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Live Aid 1985 and the Rise of Celebrity Activism within Cultural Humanitarianism

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Introduction

Cheered on by a crowd of 72,000 ecstatic spectators, Freddie Mercury entered the stage of London's Wembley Stadium on a July day in 1985. Behind a piano at the side of the stage, Mercury's "Bohemian Rhapsody," put Queen on the permanent map of legendary rock bands. Indeed, seventeen minutes on Wembley's stage catapulted Queen's popularity and recognition.[1] But as Freddie Mercury and his band needed this chance to own a big stage, this big stage needed him and his band just as much.

Queen was one of the performers during the Live Aid concerts of 1985, simultaneously held in London and Philadelphia. The concerts grew out of another phenomenon. Upon seeing horrifying images coming from famine-stricken Ethiopia, musician Bob Geldof had in 1984 started an initiative called Band Aid: bringing out singles in co-operation with numerous famous singers and artists, with the profits earmarked for humanitarian aid. Band Aid's most well-known contribution was the 1984 track "Do They Know It's Christmas?" featuring Bono, Sting, and George Michael, who, along with other celebrities, participated without getting paid. Emphasizing musical hits enabled Band Aid to convincingly unite people through great popular appeal.[2] But Bob Geldof wanted to do more in terms of fundraising and had yet a bigger idea: to create a worldwide telethon in order to raise funds from all over the world for Ethiopia.[3]

In the years prior to Live Aid, a devastating famine had been afflicting Ethiopia and the surrounding area. Agricultural mismanagement based on communism and severe drought led millions of people to the point of starvation. Although Western governments did provide

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[1] Tom Shales, "After the Music, the Memories: On TV -- Hype, Hoopla And the Whole World Coverage," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1985.
[2] Andrew Jones, "Band Aid revisited: humanitarianism, consumption and philanthropy in the 1980s," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 199.
[3] Michael Goldberg, "Live Aid 1985: The Day the World Rocked," *Rolling Stone*, August 16. 1985. https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/live-aid-1985-the-day-the-world-rocked-180152/

substantial aid at first, due to Ethiopia's ties with the Soviet Union the American government had cut its aid budget.[4] The famine went relatively uncovered in the media, until 1984 when journalist Michael Buerk released footage from the actual situation. The wider public was shocked by the images and were generally convinced their governments did not do enough.[5] This provided room for Geldof to act where politics seemed to fall short. And so, Live Aid originated as a result of thinking big and the urge to do something for starving Ethiopians.

The concerts, taking place on the 13th of July in 1985 with a duration of sixteen hours, attracted no less than 1.9 billion viewers all over the world, and raised over $245 million, a staggering number that surpassed even Geldof's expectations. Its mass character and popular appeal created the perfect mix for attracting young people in particular: pop music and celebrities had proven themselves a new and very effective way to get young people interested in international aid problems.[6] Live Aid permanently changed the character of humanitarian aid, arousing a new way of showing compassion and expressing sympathy for people in need all around the world.[7] The event's global and international character marked a new era in the tradition of cultural humanitarianism: an era of transnational and neoliberal influence, and with it a modern wave of celebrity activism.

Generally, scholars put emphasis on phenomena such as mass media, pop culture, and consumerism in order to explain why and how Live Aid was the ultimate culmination of 1980s developments. Media coverage, for example, made the world aware of the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia in the first place: journalist Michael Buerk's short broadcast

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[4] Gayle Smith, "Ethiopia and the Politics of Famine Relief," *MERIP Middle East Report*, no. 145 (1987): 32.
[5] Chris Rojek, "Leaderless Organization, World Historical Events and Their Contradictions: The 'Burning Man City' Case," *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 352.
[6] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 195.
[7] Tanja R. Müller, "The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: Revisiting the dynamics between famine and celebrity," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 474.

covering the famine, including dramatic close-ups and "horrifying scenes,"[8] brought the situation in Africa under broader and global attention. According to Müller, "[the] essentialist explanation of famine propagated by Buerk's report […] made Bob Geldof and Western audiences sit up and respond."[9] The moment the crisis had first been deemed newsworthy, "there was a sudden and massive production of texts – newspaper articles, television documentaries, radio broadcasts, books and international pop concerts."[10] In addition, media and technology were of key importance for Live Aid's "global jukebox character," as Bob Geldof himself characterized the concerts.[11] Live Aid was an inherently global event, "broadcast globally via cutting-edge satellite technology,"[12] and, according to Jones, part of a "movement [that] used the power of global television to fashion rock music into an instrument of social action."[13] Two concerts simultaneously taking place in two different countries, being televised all over the world, was an unprecedented phenomenon and a defining moment of transnationalism.

Furthermore, to many scholars Live Aid marks the rise of so-called ethical consumerism: as H. Louise Davis argues, Live Aid is deeply connected to neo-liberalism and market-based, celebrity interests.[14] Consumption in the 1980s became an increasingly accepted way of affecting global matters and influencing worldwide issues, and in the process of this tradition, Live Aid and Band Aid became part of a newly created "philanthropic-

[8] John Sorenson, "Mass media and discourse on famine in the Horn of Africa," *Discourse & Society* 2, no. 2 (1991): 225.
[9] Müller, "The Long Shadow," 473.
[10] Sorenson, "Mass media," 225.
[11] Goldberg, "The Day the World Rocked."
[12] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 190.
[13] Ibid., 199.
[14] H. Louise Davis, "Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices From Live Aid to Product Red," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9, no. 3 (2010): 101.

oriented market."[15] In other words, scholars argue that 1980s consumerism was both transformed by and essential to Live Aid.

In addition, scholars have focused on the role of celebrity activism within humanitarianism and how celebrity humanitarianism before Live Aid is different from activism after Live Aid. Andrew Jones argues that Band Aid and Live Aid, apart from fitting into a longer tradition of celebrity humanitarianism, also stimulated a rapid increase in celebrity activism on a transnational scale.[16] Tanja Müller also defines Band Aid and Live Aid as "pivotal for the subsequent high-profile engagement of a particular brand of celebrities with humanitarian action."[17] Celebrity activism, other scholars contend, changed when neoliberalism started to influence all aspects of society. H. Louise Davis, for example, writes that "Live Aid offered many economic and cultural opportunities […] for celebrity organizers and participants."[18] In addition, Jones argues, these economic opportunities signify "a shift towards consumer-led charity," a trend which developed further over the next years.[19] Taking all scholarship into consideration, the increase of marketization, consumerism, and celebrity activism all contributed to Live Aid and sparked a rise in transnational activism, a development which is very illustrative of the 1980s global character.

Although many scholars have already examined Live Aid as an unprecedented event, more can be done by emphasizing the culmination of phenomena such as transnationalism and neoliberalism as making Live Aid stand out from a crowd of similar events. Furthermore, my thesis will contribute to the existing field in that it will attribute a larger role to Live Aid as transformer of celebrity activism. Whereas celebrity activism has often been considered a landmark change instigated by Live Aid, I will build on that tradition by making a case for

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[15] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200.
[16] Ibid., 196.
[17] Müller, "The Long Shadow," 470.
[18] Davis, "Feeding the World," 96.
[19] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 202.

changing motivations within celebrity activism through Live Aid, especially in combination with the concert's transnational and neoliberalist influences. My research question is: how does Live Aid fit into the history and tradition of cultural humanitarianism and how has it permanently transformed that tradition?

