal-type, the 'cosmopolitanising state' can be defined by two principal features that distinguish it from the classic sovereign state:

- i) state sovereignty is shared in international institutions of co-operative global governance and in accordance with international treaties, agreements and norms (Held 1995, 2002);
- ii) state legitimacy depends upon the extent to which policy actors acting on behalf of states conform to international agreements and norms (Crawford and Marks in Archibugi et al. 1998; Beetham 1999).

Ending poverty is possible now, therefore, not just because of scientific technology – medical, agricultural, industrial; but also because of new political technologies. The cosmopolitanising state consists of bureaucratic officials, regulators, judges and elected politicians networked with their counterparts from other states across borders to draw up, reach agreement on, regulate and police international norms, largely through 'soft power' but borrowing the traditional monopoly over violence of modern states if necessary and where it is possible to do so (see Slaughter 2004). As such, networks of the cosmopolitanising state 'stretch' traditional modern state institutions in space, offering

the potential for moving the concerns of global politics away from traditional struggles over sovereignty, readiness for war, and wealth-producing territory towards issues of mutual concern: peace, the world economy, environmental sustainability, human rights.

The cosmopolitanising state was crucial as a condition of the Global Call to Action against Poverty, and practical understanding of the potential of these new conditions was the primary strength of the campaign. It aimed to put pressure from below (to meet pressure from above – from the United Nations) on states to make them live up to the ideals of the cosmopolitanising state, to put pressure on politicians, especially those leaders of G8 nations, often described as ‘world leaders’, to transcend national interests and to create policy in the name of a global demos that only has representation through the states system; to represent those who are not represented in international institutions through the procedures of internationally powerful national states. As one branch of that campaign, Make Poverty History similarly aimed to make good on the promise of the cosmopolitanising state. As such it attempted to make national citizens into global citizens. The citizens of the UK were to come to understand that ‘their’ state would be illegitimate insofar as the elected government acted only to realise national interests because UK citizens, acting through ‘their’ state have obligations towards non-nationals outside that state’s territorial boundaries. The campaign could only possibly succeed, however, by using the legitimate democratic procedures of the national state – in order to transcend it. There is a real paradox at work in Make Poverty History, then – real because it is not just a paradox in thought, but in practices themselves: citizens using the structures and democratic procedures of their (cosmopolitanising) state must feel and act as global citizens.

How was pressure on the cosmopolitanising state created? In many ways it was created by conventional means: writing letters, petitions, demonstrations – albeit supplemented by texting and emailing. In these terms the campaign was very successful: large numbers of people turned out to hear Nelson Mandela speak in Trafalgar Square in February 2005; there was a huge international demonstration at the G8 in Edinburgh in July; 750,000 ‘votes for Trade Justice’ were delivered to Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street in December and so on. Conventional campaigning tools are necessarily mediated; there is no possible political campaigning without media (even if we only think of fliers and posters, but today campaigns also involve the internet, mobile phones and so on (Scott and Street 2001)). However, this campaign was not just mediated in the sense that organisations were forced to use media in order to try to reach people who can make a difference (who’ll write letters, get out into the streets, vote and so on). It was a campaign that not only took place through the media; to a large extent, especially in the UK, it took place in the media.

Make Poverty History was practically a year long media event in 2005. It began on January 1<sup>st</sup> on the BBC when a very popular prime time sitcom ‘The Vicar of Dibley’ introduced the campaign to a mass audience (the main character implored her parishioners to support MPH while footage was shown of two children in Africa comforting each other after their mother had died of AIDs), and this was soon followed by a march of 600 women clergy on 10, Downing St on January 13<sup>th</sup>. All through 2005 the BBC ran programmes about Africa – largely documentaries, including one narrated by Bob Geldof, but they also turned popular drama series over to writers to develop the focus (eg ‘Holby City’ was set in Ghana) during Africa TV week. Most highly publicised was a one-off drama, ‘The Girl in the Café’ by Richard Curtis (writer and director of ‘4 Weddings and a Funeral’, ‘Notting Hill’ and other box office hits), which was unashamed agitprop for Make Poverty History, a romantic comedy set at the G8, which ended with a cliff-

