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Chapter 10

CELEBRITY CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT VALUES. . . AND DISASTER

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Introduction

This chapter considers the role of celebrity in modern disasters and examines the effect of celebrity culture upon the way people interpret and react to catastrophe. I begin by considering the antecedents of celebrity culture in the rise of mass media coverage of disasters. I then enquire into the influence of celebrities on public reactions to catastrophe, upon the politics of disaster and upon the management of humanitarian activities. Examples are taken from Africa, because this continent has been a focus of interest for celebrities in rich countries. Next, I analyse the special case of the victim as celebrity, which is an artefact of the mass media culture in which we live. Finally, I endeavour to sum up the role and impact of celebrity culture in disaster risk reduction.

The origins of modern celebrity culture in the context of disasters

Over the period 1967–70 famine occurred sporadically in the Nigerian state of Biafra, where people starved to death because they were denied the ability to produce or procure food. There are some grounds for describing this as ‘the prototype modern disaster’. It was the first in which television films of the effects of the famine were shown within hours of being taken – i.e., in near real-time. Viewers in rich Western countries were led to believe that Biafrans were starving because there was no food, or in other words that the causes of the disaster were natural. In reality, the Nigerian Government and Federal troops blockaded Biafra and attacked hospitals and feeding centres. Moreover, the embryonic Biafran Government behaved in no less a Draconian manner towards its own citizens (Ekwe-Ekwe 1990). In my opinion, the argument that this was the first modern disaster rests on the following evidence: first, it was a prototype of the sort of media spectacle that would later become the rule, rather than the exception. Second, attempts by NGOs, notably the French Red Cross, to maintain neutrality did more harm than good (and in fact dissatisfaction led to the founding, in 1971, of Médecins sans Frontières). Third, it was a complex disaster based on a proxy war, and interventionism of all kinds frequently did more harm than good.

Although there were strong elements of neo-colonialism in the Biafra war (Nkrumah 1966), it was a media-based participatory affair. In a very extreme example, the journalist Auberon Waugh (1939–2001), eldest son of the novelist Evelyn Waugh, named his son Nathaniel Thomas Biafra (Biafra Waugh, b. 1968). The seeds of celebrity culture were present. Meanwhile the use and glorification of foreign

mercenaries by both sides kept alive the celebrity status of fighters, which had been so prevalent in 1939–45.

In the modern world, it is difficult – though not impossible – that disaster go unpublicised by the mass media. Studies of the means by which this occurs are not copious but are accumulating slowly into a coherent body of work (Fearn-Banks 2011). In general terms it is concluded that the process of communication between the mass media and the general public is powerful but imprecise (Goltz 1984). In all its portentousness, this statement can be considered as either vague or ambiguous. However, it means either that people's opinions are deeply influenced by the mass media or, conversely, that the media have a great ability to mould opinions. The fusing of disaster with celebrity is driven by the public's insatiable appetite for personalities, human interest stories and individuals to which ordinary people can attach their fantasies (Morey et al. 2011). Copiousness and incessant novelty, much of it artificially manufactured, are the response of the media. Studies of press coverage of disasters reveal that at least half of what is published or broadcast consists of human interest stories (Scanlon and Alldred 1982). The fusion of these with celebrity is a natural extension that helps dramatise events and endows them with a lustre which increases their attraction to the consumers of news.

Defining celebrity and celebrity culture

A celebrity is by definition someone who is publicly celebrated because of his or her achievements. Clearly, celebrities have existed throughout human experience: in Western civilisation they were lauded in Greco-Roman epics, Scandinavian sagas, Medieval ballads, Victorian novels and many other places. Parallel hagiographies exist in other cultures: for example, the *Shahnameh*, or *Book of Kings*, by Abulqasim Ferdowsi (940–1020) is the history of the reigns of forty-seven Persian kings and three queens, all of whom were, to varying degrees, celebrities in Iran and neighbouring countries. There is much emphasis in this book on *farr*, the quality of majesty, regality and 'kingliness'. However it was defined, it represented a virtue that, along with riches and power, helped to perpetuate the mystique of the monarchy. Alongside the Persian monarchs were the astrologers, who for long periods of history were the celebrities as a result of their perceived ability to see into the future. In Western culture, Michel de Nostredame ('Nostradamus', 1503–66), has been one of the most enduring figures in this respect (Nostradamus 2009).