The main argument of my thesis is that the 1985 Live Aid concerts were exemplary for the 1980s and mark a turning point in the history of cultural humanitarian history, especially in how they transformed the character of celebrity activism. To that end, I take into account two important phenomena that characterized and transformed the 1980s: transnationalism and neoliberalism. First, I argue that Live Aid fits into the growing trend of transnationalism: during the 1980s, improving technology and mass media stimulated the origination of a global community in which Live Aid as a transnational event was able to thrive. In addition, I argue that Live Aid as a transnational event had tremendous influence on the development of celebrity humanitarian activism. To make a case for this, I make use of historical newspaper archives, using articles from papers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and the *New York Times*. Furthermore, I frequently draw upon personal interviews with Bob Geldof and other people involved in the organization of Live Aid. Second, I contend that Live Aid as a product of the neoliberal free market caused a broader shift within humanitarianism, signifying a change in character that is mostly visible in motivations of both consumer donators and celebrity activists. Again, I build my case using a body of newspaper articles exemplifying the neoliberal character of the concerts. In addition, I draw from articles featuring celebrity responses to the concerts, interviews with Bob Geldof and interviews celebrities who performed at Live Aid. Lastly, on the basis of my earlier conclusions, I contend that the Live Aid concerts successfully and permanently reinstated and reinforced transnationalism, celebrity activism and popular support for aid and humanitarianism, gaining an important and transformational place within the history of cultural humanitarianism.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will provide a historiography covering earlier research and scholarship on Live Aid as a transformational event. In this chapter, I make a division between three research strands: transnationalism and globalization, neoliberalism and marketization, and celebrity activism and the change within cultural humanitarianism.

The second chapter will go into more depth about transnationalism. In this chapter, I position Live Aid as a landmark for the transnational world, as well as a turning point in cultural humanitarianism. Because of technological options, Live Aid turned out to be unprecedented, even though as a fundraising event including celebrities it was not new. Its global hugeness, however, is what made it stand out.

In the third chapter, I link Live Aid to 1980s developments related to neoliberalism. The free market and increasing consumerism made Live Aid different from earlier fundraising events: the neoliberal focus on the individual caused people to donate more easily, especially in a consumerist culture that gave them something in return for their donation. Consumerism sparked the rise of a philanthropic market, a phenomenon used and strengthened by increasing celebrity humanitarian activism. However, Live Aid also marked a shift in motivation: consumers' incentives to donate were no longer solely based upon the sincere wish to help others, but also by the desire to participate in popular culture, and celebrity activists' motives were compromised now that fundraising concerts were swamped with advertising possibilities, mass media, and merchandise.

There are limitations to this project. More could have been done if I had been able to do my research in the U.K. or the U.S., where the Live Aid concerts actually took place. In that case, the amount of physical archival source material to use would have been notably higher, whereas now, I mainly draw upon digital archival sources. Furthermore, more research could be conducted on each of the developments and cultural elements that I mention

throughout the thesis. All of them are very comprehensive and one could write individual theses on all of these aspects in relation to Live Aid.

Watching footage from Queen's performance at Live Aid, it is easy to forget the reason Freddie Mercury was on that stage entertaining the world. Mercury even himself glibly admitted that he did not do the concert because he felt it was needed to help the people in Ethiopia, but out of pride that he was asked to perform on such a big stage with all those great artists, being watched by viewers across the world.[20] Everything seems to be aimed at gaining glory, recognition, approval, and star quality. Consumerism and celebrity activism appear to overshadow the actual reason for the event: helping the starving people in Ethiopia. That is why the big stage needed Queen as much as they needed the stage. And that is why we see Freddie Mercury with a microphone in his hand, his fist in the sky, with Live Aid's logo combining a guitar and the silhouette of famine-stricken Africa in the background: as being an illustration of a new path taken by cultural humanitarianism.

[20] "Queen at Live Aid: the real story of how one band made rock history," *Louder,* November 12, 2018. https://www.loudersound.com/features/queen-at-live-aid-the-real-story-of-how-one-band-made-rock-history

CHAPTER ONE

Historiography: Transnationalism, Neoliberalism, and Cultural Humanitarianism in the Early 1980s

There is a famous photograph of British prime minister Tony Blair, engaged in a serious conversation with U2-lead singer Bono and Boomtown Rats-lead singer Bob Geldof. "This is not," cultural politics professor John Street argues, "a moment of idle gossip or small talk." Instead, they are talking to Blair about the problems in the third world – such as famine, poverty, debt – and their opinions are listened to with respect.[21] Scholars have argued that, while the Ethiopian famine and humanitarian crisis gained worldwide attention during the mid-1980s, pop artists increasingly realized their popularity could provide political authority for social movements and causes.[22] Even though Band Aid and Live Aid were not the first occasions of celebrity activism, as Alex de Waal argues, they did create a huge impetus for this activism to take off.[23] Andrew Jones argues something similar: humanitarianism had made use of popular engagement before, but never to the extent of Live Aid.[24] The global community was growing and more connected than ever before with the increase of mass media and new technologies, giving Live Aid an extra handle for successfully installing a new path for cultural humanitarianism. In addition, Band Aid and Live Aid made clever use of "the dominant structures of free market capitalism," and "as a new emphasis on the free market took hold, the realm of consumption was increasingly legitimized as a means to intervene in global issues."[25] In this chapter, I contend that scholars have considered Live Aid to be a culmination of transnationalism and neoliberalism, and a turning point in the tradition

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[21] John Street, "Bob, Bono and Tony B: the popular artist as politician," *Media, Culture & Society* 24, no. 3 (2002): 434.
[22] Ibid., 439.
[23] Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival: A Celebrity Vogue," *World Affairs* 171, no. 2 (2008): 51.
[24] Andrew Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 199
[25] Ibid., 200

of cultural humanitarianism. First, I argue that transnationalism built the stage for new developments within cultural humanitarianism, most importantly the renewed and increased influence of celebrity activists. Second, I contend that the rise of celebrity activism sparked marketization in that it gave rise to a philanthropic market, and that increasing consumerism was fed by new technology and mass media. Lastly, I argue that the increasingly transnational world, new technological options and celebrity activism were all intertwined and in their culmination transformed cultural humanitarianism.

Transnationalism: community, globalization, and celebrity activism

Scholars have argued that the development of a transnational world character was essential for the creation of Live Aid. Andrew Jones argues that "[a] rhetoric of universal humanity and global community was crucial to Band Aid's [and Live Aid's] mobilizing power."[26] And indeed, Band Aid and Live Aid collected tremendous amounts of money and created worldwide awareness of the suffering in parts of the world such as Ethiopia. Tanja Müller calls this "Band Aid-type humanitarianism" and argues that it helped to create "the new humanitarian international community: people who feel a personal responsibility to react towards far-away suffering."[27] Chris Rojek also points out that the "social indignation at the famine in Ethiopia, fueled by the media," was the most influential incentive for the uprise of a new aid movement based around morality and personal motivations.[28] Jones considers transnational mass media, which went through a process of rapid growth during the 1980s, a development which made people more aware of what was going on in the world around them and at distant places, while in the meantime, they also became increasingly aware of the fact that humanity could be considered as one community depending on one another.[29]

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[26] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 198.
[27] Tanja Müller, "The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: Revisiting the Dynamics Between Famine and Celebrity," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 474.
[28] Chris Rojek, "Leaderless Organization, World Historical Events and Their Contradictions: The 'Burning Man City' Case," *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 352.
[29] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 198.