hanger: will the politicians do the right thing? Every single newspaper in Britain found a way to join the campaign: The Guardian and The Mirror were part of it from the beginning, but by the peak of the media excitement, even the Conservative press had joined in (with the exception of The Daily Mail, though even they relented occasionally), proposing how we could live and buy more ethically as well as covering stories, interviews and publishing op-eds on the campaign. In July media excitement over the campaign peaked with Live8 – concerts in 10 venues in 9 different countries, broadcast on TV, radio and through the internet all around the world and watched, according to the organisers, by 3 billion people. The media was saturated with celebrity stories and viewpoints during the build up to Live8, but it is important to bear in mind that, even before this, the campaign had a very high media profile. It was celebrity-led from the very beginning of 2005, but it had been strongly represented in the media before the sensation of Live8.

In practical terms, how did the campaign differ from others? ‘Cultural politics’ is crucial to all social movement campaigns: changing ideas, usually by re-naming them, to bring ‘ordinary’ people outside the core members of the movement to see things from a different perspective are what social movements do most effectively when they are successful (Nash 2000). Cultural politics was necessary, for example, to make sense of the slogan ‘justice not charity’, so that people should understand ‘hunger’ as a systemic problem of human making, rather than an incidental consequence of natural causes, and as preventable by structural changes rather than just bad luck. However, there is a way in which cultural politics was far more prominent in Make Poverty History than in the average contemporary social movement campaign because it could only possibly be successful if there was a complete reorientation of national ‘politics as usual’. There needed to be a realisation of global solidarity to displace or transform the usual national orientation of politics. As Nancy Fraser has argued, throughout modernity the national frame of the

Westphalian-Keynsian system of justice has tied procedures and community together in such a way that questions of 'who' and 'how' have not been raised (Fraser 2005). This has surely been the case in the North, though the situation has been different elsewhere at different times. Whether it has been a matter of modern struggles over redistribution or for recognition, they have almost invariably, if often implicitly, addressed the national state in the name of the nation as the political community to whom and for whom justice is relevant (with the partial exception of the environmental movement). With globalisation, this national frame is disrupted, and the cosmopolitanising state is partly a development to deal with the 'externalities' produced (environmental damage is the classic example), and partly also driving globalisation through new forms of regulation. The real task of Make Poverty History was, therefore, to create a new imagined political community to put pressure on the cosmopolitanising state out of national civil society. It was not just a matter of getting people to change their perspectives in order to agree with the particular proposals of the campaign and then to take action within the 'normal' frame of national politics: to write to their MP, to demonstrate, to sign a petition. It was rather a matter of transforming the dominant frame of 'national interest' to conceive of justice more broadly, as concerning those with whom national citizens are connected outside the nation. To be successful, the campaign had to enable people to understand themselves as part of a global political community, intimately connected with the lives of people far away, with whom they might otherwise feel they have nothing in common, through a world economic system in which they find themselves not only the super-privileged rich in relation to others but also, as the citizens of powerful states, in a powerful position to alter the life-chances of their fellow human beings around the world. Only if national citizens come to understand global citizens as able and obliged to hold politicians to account for injustices systematically perpetrated on people in developing countries to further their own 'national interests' would politicians act to alter 'politics as usual'. Indeed, only then



would politicians sympathetic to the cause have a mandate to so act, or be likely to be bold enough to take the necessary measures – given their official positions as the elected representatives of the national citizenry.

How could such a change in perspective be achieved for the vast majority of the population except through popular media? It was vital that the popular media had to be engaged, not just because campaigns are necessarily mediated and this one required such a radical change of perspective amongst the greater majority of the electorate, but also because the media in general is not a neutral forum in which ideas of ‘national interest’ and global social relations are to be worked out. On the contrary, from newspapers to national public broadcasting systems the media itself constructs and consolidates the national framing of politics (Billig 1995; Anderson 1983). From banal nationalism to the outright jingoism of the tabloid newspapers, the media itself is closely – perhaps inextricably? – tied to the imagining of the national political community.