In the modern world, power relations are constantly changing. One of the principal drivers of this process is the role of mass communication. To some extent, and for the purposes of this chapter, it can be reduced to the impact of mass entertainment (O'Neill and Harcup 2009). One of its greatest mutations concerns who, and what, are considered authoritative. Most people seem to feel a deep need to look up to someone. That person may be seen as a role model or a saint (an idealised personification of cardinal virtues), or simply as someone who is enviable or worthy of respect (Littler 2008). A leader is a person who offers both guidance and protection. This implies that such a person, if he or she is successful, is endowed with strength, intelligence, wisdom and foresight. However, that may be an idealistic vision of the qualities of leadership. A client based relationship would merely require the leader to have power

over the led. This may come from patronage and serfdom, and it survives very well in those environments in which power relations are formally structured in an exploitative manner.

A leader is not necessarily a hero and vice versa (Toncar et al. 2007). That is one of the reasons why elected representatives (leaders) and the protagonists of the entertainment industry (heroes) can coexist so easily. As the latter are frequently much more enduringly popular, the former may look to them for inspiration when ratings are flagging. Celebrity culture exists when people, especially fans, look up to the celebrity because he or she is perceived to be authoritative as a result of his or her talent and fame. Hence, politicians defer to celebrities because they are revered by the public.

However, talent is not everything. In the age of mass communication, fame (as discussed in Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*) is manufactured by barrages of publicity and hype (Herman and Chomsky 1995, Cottle 2006). Hence, there are people who are 'famous for being famous'. In many respects, this unproductive positive feedback situation underlines the power of celebrity in a world in which 'the medium [itself] is the message' (McLuhan 1964). Marshal McLuhan was one of the great theorists of media studies. Mention of his name prompts a brief examination of how valuable social theory may be to the understanding of celebrity and disaster.

A brief theoretical perspective

Whereas 'celebrity culture and disaster' is a theme that would fit – somehow – into a variety of social theories, from post-modernism to neopragmatism, the question remains outstanding as to how much benefit would be derived from forcing it into any such mould. Thus, Goffman's conception of 'identity stripping' (Goffman 1961) or Giddens's (1991) and Chomsky's (2002) ideas on the control of knowledge and power could be extended to cover the present case, but there is a serious risk of overextending them – i.e., reading more into the theory than it can offer in terms of explanatory power. At this point, one is mindful of Couch's (2000) struggles to characterise popular culture in relation to disasters, and what a heterogeneous mass of phenomena he was endeavouring to pin down.

Nevertheless, Giddens (1991) wrote of the 'sequestration of experience' (Smith 2002), meaning the ways in which those of us who are fortunate enough to live in wealthy societies have become relatively insulated from birth, death, physical injury, insanity and the sheer nastiness of life as it is lived in many less fortunate parts of the world. In my view this is an oversimplification: the experiences in question have been made more symbolic than real for those who do not experience them in first person, but they eventually catch up with us all, and then the test is whether we know how to cope with them. Nevertheless, Giddens (1991) was right to argue that in the modern age there is an unwillingness to confront major moral and existential issues. Furthermore, Williamson (1998, p. 26) suggested that we live much of our emotional lives by proxy. Blondheim and Liebes (2002) went even further in describing what they saw as the 'subversive potential' of live television, which provides the questions, but not the answers, to existential dilemmas.

By and large, we have moved from astrology and the interpretation of portents to the modern soothsaying of the 'talking heads' who forecast and comment via our mass media. Martin Amis lamented that 'what everyone has in them, these days, is not a novel, but a memoir. We live in the age of mass loquacity' (Amis 2000, p. 6).