Especially during the last three decades, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to celebrity activism in relation to transnationalism. Celebrities are correctly considered to be essential players in the transnational arena. As Annika Bergman Rosemond argues, celebrities can "brand themselves as moral agents with a strong sense of responsibility to distant others."[30] Indeed, it is often argued that celebrity culture, in combination with the media and transnational communication, showcases globally relevant moral issues to both the domestic and international public, by which it sparks public discussion and grows support for or rejection of certain foreign policy.[31] Alex de Waal ties in to this when he argues that the celebrity as a humanitarian can be compared to a bridge between audiences and distant tragedies, such as the Ethiopian famine.[32] The fact that celebrities can act as this bridge is widely argued by other scholars. For example, H. Louise Davis argues that "[c]elebrity response to the famine […] kick-started what was to become the first global relief movement," illustrating celebrity transnational power.[33] Coming back to John Street, scholars have widely argued that celebrity fame and popularity provides them with eligibility to legitimate certain movements and causes.[34] In fact, this legitimization, as I argue in this thesis, transformed celebrities into influential actors in the humanitarian field, up until this day.

In addition, scholars have argued that celebrity activists can stimulate global involvement and active citizenship among the public. Elaine Jeffreys mentions that "celebrity involvement in international development issues [is praised] for promoting global citizenship and extending democratic values."[35] What she means by this is that celebrity activists

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[30] Annika Bergman Rosemond, "The Cosmopolitan-Communitarian Divide and Celebrity Anti-War Activism," in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 70.
[31] Bergman Rosemond, "Cosmopolitan-Communitarian Divide," 72.
[32] Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival," 44.
[33] H. Louise Davis, "Feeding the World a Line? Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices from Live Aid to Product Red," *NJES* 9, no. 3 (2010): 95.
[34] Street, "Bob, Bono, Tony B.," 437.
[35] Elaine Jeffreys, "On Celebrity Philanthropy," in *Celebrity Philanthropy*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2015): 26.

encourage a form of citizenship that includes both local and global interests, as well as putting themselves up as representatives for young people who are disillusioned by the political systems in their countries.[36] Similarly, Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis argue that "celebrities are particularly capable of reaching out to the lay people and solicit the support of many of them to the advancement of global causes."[37] In scholarly debates on celebrity activism, celebrity credibility has correctly been considered extremely effective in reaching a worldwide public in order to broaden and connect the transnational community.

Neoliberalism: the philanthropic market, consumerism, and technology

Many scholars rightly make a connection between celebrity activism and the rise of the philanthropic market. Jeffreys argues, quite strongly, that "humanitarianism only became a mass phenomenon when philanthropy became a commercial marketing venture," and thus when donators started to be considered consumers.[38] Jones makes a case for the consumerist path taken by humanitarianism in the age of Band Aid and Live Aid when he argues that "Band Aid very effectively tapped into [the philanthropic-oriented market], as the globalized spectacle of Live Aid both satisfied and reinforced a consumer desire for charitable texts in the aftermath of the Ethiopian famine."[39] According to Michael Schaller, Band Aid and Live Aid acted from within the free market capitalism of the 1980s, an environment in which government regulation of economics and the market was decreasing rapidly under Ronald Reagan's first term as president.[40] In fact, Amy Edwards argues, Western governments such as the U.S. and British governments considered consumers to be active citizens and thus saw

[36] Ibid.
[37] Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "Bringing the Individuals Back In? Celebrities as Transnational Activists," in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 35.
[38] Jeffreys, "On Celebrity Philanthropy," 31.
[39] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200.
[40] Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 127.

consumerism as a basic part of effective citizenship.[41] In this influential sphere of free market and consumerism, Jones argues, "consumer-led charity" was able to rise up and, through Band Aid and Live Aid, be shaped by a decade of "advertising, branding, marketing and celebrity culture."[42] Davis, too, points out that the incentives and goals of famine relief initiatives such as Band Aid and Live Aid increasingly intertwined several economic interests: those of the charities, the celebrity activists, the sponsors and the media, while all working together to reach a wider audience and thus more donors.[43]

Debates on the philanthropic sphere connect consumerism to a deeper personal level of moralism: Rojek, for example, argues that global benefit events contain "a high level of self-gratification," because it grants the consumer the feeling that one has done their share in alleviating the burden of those who suffer.[44] The power of global events, Rojek says, is that they encourage civic responsibility and are able to stimulate every type of person to care for a global cause.[45] How do global events achieve this? By "posit[ing] the consumer as the agent of social change," according to Anne Meneley.[46] Davis points out something similar: when Pepsi became one of Live Aid's sponsors, the public, or the consumers, came to consider Pepsi as related to the famine and thus, drinking Pepsi suddenly was an indirect act of providing aid.[47] The Western public, Jones argues, became "both an actor and a spectator in its own humanitarian performances."[48]

Furthermore, scholars have marked the rise of mass media and technology an important factor in both the increase of transnationalism and consumerism in the 1980s. Jones

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[41] Amy Edwards, "'Financial Consumerism': Citizenship, Consumerism and Capital Ownership in the 1980s," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 215.
[42] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 202.
[43] Davis, "Feeding the World a Line?," 95.
[44] Rojek, "Leaderless Organization," 361.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Anne Meneley, "Consumerism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, (2018): 123.
[47] Davis, "Feeding the World a Line?," 96.
[48] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 201.

argues this when he defines Band Aid's significance as being a result of the way it made use of globalizing media and technology.[49] The improvement of technology made it easier to put news items under public attention, of which many scholars consider the Michael Buerk report the most telling example. Jones also contends that "technological advances in communications and filming over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s further stimulated humanitarian empathy […] bringing a new level of immediacy to overseas disasters."[50] Indeed, as John Sorensen argues, the shocking images of people suffering from the Ethiopian famine suddenly brought disaster closer to home in a way that it had never been seen before.[51] According to Huliaras and Tzifakis, technological advancement and transnational television indeed installed a new sense of caring for distant people.[52] In addition, they point out that because "'real-time' coverage of international crises has unleashed an 'electronic internationalism," a new transnational conscience emerged which broke down all kinds of walls put up by geography or religion or race.[53] Overall, scholars have contended that due to technological improvements, media was able to grow into mass, and mass media in turn united the people of the world into one transnational community. Furthermore, mass media was of key importance in the rise of celebrity activism as it is known today. Building on Jones and Huliaras and Tzifakis, I argue that technology was essential in the mass celebrity appeal in humanitarian that sprung up during the 1980s and endured through the next decades.