#### Showbusiness, not business as usual

As a campaign for ‘justice not charity’, it was essential, therefore, that Make Poverty History should be popular, if not populist. One of the most interesting things about the campaign in this respect was its emotional tone – the cultural politics of emotions it engaged and elicited as appropriate from prospective adherents. Two overwhelming features of the campaign stand out in this respect.

Firstly, the campaign was created as showbusiness. This was most explicit and most evident in the use of celebrities, of course, but the whole media campaign was constructed as dramatic, intended to elicit strong emotions and to create emotional involvement. As Bono put it in an interview with The Guardian: ‘This is showbusiness; we’re creating

drama... Years ago we were very conscious that in order to prevail on Africa, we would have to get better at dramatising the situation so that we could make Africa less of a burden, more of an adventure' (16/6/05).

The campaign was quite simply made for the media (1). There are many examples of how drama was achieved. One was the 'click' ad, in which a number of celebrities clicked their fingers regularly, each click representing another child's death from preventable causes. It was banned by Ofcom in September 2005 as too political. It was a very powerful ad – creating a strong sense of time and dramatic suspense. The regular clicks suggested time passing without action to prevent another death... and another death... and another death... They also create a sense of simultaneity in time: that death happened right now, while I'm here watching, another child has died... and another... and another... Another example of the creation of a sense of drama was frequent use of the expression 'We'll be watching you' (from a song by The Police, originally 'I'll be watching you'). This phrase, used frequently by Geldof, Bono, and others and widely reported in the media, both involved 'us' – the watchers – and created suspense: what will we see? What will happen? Perhaps most effective at creating suspense and a sense of personal involvement, however, was the continual emphasis of the campaign on you as the one who can make a difference, as a member of a generation that is unique in history. You are among the generation that can rescue these people from their plight. There was a continual and extraordinarily un-ironic re-stating that you can change the world. This sentence from The Mirror, entreating people to buy a white wrist band, symbol of the campaign, well exemplifies the theme: 'Join the celebrities by wearing a white band and help end poverty for ever... By wearing a white band, you can be part of the biggest anti-poverty drive, joining forces with 150 million people in 60 countries...' (2/2/05) Again, from The

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Guardian, 'In the next 50 days, you can change the world for good.' (15/5/05) And, from the Make Poverty History website, 'you can be part of it' (31/5/05).

Secondly, there was a very explicit strategy to elicit pride and joy, feelings of empowerment, rather than shame and guilt. The appropriate feeling solicited was righteous anger; you are part of the solution, not part of the problem. As Stan Cohen's work has shown, eliciting shame and guilt is often counterproductive: horrific and disturbing accounts produce denial; we'd rather 'not know what we know' (Cohen 1995, 2001). Nor in the case of this campaign was 'compassion for distant suffering' to the fore as it has been in others; it was an important sub-theme, but the heroic rescue narrative was much more prominent (Stevenson 1999, Tester 2001). The strategy of Make Poverty History was much closer to that detailed by Luc Boltanski in his important book, *Distant Suffering*: the denunciation of systemic injustice, for which the appropriate emotion is indignation and the desire to bring about change (Boltanski 1999). Nelson Mandela's speech in Trafalgar Sq on February 3rd, the very words of which were continually repeated, by activists and politicians, is a perfect expression of both these themes, as in the following quote: 'Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom... Make Poverty History in 2005. Make History in 2005. Then we can all stand with our heads high' ([www.makepovertyhistory.org/docs/mandelaspeech.doc](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/docs/mandelaspeech.doc)).