Renn et al. (1992, p. 139) argued that 'hazards interact with psychological, social, institutional, and cultural processes in ways that can heighten or attenuate individual and social perceptions of risk and shape risk behaviour'. Much of the development of the social amplification of risk theory is based on the assumption that the process happens naturally, spontaneously or autonomously. What if it is deliberately managed? Pidgeon et al. (2003, p. 22) wrote as follows:

"Although the dramatisation of risks and risk events in the media has received much attention, the circularity and tight interrelations between the media and other components of social amplification processes (e.g., contextual effects, historical settings, interest group activity, public beliefs) render it difficult to determine the specific effects of the volume and content of media coverage."

Whereas the sheer copiousness and heterogeneity of media outputs make that observation generally true, it is less so when dealing with the more direct relationship between celebrities, the causes they espouse and the people who follow them.

After reviewing the cults and spectacles of history, Penfold (2004, p. 300) argued that the cultural reception of celebrities has developed beyond anything previously experienced in centuries past. This is perhaps an exaggeration, given, for example, the veneration of emperors, but there is no denying the change in values that has occurred.

The great rallying call that has echoed down to us from the Edwardian era is E.M. Forster's 'only connect'. Writing in his novel *Howard's End*, Forster meant one should connect across class barriers and their associated, rather contrived, moralities. Forster had to be discrete about his own homosexuality, which was then a crime in the eyes of the law. A Cambridge academic, he was very much the anti-celebrity. He would probably be amazed at how his rallying call has been taken up in the modern world, but also how it has lost its original meaning and come to symbolise the fear of being left out, not a loathing for artificial social boundaries.

The following investigation will, I hope, show that the cult and status of celebrity has a strong bearing on social attitudes to disaster, but that these remain fickle. One thing is certain: disaster is not better understood by the general public as a result of the intervention, or the manufacture, of celebrities. People's reactions to it are, however, easily moulded, even if only temporarily.

The power of celebrity

At the time of writing there is a major scandal in the United Kingdom over the activities of the late Jimmy Savile (1926–2011), entertainer and philanthropist. Amid a wave of public revulsion and official alarm, Savile has been posthumously accused of being a sexual predator and abuser of children. Although some accusations were made during his lifetime, his reputation was relatively unscathed throughout half a century of activities in the public view. In some measure, this is because attitudes towards sexual abuse were different fifty years ago and only changed slowly towards something more fair and accommodating from the perspective of the victims. In part it reflects the power of celebrity, which has grown and grown in recent decades. Savile apparently used his status as a public figure to cloak his many and monstrous predations, and in large measure he succeeded. In part this is because mass media celebrities have acquired power in the public arena, and in part it is because some of them are able to use their status, and the functions of the media, to control the image of them that is presented to the public.

Of course, fame and notoriety have always existed. They have frequently conferred power and influence upon those who acquire them. I do not wish to conflate royalty, leadership and celebrity more than is reasonable, but there is no doubt that great kings, queens and leaders have been celebrated throughout history, and in a significant number of cases merely because of the positions they held. Good examples of the powerful and celebrated exist in the Roman emperors Caligula, Hadrian and Augustus, or in Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan. However, the rise of the electronic mass media has not only greatly increased the sphere of recognition of the famous or notorious, but they have also altered the balance of who is a celebrity and what one needs to do to become one. It is a system that can easily be manipulated by whoever has the microphone and the public's attention, providing they can master the art of capturing the public's attention. Thus stars such as Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian are photogenic, fashionable and 'famous for being famous'.

The 'Geldof/Bono factor'

My use of the term 'Geldof/Bono factor' refers to the charitable involvement of Robert Frederick Zenon (Bob) Geldof (b. 1951) and Paul David Hewson (alias 'Bono', b. 1960), both of whom are singers in rock bands. Geldof has a second career in venture capitalism that has reputedly made him a billionaire. Both individuals have become enormously influential on the basis of their efforts to mobilise the entertainment industry in favour of charitable work in Africa. Geldof's efforts began with the hit song 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' (possibly not, as many of the intended beneficiaries are not Christians!) He went on to organise the Band Aid (1984), Live Aid (1985) and Live 8 (2005) rock concerts. Bono has concentrated on disease reduction and debt cancellation in Africa.