Cultural humanitarianism into the mainstream

The tradition of cultural humanitarianism in its 1980s form had existed for a number of decades, but ever since the 1980s, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the significant changes within that tradition. First of all, scholars have pointed out how cultural

[49] Ibid., 190.
[50] Ibid., 193.
[51] John Sorensen, "Mass Media and Discourse on Famine in the Horn of Africa," *Discourse & Society* 2, no. 2 (1991): 224.
[52] Huliaras and Tzifakis, "Bringing the Individuals Back In?," 31.
[53] Ibid.

humanitarianism moved from the margins to the mainstream: Kenneth Cmiel, for example, has argued that the 1970s were a period of fundamental political reconstruction, with the immense rise of human rights movements in both the 1970s and 1980s.[54] Cmiel also points out that feminist and gay rights movements sprung up in America, and Amnesty International rose to prominence over the decade, being exemplary of the rise of human rights significance among wider audiences.[55] In other words, people began to actively participate more in the political sphere, especially where it concerned the improvement of rights and conditions. As Mark Philip Bradley argues, "neoliberal globalization began to transform the contours and dynamics of world politics."[56] Indeed, Bradley writes that the growth of global capitalism and the transnational spreading of technology and mass media "decenter[ed] the place of the state" and made way for a world order less based on nation-states.[57]

Secondly, scholars have pointed out that cultural humanitarianism discovered new pathways in the availability of the increasing amount of technological options. Jones, for example, argues that the famine movement behind Band Aid and Live Aid made successful use of "the power of global television to fashion rock music into an instrument of social action."[58] Improved technology made it possible for the Live Aid concerts to be watched by 1,9 billion people worldwide, an unprecedented figure.[59] In addition, Jones contends that "the central role of television coverage [was] a turning point in charitable fundraising."[60] Furthermore, Bob Geldof, according to Tanja Müller, made clever use of the media and its visual capacities to bring the suffering of Ethiopians under Western public attention.[61] Media

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[54] Kenneth Cmiel, "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1234.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 132.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 199.
[59] Ibid., 190.
[60] Ibid., 192.
[61] Müller, "The Long Shadow," 474.

use within humanitarianism transformed its character, according to Sorenson: "[w]hat began as a spectacle of suffering […] became transformed into a spectacle of celebrity and charity, as the world's richest pop stars performed in novel combinations and jetted from London to Philadelphia to participate in what was regarded as a media marvel."[62] Existing scholarship mainly argues that increasing celebrity activism within cultural humanitarianism was strengthened by the presence of media, and the media gave cultural humanitarianism star quality in its coverage of benefit events swamped by celebrity philanthropists.

Thus, lastly, it has often been argued that cultural humanitarianism was very much influenced by the rise of celebrity activism, in a transnational world where celebrity and media were inseparably connected. Jones points out that well before the 1980s "humanitarian agencies [already] understood the advantages of being associated with popular culture[.]"[63] However, when technology and media became more developed and more prominent during the 1970s and 1980s, celebrities automatically had what Daniel W. Drezner calls "a wider array of media outlets, which translates into a wider audience of citizens," a development through which fame and visibility instantly rose up and thus, celebrities became even more useful within cultural humanitarianism.[64] Drezner goes on to argue that celebrities have been very successful in recruiting within humanitarianism: well-known people simply attract large numbers of public.[65] The combination of philanthropy, marketization and famous celebrities, according to Jones, has "inaugurat[ed] a new era of celebrity humanitarianism, in which high-profile stars systematically engage in charitable causes and campaigns."[66]

The debate on cultural humanitarianism has rightfully emphasized transnationalism and marketization as main actors in the development of this form of humanitarianism over the

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[62] Sorenson, "Mass Media," 236.
[63] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 195.
[64] Daniel W. Drezner, "Foreign Policy Goes Glam." *The National Interest*, no. 92 (2007): 25.
[65] Ibid., 27.
[66] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 190.

1980s, taking Live Aid as a focal point. Live Aid was, indeed, the turning point within the tradition of cultural humanitarianism, embodying everything the 1980s brought in terms of globalization, technology, and culture. Jones and Müller have both made convincing arguments about Live Aid being a watershed event within the tradition of cultural humanitarianism. This thesis builds on arguments made by Jones and Müller and further investigates the legacy of celebrity activism as introduced with Band Aid and Live Aid. In addition, it argues that the celebrity activism which originated in the 1980s is unique and fundamentally different from earlier celebrity activism. By doing so, this thesis aims to provide a new perspective on celebrity philanthropy and its essential connection to transnationalism and neoliberalism, developments both of which were of great importance for the creation of the Live Aid concerts. The following chapters will analyze the increasing presence of cultural humanitarianism over the 1970s and 1980s up until the point of Live Aid, the rise and use of technology and mass media prior to the concerts, and the increase and instalment of celebrity activism as one of the most significant legacies of Live Aid. In doing so, this thesis will map transnationalism and neoliberalism onto these three developments, contributing to the field by building on existing scholarship on cultural humanitarianism, transnationalism, neoliberalism, technology and celebrity activism.

CHAPTER TWO

Live Aid's Transnationalism: The Rise of Humanitarianism and the Global Community

It is a warm summer day in July 1985. In the preceding days and weeks, newspapers have extensively covered the preparations for immense fundraising events that will take place in two different places, countries, time zones. And now, people from all over the world, some during the day and some in the middle of the night, turn on their TV's and all watch the same concert at the same time, no matter how far apart they may be.

On July 13, 1985, one might watch the Live Aid concerts on television with 1.9 billion other people all around the world. This signifies the inherent transnational character of the event: it was able to connect the entire world and unite people in aiming to provide relief to people in suffering.

Various historical developments preceded Live Aid's rise to a transnational highpoint. For example, during the 1970s as well as the first half of the 1980s, the world witnessed the rise of a global community. Due to mass media and television, borders seemed to disappear, transnationalism thrived, producing what Andrew Jones calls "an extra-parliamentary social movement."[67] Mark Philip Bradley also emphasizes the influence of transnationalism on social causes: globalization, he argues, sparked increasing transnational activism on human rights and humanitarianism, transforming the existing world order.[68] In addition, celebrity activism as stimulated by Live Aid and Band Aid was able to grow and become more effective because celebrities gained an increasingly louder and far-reaching voice in a transnational world. A global community proved to be highly fertile ground for celebrity humanitarianism to take root.[69]

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[67] Andrew Jones, "Band Aid revisited: humanitarianism, consumption and philanthropy in the 1980s," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 190.
[68] Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 131-132.
[69] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 190.

In this chapter, I argue that Live Aid was essentially a product of increasing transnationalism during 1970s and 1980s, and that transnationalism increased celebrity activism by giving celebrities an international stage, which ultimately transformed cultural humanitarianism. First, I contend that transnationalism gave rise to the tradition of humanitarianism that Live Aid originated in. Second, I argue that mass media and technology enhanced the impact of transnationalism to the extent that Live Aid became the paragon of what a global community entailed. Lastly, I argue that celebrity humanitarianism as it was introduced at and installed by Live Aid was a product of a globalized, transnational world.

Transnational humanitarianism and Live Aid

The tradition of humanitarianism from which Live Aid originated was ultimately driven by a sense of global community, not bound by state or ideological lines but by the desire to help fellow human beings who were suffering. This development accelerated during the 1970s, when transnationalism and globalization heavily influenced various areas of life.[70] One relevant area in which transnationalism had tremendous influence was human rights: in the 1970s, human rights in the U.S. were constructed and defined through both personal sentiment and the transnational increase of moral witness accounts, accounts of people subjected by hardship who told their audience about how they felt.[71] The public became increasingly aware of what was happening abroad, due to several testimonial accounts from victims of human rights abuses such as torture or persecution. This awareness fueled international human rights activism. Even though human rights are not the same as humanitarianism, which focuses not so much on rights but on relief and aid, there are still some parallels to be drawn: both include issues that require solutions, and both aim to improve the problematic and harmful living standards of someone else. The transnational

[70] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012): 13.
[71] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 196.

influence on the human rights movement affected humanitarianism in a similar way: the kind of humanitarianism that developed during the seventies – and that was reinforced a few years later by Band Aid and Live Aid – is called "the new humanitarian international community" by Jenny Edkins.[72] The public feels connected to far-away people who are suffering and experiences a sense of responsibility to help these people: this is the sentiment that exemplifies the way in which transnationalism and humanitarianism became intertwined.