Make Poverty History linked these emotions to a set of ideas that we might call 'globalism', explicitly set against the taken-for-granted national framework within which politics is normally conducted. Globalism is forward looking and inclusive, self-consciously advocating 'humanity' as a universal identity. As exclusive totalities, identities need a constitutive outside, an Other, for their construction. The explicit

constitutive outside of globalism is not a group of people, but systemic injustice (though, as we shall see, in *Make Poverty History* there was, as there perhaps must always be in human relationships, an implicit, embodied Other as well). ‘The world demands justice’ (MPH press release 9/6/05). In fact, forward-looking, globalism was often articulated around an injustice overcome that creates solidarity today. Again, the speech by Mandela, who was introduced by Bob Geldof as ‘President of the World’, set the tone here: ‘... [as] long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest... The Global Call for Action against Poverty can take its place as a public movement alongside the movement to abolish slavery and the international solidarity against apartheid.’

Globalism constructs the world as if it were already a single space of global citizens. This was spelled out in a letter to The Mirror ‘We are global citizens, not little islanders’ (26/4/05). As a vision, globalism was not clearly worked out in any of the campaign materials of *Make Poverty History*, nor in political speeches, nor representations of the campaign in the media (as it might be, theoretically, in terms of a world state and civil society, for example), but the construction nevertheless had significant implications for national ‘politics as usual’. A good example is the use of the term ‘public’ in the context of globalism. As Michael Billig has pointed out, ‘the public’, unqualified by geographical delimitation, invariably denotes a national public (Billig 1995). What globalism achieved in the *Make Poverty History* campaign, was the problematising of this term; it was simply no longer clear quite who it referred to. So, for example, the following quote is not quite claiming that a ‘world public’ exists, and certainly not theorising what that might mean. But leaving ‘public’ unqualified, as it does, certainly does not return us to a ‘national public’. On the contrary, it allows us to believe that there is a ‘public’ beyond the nation, of which we are part. ‘Today [the demonstration in Edinburgh] has been way beyond our

expectations. The fact that 200,000 people gathered in Edinburgh to demand that the G8 act now will send a powerful message to the G8. They can be under no illusion about what the public want. Now is the time for action, not empty words.' (Richard Bennet, Chair of MPH, MPH press release 2/7/05)

The term 'world leaders' was similarly ambiguous in Make Poverty History, and similarly productive of orientations beyond the nation as a result of that ambiguity. As a term, it was hugely important in the campaign. Apparently a simple description of 'our' elected leaders, it simultaneously denoted – without problematising the description – the leaders of the most powerful economic countries in the world and at the same time British politicians. The fact that 'our' leaders are not elected by the world as such is completely obscured in this formulation. It was very important to the campaign because what it allowed was representation of 'the public' invoked to bring pressure to bear on 'our' elected leaders – without calling the legitimacy of their leadership, or of 'our' status as 'the public' into question. The slippage between the two is well-exemplified in this quote from Emma Freud (a TV presenter closely involved in the campaign): 'The world leaders are our representatives. They are only there because we elected them. If they truly believe their voters want this, it will happen' (The Sun 25/4/05).

In order to highlight the globalism of Make Poverty History, with all its limitations and ambiguities, it is useful to contrast it with the very different way in which the emotions of pride and joy were elicited in the national context of the US. Like Make Poverty History, ONE – its sister organisation there, with which it had close links - had as its aim, 'justice not charity', but it took a very particular approach to getting that message across – one which emphasised America's greatness and generosity. Bono told Time that he was advised to appeal to America's greatness (27/6/05) and he did, referring to America as:

'not just a country, but also an idea', that people who want to be free and equal should be 'embraced' (Q & A with Bono 22/9/05). ONE fostered pride (we are the generation) and empowerment (we can make poverty history) whilst filling out the 'we' with nationalism rather than an appeal to global solidarity as such. For example, the slogan of ONE, which appeared frequently in their press releases, was the following: 'ONE is a new effort by Americans to rally Americans, ONE by ONE, to fight AIDs and extreme poverty'.