Since the days of the industrialists Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) and John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), philanthropy has benefited the philanthropists as well as the recipients of their largesse. It appears to render the accumulation of immense wealth less unethical. It keeps the donors in the public eye (if that is where they wish to

remain). It endows them with apparent moral authority, increases their connections with powerful decision makers and gives them influence over world affairs (Furedi 2010). High profile charity work by entertainment stars increases their celebrity and, not inconceivably, their earnings as well. Geldof in particular embodies the spirit of the age and the energy of its youth culture through the iconoclasm inherent in his use of offensive language and facile judgements. I am aware that the latter statement is Draconian, but it is backed up by the analyses of authors such as Müller, who penetratingly deconstructed the rock-concert-based approach to charity and in so doing observed (2013, p. 68) that 'The Band Aid representation of famine in Ethiopia has emerged more generally as a potent symbol of African collapse and the crisis of the post-independence project'. Yet Africa has not collapsed: indeed, it is growing vigorously in many ways, as one would expect of a continent with immense social, economic and cultural diversity.

On 15 December 2005, the writer Paul Theroux published an op-ed article in the New York Times called 'The Rock Star's Burden' (the title is derived from Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Take up the White Man's burden –/The savage wars of peace –/Fill full the mouth of famine/And bid the sickness cease'). Theroux (2005) criticised stars such as Bono, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, labelling them as 'mythomaniacs, people who wish to convince the world of their worth'. Theroux, who lived in Africa as a Peace Corps Volunteer, added that 'the impression that Africa is fatally troubled and can be saved only by outside help – not to mention celebrities and charity concerts – is a destructive and misleading conceit'. Elsewhere, Bono has been criticised, along with other celebrities, for '[ignoring] the legitimate voices of Africa and [turning] a global movement for justice into a grand orgy of narcissistic philanthropy'. In a cartoon published in the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*, two emaciated Africans say 'We're holding a famine in favour of fading rock-stars'.

According to Theroux (2005) and Müller (2013), the main criticisms of the 'celebrity philanthropy' approach are as follows:

- Interventions are made on the basis of snap judgements about economic and aid problems that are not backed by adequate research. Many of the problems are too subtle and sophisticated to be encapsulated in a slogan or remedied by a simple action.
- Most celebrity philanthropists have ignored the political causes of hunger and instability in Africa, yet tackling these may be fundamental to the solution.
- There have been suggestions that aid was misappropriated, for example, by being given to insurgents, but this has been vigorously contested by the organisers of the various charity initiatives.
- Celebrity philanthropy tends to adopt a paternalistic rather than inclusive approach. It is a well-known axiom of human and economic development that it must help and encourage people to take control of their own destinies, as passive receipt of aid can be debilitating rather than helpful.

In the final analysis, the impact of celebrity philanthropy tends to be superficial rather than substantial.

One of the most controversial acts of celebrity philanthropy was the adoption, finalised over the period 2006–2009, of two Malawian children, David Banda Mwale and Chifundo James, by the American singer Madonna Louise Ciccone (alias ‘Madonna’, b. 1958). The adoptions, and Madonna’s other charitable initiatives, were challenged by a Malawian NGO, the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation. The attitude of the Malawian Government and Judiciary has been inconsistent as they have been torn between the benefits of charitable acts (Malawi has two million orphan children) and the need to safeguard minors against potentially unscrupulous behaviour. In this respect, Madonna’s first adopted child is not an orphan, and there are suggestions that neither is the second. Hence, part of the basis of the challenge has been that children are being removed, unfairly, from their cultural and family milieu rather than given the chance to thrive in it. At the very least, Madonna’s approach could be regarded as heavy handed. Her ‘on–off’ approach to the funding of schools in Malawi has been criticised by those whose interest in education and development in Sub-Saharan Africa is more enduring.