Live Aid consolidated a pattern of humanitarianism that had been evolving since the Second World War.[73] In Britain, that pattern included increasing NGO involvement in providing aid to developing countries suffering from all sorts of disasters, the use of popular culture to appeal to several age groups, and the steady rise of public donations to humanitarian causes.[74] In the United States, too, humanitarianism developed into an established tradition especially after World War II. The Red Cross, for example, was involved in several overseas aid programs, such as Korea in 1950 and Cuba in 1953.[75] During these years, Jones writes, an image of "the global South as helpless, desperate, and dependent upon the benevolent contributions of white westerners" emerged.[76] Julie Grant argues something similar when she says that Live Aid "served to unite the *capable* people of the global north and participants of Live Aid […] as benevolent, ethical consumers with a shared (somewhat paternalistic) concern for the less *able* people of the global south."[77] This image is exactly what Live Aid would later reinforce, assisted by transnational media coverage of what was indeed framed as desperate suffering that had to be lifted by a compassionate and

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[72] Jenny Edkins, *Whose Hunger? Concepts of Famine, Practices of Aid* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000): 122.
[73] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 193.
[74] Ibid., 193-195.
[75] "Red Cross Timeline," American Red Cross, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/history/significant-dates.html
[76] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 194.
[77] Julie Grant, "Live Aid/8: perpetuating the superiority myth," *Critical Arts* 29, no. 3 (2015): 319.

transnationally united western public. As Geldof once told The Irish Times: "We're […] trying to educate people and show them that problems can be overcome if they work together."[78]

In addition, Live Aid was exemplary of a humanitarian tradition that acted on urgency and emergency, and thus was mainly concerned with short-term solutions such as providing immediate help and food. Indeed, Tanja Müller argues, the way Band Aid and Live Aid represented the Ethiopian famine "was instrumental in establishing a hegemonic culture of humanitarianism in which moral responsibility towards impoverished parts of an imagined 'Africa' is based on pity rather than the demand for justice."[79] Because of this focus on emergency aid rather than structural help, the concerts, eventually, did more to help businesses and celebrities than the people in Africa.[80] The transnational character of the concerts perfectly fitted this preoccupation with immediate help, since immediacy signals fastness and that is what most people want: quick results, here, now, and right away.

Furthermore, the moral arguments and motivations fundamental to the type of humanitarianism Live Aid exemplified made it easy to advocate and promote its causes through transnational media. Every human being would be moved by the horrifying images of suffering fellow humans and be urged to do something about it. Far-away tragedies are only deemed important when they sensationally shock us, being able to attract global attention.[81] Considering the people involved in that tragedy as being one's distant yet fellow human beings, a sense of unity is achieved. As Jones puts it: "A rhetoric of universal humanity and global community was crucial to Band [and Live] Aid's mobilizing power, as it aspired

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[78] "Channelling the vitality of rock to feed hungry," *The Irish Times*, July 13, 1985.
[79] Tanja Müller, "The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: Revisiting the dynamics between famine and celebrity," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 470.
[80] Grant, "Live Aid/8," 320.
[81] John Sorenson, "Mass media and discourse on famine in the Horn of Africa," *Discourse and Society* 2, no. 2 (1991): 224.

towards a moral crusade to 'feed the world.'"[82] Bob Geldof regularly pointed out the goal of his creation as well, saying to the *New York Times* that "in and amongst all the hoopla, what this is all about [is] that this should be able to raise a lot of money to feed a lot of people."[83] Constantly putting the focus on food and hunger, one being a deemed universal right and the other being something that should not be part of anyone's life, Live Aid was able to effectively draw upon a kind of international citizenship.

Media and the global community

Live Aid was an image of how culture in the 1980s was represented. Essentially, Michael Schaller argues, "new technologies and media, such as […] cable television […] and national newspapers, altered how Americans entertained and informed themselves," two elements that partially define cultural participation.[84]

Transnationalism and media go hand in hand: through mass media and its rise in the 1970s and 1980s, people from all over the world became more connected than ever, because it made them aware of what was happening in virtually every part of the world. Media platforms grew in number and variety, and they increasingly reported on international news items. In addition, the media offered everyone the same interpretation of the real world, though people could attain that information from alternative sources.[85] Indeed, a "speedy circulation of texts and images across borders, through the various communicative channels, ensures global mass audiences," and "human beings, provided they have access to global communication channels, are thus exposed to the same social world."[86] Furthermore, Jones argues that

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[82] Ibid., 197-198.
[83] Esther B. Fein, "Live Aid Concert Is Aiming for the Sky," *New York Times*, July 12, 1985.
[84] Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 147.
[85] Annika Bergman Rosemond, "The Cosmopolitan-Communitarian Divide and Celebrity Anti-war Activism," in *Transnational celebrity activism in global politics changing the world?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 70.
[86] Ibid.

"technological advances" such as broadcast material "[brought] a new level of immediacy to overseas disasters."[87] Because of improved technological options and a broader news base, the public became increasingly aware of what was happening in the world around them. Since the media tend to address issues that in some way imply negative consequences – natural disasters, attacks, missing children, humanitarian problems – people's internal news storage substantially entailed items on disastrous happenings.[88] In combination with new technology, these issues lingered around for a long time, since they were accompanied by graphic images of the horrific situation.[89]

Considering the media coverage of the Ethiopian famine, Jones' point is definitely accurate. A substantial amount of imagery covering the famine, John Sorensen writes, "concentrated on close-ups of the most emaciated and desperate individuals, too weak to brush away the clouds of flies which settled on their faces."[90] The refugee camps covered Michael Buerk's report and other broadcasts, Geoffrey Lean and William Shawcross wrote, "provided […] harrowing television footage," bound to unsettle those who watched it.[91] Media coverage was, therefore, key in convincing a transnational public of the need to undertake action.

The media, along with growing global communication, exposed a worldwide public to global causes, such as the Ethiopian famine.[92] Therefore, it strongly united those who wanted to provide help: they all witnessed the same problematic situations elsewhere in the world, which created a sense of shared purpose. A very telling example of this is journalist Michael Buerk's report on the famine in Ethiopia. The recording has become famous for its

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[87] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 193.
[88] Sorenson, "Mass media," 224.
[89] Ibid., 225.
[90] Ibid., 224.
[91] Geoffrey Lean and William Shawcross, "Live Aid alone is not enough," *The Observer*, July 14, 1985.
[92] Bergman Rosemond, "Cosmopolitan-Communitarian," 72.

comparison of Korem, one of the refugee camps, with a biblical famine, and its description of the suffering people: "Thousands of wasted people…flood in every day from villages hundreds of miles away dulled by hunger, driven beyond the point of desperation."[93] Buerk described Korem as "hell on earth" and the accompanying images sustained that characterization.[94] The estimated audience that at one point saw the Buerk report lies around 470 million, making the report, according to John Sorenson, "the most famous and influential humanitarian recording in history."[95] It is this report that made Bob Geldof, as well as the larger Western public, eager to undertake action to provide relief.[96] International reporting by the media, thus, created a global community, to which, essentially, all people belonged: those who suffered and those who could help. For many people, the media placed nationalism on the back burner, attributing more importance to internationalism and less to nationalist sentiments for the sake of a better world.[97] Furthermore, international media was very effective in rapidly spreading awareness as well as urging a transnational audience to provide aid in any way possible. Out of these developments, Live Aid originated and because of them, it was immensely successful.