Similarly, nationalist, is the ONE Declaration that 'We believe that in the best American tradition of helping others to help themselves, now is the time to join with other countries in a historic pact for compassion and justice to help the poorest people of the world overcome AIDs and extreme poverty' ([www.one.org](http://www.one.org) 5/12/05). This kind of approach surely was appropriate to its national context, though the campaign didn't take off in the US as it did in the UK, despite A-list celebrity endorsement. But if it had, it's not clear that it would have made much of an impact on altering commitments to 'national interests'. Compare, for example, Bush's pronouncement, presumably intended to play well at home, but widely quoted in the UK media as quite at odds with the sentiments that had been building up in this national context: 'I come [to the G8 summit in Scotland] with an agenda that I think is best for our country' (from an interview with Trevor McDonald on 'Tonight', ITV 3/7/05)

A second approach within Make Poverty History, as prevalent as globalism in the UK, was a kind of hybrid of globalism and nationalism: 'cosmopolitan nationalism'. It was especially invoked by politicians, by Tony Blair but even more by Gordon Brown, who managed to position themselves as the leaders of the campaign and were widely supported as such in the UK media (to the consternation of the NGOs involved in the coalition, who saw themselves at odds with New Labour over neo-liberal policies on trade, and to the point where critics derided MPH as a PR exercise for the government. See Ann

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Talbot 'Live 8: who organised the PR campaign for Blair and Bush' [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org) 11/7/05; also Stuart Hodgkinson 'G8? Africa Nil' Red Pepper November 2005).

'Cosmopolitan nationalism' is a kind of hybrid between globalism and nationalism. It has two main components in this context. Firstly, Britain is the greatest nation because it leads the world in developing globalist values and policy in international institutions. In cosmopolitan nationalism the fact that Britain had the Presidency of the G8 in 2005 was sometimes presented as if the UK were literally leading the world in ending poverty (despite the UK's relative meanness with regard to aid, its commitment to neo-liberalism and so on) (eg 'Remarks by the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP Chancellor of the Exchequer on Debt Relief' 14/1/05). Secondly, cosmopolitan nationalism involved enlightened self-interest: it is not that we give up our national interests to help non-national others; but we help people out of poverty and despair to prevent terrorism and mass migration that will harm our nation (eg Tony Blair's Mansion House speech 15/11/05).

Interestingly, globalism continually risked slipping into cosmopolitan nationalism. For example, in this quote from The Mirror, a summary of the campaign in 2005, 'This is only the beginning. The British public and the world's conscience are watching the politicians more closely than ever before on behalf of the world's poor...' (under the headline 'How You Helped Make Poverty History in 2005' 2/1/06). And again, from Chris Martin of Coldplay, a quote that also exemplifies the ambiguity of 'world leaders': 'World leaders only do things they think will please their voting public. Britain is amazing – it really cares about this stuff.' (The Mirror 1/6/05)

### Why isn't poverty history?

Immediate criticisms by NGOs, who disagreed with Geldof's initial assessment, and with the British government, suggested that the result of Make Poverty History was charity not

justice: while a little more money was produced for developing countries, nothing was done to restructure economic policies that produce the gross inequalities and suffering at which the campaign aimed (eg 'Small Change' produced by World Development Movement June 2006). And this has come to be the received wisdom on the campaign. Even Geldof, slated by NGOs for acclaiming Make Poverty History as a success after the G8 summit in 2005, has been publicly critical of the outcome in 2006 on very similar grounds (eg BBC News website press release 29/6/06). (Cf Larry Elliot in The Guardian 3/7/06 for one of the very few alternative views.) Although Make Poverty History was hugely successful in constructing a public space for its claims and in mobilising popular sentiment for its aims, then, it is generally agreed that ultimately, it was a terrible failure. Make Poverty History may have achieved something of a shift in UK politics, putting world development on the agenda of domestic politics in the election of 2005, for example, in which all the major parties promised to increase aid to 0.7% by 2013. But it failed to achieve any of its concrete aims in changing global economic policy, and it surely also failed to achieve genuine cosmopolitan solidarity across state borders.

What is solidarity? Solidarity requires more than identity: a shared sense of values and relevant facts and dispositions to act in certain ways as a result. It also requires social relationships across differences, the shared appreciation of material risks and benefits that are unevenly distributed and yet experienced as of common concern to the group. This is how nationalism, on a continuum from ethnic to civic, has supported national citizenship to the point where it is now the global norm. As we see in the case of nationalism, solidarity has an important emotional component. The constructed 'we' must feel solidarity; we must feel ourselves to be interdependent in a 'community of fate'. There is little doubt that Make Poverty History did achieve feelings of this kind, at least within the UK. Feelings of interdependence are not enough, however; 'we' must also have



some understanding of how relations of interdependence amongst us are lived differently and what that means for the community as a whole.