The difference between Madonna’s strategy and that of Geldof and Bono lies in the role of popular support. Madonna acted unilaterally – at least, according to a spokesperson for the Malawian Government (Bronfen 2010, p. 180). Geldof and Bono rely upon mobilising the economic power of (mostly young) people who identify with the popular culture that they spearhead. As with all popular culture, the strategy relies upon being able to simplify issues.

Hitherto, the discussion has dealt exclusively with people who approach disasters from the starting point of already being celebrities. However, there is another class of person, for whom a disaster is the opportunity to become a celebrity – those who, in the Napoleonic fashion ‘have greatness thrust upon them’. Among these there are people who accept the challenge reluctantly or with genuine altruism and those who bask in fame or notoriety for its own sake.

Celebrity victimhood

Fame, or at least notability, can be achieved through being a victim, but in the active, not the passive sense. Active victims typically fight for one of the following: justice, a safer future, recognition of a cause or compensation for losses or reprisals against those who are perceived to have instigated the harm. Hence, the following is the array of agendas that can transform active victims into celebrities:

- *Justice*. The disaster is presumed to have occurred as a result of an injustice. For example, people are killed when houses collapse in a disaster because they have not been built to conform to the prevailing building codes. The builder or designer may therefore be considered culpable. However, there is a substantial ‘grey area’ of responsibility in which vulnerability to disaster comes from ignorance of the consequences which may, at least in part, be excusable, and from divided responsibilities.
- *A safer future*. The victim wishes to fight to ensure that risks are reduced and in the future a disaster with the same characteristics of impacts does not occur again.

- *Recognition of a cause.* Public initiatives connected with, for example, reducing risks of increasing safety may be susceptible to failure through lack of official recognition or lack of funding and support. The victim feels that he or she has a personal stake in ensuring that the initiative succeeds.
- *Compensation.* A victim may become well-known for fighting for compensation, possibly on a grand scale as a result of the alleged culpability of parties considered responsible for the disaster or its effects.
- *Reprisals.* Compensation suits are one of the main ways in which victims gain reprisals over those people or organisations that they deem are responsible for their misfortunes in disaster. Some of these actions can become high profile cases.

There is, of course, no inherent reason why pursuing any of these aims should convert the supplicant into a celebrity. However, the portrayal of victimhood by the modern mass media has transformed the whole process of advocacy by victims, presenting such people with the choice of whether or not to exploit the glare of publicity by projecting their personalities in certain ways. Victims may be part of 'disaster subcultures' (Granot 1996), in which their lives gain shape and substance from advocacy and association. The celebrities in disaster subcultures are usually those that exert a leadership function and keep the subculture alive

Let us now examine how the remarkable transformation of victimhood has come about over the last 75 years or so.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a victim as a person who has been killed or injured as a result of an event or circumstance. A survivor is defined as a person who remains alive after experiencing danger, an accident or a disaster, or continues to exist in spite of such a contingency. The following working definition will be adopted in this paper: a victim or survivor will be considered here to be a person who has been fully involved in a major incident, disaster or catastrophe and who has in some way suffered, but who pulls through and is able to recount or discuss the experience afterwards.

A century ago, celebrity and victimhood were poles apart. That is no longer true. The significance of victimhood has changed over the last century. In modern society, people who have suffered deep travails achieve a special status (Lifton 1980). Whereas in the past victims were often regarded merely as people who had suffered disgrace (with or without culpability, according to circumstance or credence), now they are listened to by investigators, politicians and the mass media with a special respect, sometimes almost with reverence. The modern survivor has captured the moral high ground. Ordinary citizens can feel thankful that they have not been put through the same mill as the victims who they see or hear interviewed on news broadcasts. But like those officials who conduct enquiries into disasters, viewers and listeners can appreciate the sense of moral outrage that nowadays accompanies victimhood. It relates very well to Horlick-Jones's (1995) model of disaster as a betrayal of trust by the authorities who, by means of procedure and regulation, were expected to keep people safe.