Technology and transnationalism: the world as a stage

Live Aid was the embodiment of a transnational event: it took place in two different countries at the same time, while being broadcast all over the world as well. Improved technology was an essential counterpart for Live Aid's transnational success.[98] One day before the concerts took place, the *New York Times* described Live Aid as "an event that is being staged in

[93] Müller, "The Long Shadow," 473.
[94] John Sorensen, "Mass Media," 223.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 2016): 4.
[98] H. Louise Davis, "Feeding the World a Line? Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices from Live Aid to Product Red," *NJES* 9, no. 3 (2010): 96.

London and Philadelphia, supplemented with footage from seven other concerts around the world and simultaneously broadcast on radio and television to more than 150 countries."[99] The *Washington Post* also acknowledged Live Aid's transnational appeal and character: Richard Harrington struck an impressed tone when describing the telethons, televised fundraising events, enabling people from many countries to make donations, and taking place in over 20 countries.[100] In the end, 1.9 billion people all around the world would watch the event, and while Bob Geldof himself, prior to the concert, estimated the total of donations at £10 million in *The Guardian*, the actual figure was no less than $127 million.[101]

Live Aid may have been a concert, but it was also the culmination and elevation of the combination of technology and mass culture.[102] It used technology and transnationalism to become a very impressive event in history, but at the same time it consolidated that transnationalism within the fabric of the 1980s, setting a precedent and a frame for the decades to come. People involved in Live Aid claimed that it was a unique event because of how it made use of technology in order to get people involved in humanitarian help. For example, Michael Mitchell, Live Aid's executive producer, claimed that "[t]elevision's never been used this way, to create a catalyst of action, to create a day of such emotional interest and intensity that this hunger is actually faced on a worldwide basis."[103] Mitchell connected the unprecedented use of television with the aim to provide help, drawing on television's ability to unite people for a cause. This is exactly what Live Aid aimed to achieve: making people feel they were all committed to Africa's cause. Geldof also voiced this when he said

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[99] Fein, "Live Aid' Concert."
[100] Richard Harrington, "The Greatest Show On Earth, Tomorrow: 'Beatles' May Reunite for the Global Concert Live Aid Concert," *The Washington Post*, July 12, 1985.
[101] Gareth Parry, "Live Aid's £1m an hour aim to help feed starving of Africa," *The Guardian*, July 13, 1985.
[102] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 198.
[103] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."

that "[Live Aid] is an easy way to help."[104] He viewed Live Aid as an accessible way into the world of humanitarian help, where everyone is able to pitch in and feel good, fed by the appeal of the event's star quality. Making the concerts even more accessible by broadcasting it as a telethon – and thus allowing millions of television viewers to have an even better view than the few thousands attending the event live – increased the sense of unity and commitment even more, adding on to that the "unprecedented cooperation between television and radio networks."[105] Technology, thus, was employed by Live Aid's organizers as an effective means to draw people into community and into commitment, all in order to provide humanitarian aid to help their fellow human beings, who were just as well part of the global community.

Furthermore, in the media, Live Aid was highly praised for its technological potential. "As a television event," the *Washington Post* enthused, "it is unprecedented."[106] Live Aid, journalist Lindsey Gruson marveled, needed "a small army of technicians."[107] All these efforts culminated in an unprecedented opportunity to unite most of the globe for one cause, and the technological possibilities combined with interdependent growth within multiple countries installed a new stimulus to care for distant as well as different people.[108] Live Aid's technological achievements thus included not only the biggest television audience in history, but also wider humanitarian awareness.[109]

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lindsey Gruson, "Global Concert Gives Philadelphia a Chance to Introduce Itself to the World," *New York Times*, July 13, 1985.
[108] Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "Bringing the Individuals Back in? Celebrities as Transnational Activists," in *Transnational celebrity activism in global politics changing the world?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 31.
[109] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."

Celebrity appeal and humanitarianism: the tradition of celebrity activism

On July 13, 1985, the world both watched and provided a stage for Live Aid, and to that end, its organizers went out of their way to increase its appeal and greatness. Bob Geldof dubbed the concert a "global jukebox" and sought "internationally recognized acts who could attract as many viewers as possible."[110] Artists enjoying international fame could enhance Live Aid's popularity and appeal even more. The performers' list of Wembley listed some internationally famous rock musicians such as Status Quo, Sting, Elton John and Paul McCartney.[111] For its inclusion of big names such as these, several newspaper dubbed Live Aid "The Greatest Show on Earth," for example the *Scottish Daily Express*.[112] Live Aid made use of celebrity appeal more thoroughly than had been done before, and thus stood out from earlier similar events in its significant and unprecedented use of celebrities for a cause.

In a globalizing world, the international fame and success of celebrities was expanding to new heights. In a transnational world, fame was potentially worldwide in only the blink of an eye, and once achieved, it was undeniable. Therefore, celebrities gained increasing authority, which is why using popular culture within humanitarianism had been around for some time before Band Aid and Live Aid. However, the way in which Band Aid and Live Aid made use of pop culture's mass appeal differed from earlier approaches in that it successfully combined all these other tenets of music, celebrities, and global media within its drawing upon pop culture to attract a public as large as possible.[113] Because of this transnational approach, even though popular engagement within humanitarianism was not new, Live Aid's involvement of celebrities for a good cause was unprecedented and set an example for the decades to come.

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[110] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 199.
[111] Parry, "Live Aid's £1m."
[112] "The Greatest Show on Earth," *Scottish Daily Express*, July 12, 1985, p. 19.
[113] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 190.

The transnational significance of celebrity appeal and celebrity humanitarianism is in the wide authority they are able to employ. Celebrities, definitely those in the fame category of celebrities who were present at Live Aid, are known to the entire Western world and therefore, they maintain a wide and transnational fan base that is united by their music. Music and musicians, according to Eyerman and Jamison, can "play a key part [in] collective learning process[es]" which are necessary for the formation of collective identity.[114] In being the installers for this identity formation process among their public, they can connect their popularity to several causes or movements, giving these a certain authority or legitimacy.[115] This can take place at a local level, but also on a worldwide scale, especially in a decade such as the 1980s which saw new means of technology and thus more ways to widely distribute news, images, name, and music. The music lent a common identity to the global public, something all people could find themselves in, making them feel part of a bigger community. Celebrities and their music, thus, play an important role in the rise of the transnational world, and Live Aid cleverly employed their popular appeal to attract a global audience.

A celebrity may not only be an influential role model, but also an allegedly apolitical spokesperson. They can be of tremendous influence as being people who stand up for something while they do not explicitly state their political preferences, thus with clear and clean motivations. Especially in times of political failure and public discontent with their government, apolitical heroes, or people who do not push their public to the left or the right and polarize them, are what the public wants. Live Aid partly originated as a product of public dissatisfaction with governmental action in Ethiopia: especially the British and American people witnessed their governments' largely inactive attitude towards the crisis, which often infuriated them and made them look for other ways to help. This is where celebrity activists

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[114] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 163.
[115] Ibid.

come in: as Yjrölä argues, celebrity activists can act as "anti-hegemonic heroes who act against the western power elites and their policies by truthful reasoning and selfless engagement."[116] In this capacity of "outsiders to, or even challengers of, conventional politics," these celebrities often gain a substantial amount of support because they are not bound to any political commitments, and simply act on behalf of those in need of humanitarian help.[117] Celebrity activists, to the public, are supposedly uncompromised compared to politicians, which is why people are willing to follow them and be influenced by them.