The much-criticised absence of African accounts of the campaign in the media is a symptom of the failure of Make Poverty History in this respect (see, for example, Yasmin Alabhai-Brown 'Bob Geldof and the White Man's Burden', The Independent 6/6/2005). In Boltanski's terms the failure of Make Poverty History to achieve solidarity is an ever-present danger in the cultural politics of moral condemnation: the feeling for the suffering of distant people, which the campaign undoubtedly did achieve, degenerated from a collective understanding of 'our' moral obligation to do something to alleviate that suffering into narcissistic sentimentalism. The absence of African voices was structured – African intellectuals were critical of the campaign, in contrast to those Africans represented as the grateful recipients of 'our' help. Across the focal points of the campaign, criticism was virtually uniformly identified with cynicism and not permitted. In this respect critics of Make Poverty History are the embodied Other of its apparently universally inclusive 'we', who are rightfully angry about the continuing existence of global poverty and who want to see it ended, excluded in order to make the universal 'we' possible (2). An illustration of this failure comes in a quote from a Scottish student responding to John Kamau, a Nairobi journalist in Edinburgh for the G8 summit, who asked him whether he should be hopeful about the outcome: 'This is not only about you, it is about our humanity' (J. Kamau and O. Burkeman 'Trading Places' The Guardian 4/7/05). Obviously such a stance, whilst possibly displaying a strong sense of responsibility for the world, at the same time risks a narcissism that hardly reaches for understanding across differences. Involving more than just identity, cosmopolitan solidarity requires the working through and incorporation of different perspectives from positions of (in this case, gross) inequality and conflicting socio-economic interests to

reach consensus on how “we” nevertheless belong together, sharing mutually-recognised belonging to a community of fate.

What, if anything, can we learn from the failure of Make Poverty History? Here I want to briefly consider three possible reasons why Make Poverty History failed: why it failed to achieve its stated aims in terms of the economic policies of the G8, and why it failed to achieve genuine cosmopolitan solidarity, degenerating into sentimental narcissism rather than launching an ongoing mobilisation of demands for global citizenship.

Firstly, it is argued by radicals on the left that Make Poverty History could never succeed because there was a structural deficit in the campaign. On this reasoning the campaign could never succeed precisely because it tried to work through existing international institutions which are structured to benefit rich and powerful states. Aimed at privileged states, it was naïve to expect existing international institutions to use the power they have to give away some of those advantages to poor, weak states. The campaign was therefore a failure in its very conception and shows a deficient understanding of the social relations between rich and poor. Undoubtedly this is a telling criticism, backed up thorough analysis (eg George Monbiot ‘Africa’s New Best Friends’ [monbiot.com](http://monbiot.com), posted 7/7/05). However, it is the case that any campaign to democratise international structures would also be faced with a similar problem: how could some kind of international democracy possibly be achieved except by privileged states giving up their privileges? In this sense Make Poverty History activists are correct in their analysis: persuading those who profit from the misery of others to stop is like trying to abolish slavery, end apartheid or, perhaps more appositely, to enfranchise the working class.

The second possible reason that Make Poverty History failed may have been that there was a deliberative deficit in the campaign. By using the term 'deliberative' I do not mean to suggest that the campaign could only have succeeded on the basis of a Habermasian rational consensus. On the contrary: the originality of the campaign, and its success in mobilising popular sentiment and in shifting something of the common-sense understanding of rights and responsibilities as based exclusively on national belonging, are surely attributable to an understanding of politics as agonistic, as involving the more or less strategic use of emotion, images and values in order to win allies to the cause (Mouffe 1993). It is very unlikely that a more austere and intellectually critical debate would have been more effective. Moreover, the campaign did engage in rational persuasion: emotions and reasoned judgement are complementary not antithetical and the campaign was not exclusively based on 'feel-good' emotional excitement. Arguments, however inadequate and incomplete were made as to why 'national interests' were less appropriate and attractive than 'globalism' or 'cosmopolitan nationalism' when it comes to matters of poverty, and facts about poverty in the developing world and how the aims of the campaign would deal with it, were effectively presented – actually to a surprising extent - in much of the mainstream media coverage, including the tabloids, as well as on the Make Poverty History website.