At 1400 hours on 25 January 2003, a London Underground train derailed in a tunnel just outside Chancery Lane station. The train left the tracks and scraped along the tunnel wall. Thirty-two people were slightly injured and many more suffered a brief entrapment in smoke and darkness. They emerged onto the platform covered in soot and dust. Accounts of their experiences were published by the BBC the following day. The interviews reveal a sense of self-importance and a desire to dramatise the incident to the level of a veritable 'brush with death'. The moral outrage may come from the uneasy contemporary relationship between citizens and civil authorities, but the real status of victimhood is conferred by the mass media (BBC News 2003). In cases such as this, exaggeration and dramatisation are the means by which it is achieved.

When unusual adverse events such as disasters occur, people struggle to endow them with meaning and explanation. At the physical level of natural hazards, this has led to, for example, confusion between the meaning of 'weather' and 'climate' and lack of understanding of the established fact that global warming can lead to more general extremes of weather, including excessive or prolonged cold spells. Natural *hazards* at least have the advantage of being morally neutral phenomena – *Natura enim non nisi parendo vincitur* (Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed). The problem with *vulnerability* to hazards (whether natural or anthropogenic) is to find a focus for the outrage. In the words of Horlick-Jones (1995, p. 305),

Disasters in modern society contain strong elements of a release of repressed existential anxiety, triggered by a perceived betrayal of trust by contemporary institutions'. Horlick-Jones (1996) went on to analyse the concept of blame as part of this release mechanism. As Bucher (1957, p. 467) put it, 'blaming for disasters arises out of seeking a satisfactory explanation for something which cannot be accounted for conventionally'. That, of course, is not enough to apportion blame, which requires some assumption of culpability, or that the responsible agencies will not take action to prevent a recurrence. At its worst, blame can be an attempt to deflect or transfer responsibility to other people.

At the root of the fusion of victimhood, celebrity and outrage is the modern culture of *public intimacy*: grieving, rage and sharing intimate details with strangers. It is coupled with *disinhibition*, the very public demonstration of intimate emotions (Hjorth and Kim 2011). The corollary in times of peace is the daily televised diet of emotion and money, which engenders the game show mentality through constant displays of gambling for money and celebrity. Hence, the public disinhibition of victims is coupled with a degree of public voyeurism. An alternative view is provided by West (2004, p. 14), who argued that 'these public displays of emotion [. . .] have a cathartic function, and serve as a means to "(in)articulate our own unhappiness"'.

In the televising of emotion, grieving and outrage, there are strong temptations to overplay the scene, which leads to a culture of exaggerated offendedness – exemplified by the common declaration 'I was devastated'. The demonstration of moral outrage is exploited as a weapon of self-aggrandisement. Because there is a consensus that something is wrong, very rarely are those who show their manufactured rage, grief or offence in front of the cameras questioned or cut down to size. They are instead taken seriously.

At this point, at the risk of being accused of abdicating my responsibilities as a researcher, I will leave it to the reader to decide how much substance there is in the world of victims and celebrities when they are confronted by the painful realities of death and destruction in disasters. Ever since the times of B. T. Barnum and his circus, showbiz has wanted to demonstrate that it has a heart. This is its way of trying to compensate for its endless orgy of self-absorption. Some of its charitable work has been absolutely laudable, other aspects have been debatable – as in the case of the Geldof concerts – and other elements have masked a much less respectable agenda, as in the case of the entertainer Jimmy Savile.

Conclusions

In conclusion, celebrity culture appears to have gone about as far as it can in influencing world affairs. Major celebrities have beat a path to the high table of international politics, for example at the Davos World Economic Forum. They sing and perform at major state events such as political inaugurations and funerals. Their opinions are heeded by politicians and officials. In some cases they are even given a semi-official role by being appointed as ‘cultural ambassadors’, a role that has been brilliantly satirised by the comedian Barry Humphries, who portrayed such a character – perhaps unfairly – as the lecherous, boorish and ignorant Australian ‘cultural attaché’ Sir Les Patterson, master of the vulgar witticism (Wikipedia 2013).