The power of celebrities in humanitarianism, therefore, is their authority: they are role models for countless people in the world and thus, they are able to influence and attract attention. They lend their credibility to a cause, raising awareness and stimulating donations. In earlier decades, bringing humanitarian causes under public attention was mostly done by humanitarian agencies, such as the Red Cross, and politicians would debate and discuss potential aid. During the 1980s and with Band Aid and Live Aid, however, celebrities increasingly moved into the seat of politicians. Because of broader changes within the role of the state during the 1970s and 1980s, described by Mark Philip Bradley as "new global economic, social, and cultural ruptures [beginning to decenter] the place of the state […] in the making of international relations," celebrities were able to take up these roles previously embodied by politicians. A transnational community replaced the importance of the national state. Therefore, celebrities' authority was no longer just nation-bound, but international. This was an ideal situation because celebrities benefited from globalization and globalization benefited from celebrities.

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[116] Riina Yrjölä, "The Global Politics of Celebrity Humanitarianism," in *Transnational celebrity activism in global politics changing the world?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 181.
[117] Ibid.

Bob Geldof is one of the most well-known examples of celebrity humanitarians who actively dismissed the importance of politics within humanitarianism. Chris Rojek even describes him as one of "the architects of a stateless solution to African hunger."[118] Clearly dissatisfied with politics, in a *Saga* interview Geldof said: "Don't underestimate my shame, my anger and my rage that this situation in Africa has been allowed to happen."[119] Geldof himself stated that Band Aid, of which Live Aid was part, was "a moral issue: whether you were left or right was irrelevant," emphasizing the irrelevance of politics within humanitarianism.[120]

What mattered was the will to feed the hungry, by all means. That is also what Geldof told *The Irish Times*: "The main point we want to get across is that hunger is solvable. If we can get that point across, we're home."[121] Not political viewpoints and convictions, but the simplistic view that the rich world, or people who visited or donated to the concerts, could save the poor Africans, created unity among the public. In a world characterized by a transnational community and not just national interests, people could not only actually imagine distant others, but also felt a deeper connections with those who suffered because they were all human. The role of the celebrity humanitarian in this realization is that he or she "acts as a bridge between a (Western) audience and a faraway tragedy."[122] Geldof, for example, went to Ethiopia to walk around at several heavily hunger and drought-affected sites, with cameras following his every move. In that way, the public could see two worlds connected: that of their Western comfort, and that of fellow human beings who were severely

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[118] Chris Rojek, "Leaderless Organization, World Historical Events and Their Contradictions: The 'Burning Man City' Case," *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 352.
[119] Mark Ellen, "Bob Geldof: the light and dark sides of life in the spotlight," *Saga*, October 21, 2014, https://www.saga.co.uk/magazine/entertainment/celebrities/bob-geldof-interview
[120] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 199.
[121] "Channelling the vitality."
[122] Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival: A Celebrity Vogue," *World Affairs* 171, no. 2 (2008): 44.

suffering. In a transnational world, celebrities are extremely effective in bringing all kinds of different worlds under public attention, disregarding any political boundaries and thereby creating an increasingly transnational community based on humanity.

Because of the media and technological abilities, celebrities' popular power was able to cross national boundaries. It changed the perception of humanitarianism, according to Midge Ure, Geldof's fellow initiator of Band Aid: "I think the legacy of Live Aid is not just the fact that there are people alive today who wouldn't have been alive, but I think young people's perspective of charity has changed."[123] Humanitarianism had become a popular phenomenon, 'cool to care', because celebrities made it cool. The fact that "[a]ll of a sudden, their heroes [were] up there saying, 'I'm involved,'" drew people towards the cause, Ure said.[124] That new popularity, in combination with intensive use of technology, made transnationalism highly effective in spreading and stimulating celebrity appeal and activism.

However, the public's assumption that celebrities are uncompromised was, and still is, often incorrect. Though along with a substantial part of the public several celebrities were undoubtedly sincerely committed to the humanitarian causes underlying Live Aid, Sorenson writes, the media stimulated "a programmed consumerist response" by "emphasizing immediacy and personal solutions."[125] In addition, attention to humanitarian crises such as the Ethiopian famine was increasingly redirected to the people acting on behalf of it, instead of the people suffering from it.[126] In chapter three I argue that it is this consumerist character, along with increased influence of neoliberalism over the 1980s, that affected celebrity activism and Live Aid itself by complicating the motivations of celebrities.

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[123] Carl Wilkinson, "Live Aid in their own words," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/oct/17/popandrock5
[124] Ibid.
[125] Sorenson, "Mass media," 230.
[126] H. Louise Davis, "Feeding the World," 98.

In conclusion, transnationalism as it rose over the 1970s and 1980s tremendously affected society and culture, creating the perfect ground for Live Aid to take root. Media and technology increased the flow of news and imagery, making the worldwide public more aware of what was happening in the world. In addition, technology made Live Aid bigger than any other event that had ever preceded it. The key phrase in this chapter is ‘global community’: it includes the dissatisfaction with politics, the rise of celebrity humanitarianism coming forth from that discontent, the authority celebrities enjoyed which was also one of the reasons Live Aid could be so big, the transnational media and technology that make global community possible, and the effects and influence of a transnational world on public, unity, and humanitarianism. Live Aid is a landmark in the longer tradition of transnationalism, since it has set an example in the mid-1980s that many events to our day still resemble, and at the same time, it signals the starting point of the modern merge of transnationalism and humanitarianism.

CHAPTER THREE

Live Aid's Neoliberalism: Celebrity Activism and the Marketization of Philanthropy

Watched by a substantial part of the world population, Queen and numerous other famous performers took over the stages in London and Philadelphia on that memorable day in July 1985. The music was great, the turnout was huge, and money was spent on food, drinks, tickets, and merchandise. And donations, because after all, that was the main reason for Live Aid: to raise money for the victims of the horrible famine in Ethiopia. However, apart from one or two short sentences on Africa spoken by a handful performers and the continent's silhouette in Live Aid's logo, there was not much that laid out the motivation and the goal of the concert.

Taking place during the mid-1980s, Live Aid found itself in a world that had essentially moved to the political right, in which U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher managed their countries' economic problems by cutting taxes, deregulation, and slashing welfare policies. Andrew Jones describes the economic climate of the early 1980s as "free market capitalism," to which Band Aid and Live Aid, I argue, perfectly corresponded, because they offered consumers something popular – music – in return for their donations to famine relief.[127] The "corporate climate of the 1980s," as Jones calls it, influenced the cultural humanitarian tradition in new ways.[128] For example, it gave rise to a philanthropic market, in which fundraising events such as Live Aid were not merely about the goal but also about the desires of the consumer. The new importance of the consumer also gave involved celebrities a new objective: making a name and money for themselves.

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[127] Andrew Jones, "Band Aid revisited: humanitarianism, consumption and philanthropy in the 1980s," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 200.
[128] Ibid.

In this chapter, I argue that Live Aid exemplifies a shift in the history of cultural humanitarianism in that it showcased a change in the character of humanitarian celebrity activists and their intentions. First, I contend that Live Aid was a product of 1980s marketization and consumerism because it originated within a tradition of free market capitalism, and that this can be seen in the way Live Aid incorporated a focus on the consumer. Second, I contend that Live Aid as a product of a consumerist society gave rise to the philanthropic market, a phenomenon that altered the fabric of cultural humanitarianism altogether. Third, I argue that as a result of this philanthropic market, celebrity activism became compromised, because they increasingly served their own purposes in addition to a humanitarian goal in their capacity as activists.