There was, however, a deliberative deficit in one particular respect: what the mainstream media campaign did not do was to take on the job of persuading 'us' that we should mandate national/world leaders to enact economic policies that would explicitly go against 'our' national interests. The campaign mobilised support for policies beyond national interests, but did not take up the difficulties of conflicts of interests between rich Northerners and poor Southerners. Cancelling debt and increasing aid cost very little in proportion to national income in the North. Trade justice, on the other hand, would

require the liberalising of Northern economies and the protection of developing ones to enable them to grow, and this would undoubtedly increase prices and threaten jobs in the North. There was some consideration of the effects of such a restructuring - in the popular papers as well as the qualities (eg article by George Alagiah in The Observer 3/7/05; and one by Chris Martin in The Mirror 15/12/05). However, there was certainly no sustained media debate over politicians' responsibilities to citizens as compared to non-citizens where there is a conflict of interests between them. There was, therefore, no developed consensus on how rights and responsibilities should be balanced and distributed when it came to making policies on global poverty. And without sure knowledge of such a consensus, which 'world leader' could be expected to put the interests of non-citizens above those of citizens in drawing up or putting into practice such policies?

Was a media deficit also one of the reasons for the failure of Make Poverty History? Or to put it another way, what do we learn from this campaign about the capacities of the media for realising the changes in subjectivity necessary to realise the ideals of the cosmopolitanising state and of the global citizenship they appear to imply? One interesting thing about Make Poverty History was the way in which different media enabled the construction of 'globalism' and 'cosmopolitan nationalism' that is rather at odds with usual understandings of their functions. Most notably, the Make Poverty History website was not solely responsible for carrying globalism, whilst newspapers did not conform to their status as the exemplars of the imagined community as national. In fact, the Make Poverty History website acted very similarly to a paper-based medium in that it confined itself to presenting the facts that made the campaign important, reporting news of actions past and future, publishing press releases and selling merchandise. It did not create a space for interaction – a blog or discussion forum - presumably to avoid

criticism of the campaign. On the other hand, many newspapers also made themselves into campaigning tools, as well as carrying the more traditional reports: giving the MPH website address, email addresses and numbers to text 'world leaders', urging us to demonstrate and – in the case of the Financial Times, creating an online petition ([www.g8rally.com](http://www.g8rally.com)).

What we learn from Make Poverty History in this respect then, is that in the context of the cosmopolitanising state, paradigmatically national media can and do represent globalism to newspaper readers. The identity of the global citizen, feeling cosmopolitan solidarity with suffering non-citizens far away can be constructed from within the cosmopolitanising state. What is much more difficult, perhaps impossible, is to construct equitable social relations across borders from within the territorially bounded public space of a single state. To do so would surely require not just more equitable structures of global governance, but also genuinely popular transnational media in which material commonalities and differences were debated from divergent socio-economic perspectives as well as creating and sustaining emotionally charged campaigns like Make Poverty History. The restructuring of global governance and such a transformation in media consumption and production both seem unlikely, however, without a huge transformation in our conception of ourselves as 'people' who live in one particular territory and who make up 'a (global, political) people'. And where is such a transformation to take place except in the popular media?

Notes

1. This is not to say, however, that Make Poverty History should be considered a 'pseudo-event' (Boorstin 1992). There is no reason to suppose that the intentions of those involved was to create or to participate in a media event as such, rather than to bring about real change in the world.

2. Racism was an also an issue here: justifications for the absence of African musicians from Live8 were different, but the effects were similarly exclusionary.

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