Celebrities vary in the extent to which they become knowledgeable about the complex humanitarian and environmental issues they have decided to involve themselves. Some have become quite authoritative, and revealed a talent for dealing with the issues, while others have miscalculated through ignorance or, above all, a tendency to oversimplify. In neither case has this had a negative influence on their standing with their followers, in whose eyes the advocacy of causes tends to be a sideshow that accompanies the business of entertainment.

In the past, monarchs could direct or govern the response to disasters by perceived divine right, the exhibition of power, their ability to command or, latterly, their constitutional role as leaders. In two decades of reconstruction after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, the Marquis of Pombal was only able to employ Draconian measures and create innovative recovery strategies by expropriating, as Viceroy, some of the authority of a weak and ineffectual king (França 1983). In order to maintain support and status, contemporary monarchies, bound by parliaments and constitutions, increasingly have to appear – and perhaps behave – in the same way as media celebrities such as the stars of film or popular music. A convinced republican might say that they are equivalent to those stars who are simply ‘famous for being famous’. Bronfen (2001, 2010) saw this in the death of Princess Diana. Although she was known for no particular exploit, her image became a universal referent for a host of feelings and aspirations (Thomas 2008).

In the end, one has to hope that celebrities of any kind who involve themselves in humanitarian causes are sufficiently influenced by technically competent advisors.

Contributing money to a cause is a voluntary action that should be the result of a free decision about whether or not to give charity. However, it has long been known that the mass media can turn on or turn off the flux of donation according to the publicity given to an event or a cause (Olsen et al. 2003). However, modern means of communication – and donation – have ‘ramped up’ this phenomenon to unprecedented levels. Despite this, every day we are bombarded with information, and this endless and indiscriminate process has increased the incidence of ‘attention span deficit’ and ‘donor fatigue’. It has also much reduced the ability of adverse events to shock people.

Regarding disasters, the magnitude of donations is closely related to the sense of involvement experienced by the donors. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004 led to public donations of US\$4.5 billion (matched by even larger official ones). At the same time, a United Nations appeal for \$30 million to fund crisis response in Darfur failed to reach its target, even though this was only two thirds of a percentage point of what was contributed to the survivors of the tsunami and earthquake. For the donors, Darfur appeared remote and perhaps incomprehensible, but on the beaches of Thailand, Bali and India, the casualties included many Westerners and this brought the catastrophe home to them. Indeed the loss of 543 lives was the worst disaster mortality for Sweden for almost 300 years (Olofsson 2011). If familiarity can stimulate monetary involvement in a disaster aftermath to this extent (under the tacit assumption, ‘it could have happened to me on my last tropical holiday’), one can imagine what more identification with celebrities can do. In fact, the case of Bob Geldof and hunger and disease in Ethiopia illustrates how swearing at potential donors and abruptly facing them with starkly simplified moral dilemmas is capable of eliciting a donation rate of £300 (€350, \$475) per *second*.

Despite such dramatic statistics, it is as well to remember that celebrity is no guarantee of influence – or longevity of reputation. Toncar et al. (2007, pp. 272–3) found that celebrity endorsement did not necessarily render a public service emergency message legitimate. Many commentators have sought to treat celebrity involvement in humanitarianism and other causes as evidence of a desperate desire to hang on to celebrity status when contracts for musicianship or acting have ceased to be awarded. Only in a very few cases does celebrity victimhood endure and then not necessarily for happy motives, but more often as a result of continued suffering. In the United Kingdom, for example, Doreen Lawrence remains a celebrity figure (and a much respected one) not merely because her son Stephen was the victim of a high profile racist murder in 1993, but because since then her model of dignified advocacy for racial justice has been constantly in demand, and her family have never been free of racial persecution. Meanwhile, there are journalists who feel profoundly uneasy about the role of the mass media in creating and sustaining celebrity (cf. Ponce de Leon 2002, Snyder 2003).

Lastly, it would be interesting to explore how similar processes have acted to stimulate support for religious fanaticism, so-called ‘fundamentalism’ and the celebrity status of people such as Osama Bin-Laden. However, that would require another chapter.

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