Marketized culture, the rise of consumerism, and Live Aid

The 1980s accelerated the 1970s trends toward deregulation, market liberalization, and privatization. President Gerald Ford, according to Michael Schaller, had already committed himself to a conservative political approach mid-1970s, for example pledging reduced government involvement.[129] The ingredients for capitalism were present and they were about to get mixed into a strong and persistent way of life in the Western world. This happened when utterly rightwing politicians were installed both in the U.S. – Ronald Reagan – and the U.K. – Margaret Thatcher. Schaller writes that the Reagan administration "worked to shrink the social welfare system, […] reduce government regulation of business, […] and slash income taxes, especially for high-end earners."[130] Similarly, Andrew Jones, argues, Thatcher pushed for privatization and a common attitude of "hard work, discipline, self-reliance, and philanthropy."[131] Marketization, exposing firms and industries to market forces, was

[129] Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 24.
[130] Ibid., 51.
[131] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 197.

stimulated by privatization. According to Jones, a "neoliberal ethos of individual responsibility" was emerging, tying in to the deregulation of business and the rise of a free market.[132]

In addition, consumerism was encouraged among the public. This was not new: during the 1960s, in the middle of the Cold War, consumerism was already considered a fundamental aspect of Western life. After the stagflation of the 1970s, however, consumerism went through a revival when Reagan entered office. When Live Aid took place in 1985, it had just been a year since Reagan had declared it was 'Morning in America'. This television spot, which was part of Reagan's presidential campaign, was an attempt to spread economic optimism among the people. Reagan's economic policies, for example his supply-side economics that jumpstarted more "business activity and [promoted] economic growth," became embedded in Western society over the decade, stimulating consumerism as a means of embracing that economic optimism.[133] Consumerism, as Anne Meneley writes, is "essential to the positive functioning of capitalism," and therefore inherently connected to the marketization trend of the 1980s.[134]

Live Aid as a transnational event, touching upon countless cultural developments such as new technology, new media, and global community, was bound to be influenced by neoliberalism. It commodified every aspect in life, inducing these with profit maximalization, competition and privatization. Neoliberal notions of the market as advocated by the political right were thus persistently present in virtually every aspect of life. According to Andrew Jones, Live Aid took place in a period of time when "market values [were extended] to all aspects of social life," which "aligned with a broader trajectory of free market discourses

[132] Ibid., 200.
[133] Schaller, *Right Turn*, 52.
[134] Anne Meneley, "Consumerism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (2018): 118.

penetrating into the public sphere over the course of the 1980s."[135] The notion of the free market did its work for Live Aid, too: the idea of the free market cut away any limits in charity spending, making Live Aid stand out from earlier charity events.

The loss of these boundaries meant that even higher amounts of money could be collected through events such as Live Aid, because the call for donations was repeated over and over again, in combination with bold statements by Bob Geldof. For example, Nancy Banks-Smith writes in *The Guardian* that "Geldof appeared intermittently during the 16-hour show, looking understandably wild and white and demanding money with menaces: 'We want to get a million pounds before 10 o'clock tonight. You've got plenty of money or, if you've got none, get on the phone' (presumably to pledge it on a credit card)."[136] Furthermore, Jon Pareles quotes Geldof in the *New York Times* saying "I don't need Paul McCartney to put in half a million dollars. […] I need him to sing *Let It Be*, because that will bring in more money."[137] Geldof's money-oriented approach and methods are evident, and might have been put away as rude and too bold if the times were different. But these were the 1980s, in which a market-based society and a spirit of action were dominant. Therefore, Geldof could appeal to people's purses as much as he wanted. After all, while doing this he would at the same time appeal to people's desire to consume. The public proved eager to spend money, as this was stimulated throughout society. Furthermore, Live Aid, like the rest of society, was influenced by neoliberalism to its core, which made the concert market-oriented and aiming for maximized profit. As Geldof himself later admitted, he never saw Live Aid as a concert, but merely as a TV show which sole aim was to get money.[138]

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[135] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200

[136] Nancy Banks-Smith, "Money makes the world go around: Nancy Banks-Smith experiences the joys and trials of Live Aid," *The Guardian,* July 15, 1985, p. 9.

[137] Jon Pareles, "Hunger Telethon to Be Heard Round the Globe," *New York Times*, July 7, 1985, p. 35.

[138] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 198.

And with success: Live Aid eventually raised the unbelievable amount of 127 million dollars, an unprecedented number at the time.[139] In a decade marked by increasing transnationalism, as argued in chapter two, Live Aid had more opportunities to raise money, not only in number but also in variety. In addition, because of the rising trend of consumerism, Live Aid was able to draw money from more than just the donations for the Ethiopian famine, television broadcast rights fees – these brought up around 10 million dollars – and the logical ticket sales, which already brought up approximately 5.6 million dollars.[140]

One of these opportunities was sponsoring and advertising. Advertising and sponsoring were typical for a marketized society, and therefore, the way in and extent to which Live Aid used these methods was unprecedented. Because of marketization, advertising and sponsoring had gained new importance. Live Aid cleverly tapped into this development. Many companies were triggered by the international character of Live Aid; it would reach a worldwide audience, and therefore, advertising there was very attractive. H. Louise Davis argues that "celebrities, record companies, instrument and equipment manufacturers, and telecommunications companies all benefited from unprecedented advertising," signifying the range of parties that benefited from Live Aid.[141] Various well-known companies sponsored Live Aid, such as Pepsi, AT&T, Chevrolet, and Kodak.[142] These particular four are also mentioned by Mike Mitchell in *The Washington Post*, and he added that Live Aid's corporate sponsorship is worth several million dollars.[143] This was an unprecedented number,

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[139] "Live Aid concert raises $127 million for famine relief in Africa," *History.com*, November 24, 2009. https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/live-aid-concert

[140] Michael Goldberg, "Live Aid 1985: The Day the World Rocked," *Rolling Stone*, August 16, 1985. https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/live-aid-1985-the-day-the-world-rocked-180152/

[141] H. Louise Davis, "Feeding the World a Line? Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices from Live Aid to Product Red," *NJES* 9, no. 3 (2010): 96.

[142] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 201.

[143] Richard Harrington, "The Greatest Show On Earth, Tomorrow: 'Beatles' May Reunite for the Global Concert Live Aid Concert," *The Washington Post*, July 12, 1985.

exemplifying Live Aid's uniqueness as an event. Numerous companies pitched in and connected their name to Live Aid by sponsoring, advertising, and waiving charges. Helen Shaw illustrated this claim in *The Irish Times* when she wrote about "RTE [having] sponsored the show jointly with Allied Irish Banks, which has also teamed up with Telecom Eireann to give people the opportunity to phone in pledges of cash donations to the famine fund."[144] Another way of advertising was product placement, something that Pepsi did by placing Pepsi cups on musical equipment on stage.[145] Images and footage of the concert would go all around the world, providing immense awareness and a huge potential customer basis. Ultimately, newspapers report, Live Aid made five million dollars out of corporate sponsorship.[146] At Live Aid, corporate sponsors turned into consumers in paying for advertising possibilities and Live Aid made money by providing these possibilities. The concert was again unprecedented, this time in its broad employment of marketization within a mass cultural event.

Live Aid essentially contributed to the trends of marketization and consumerism that rose to a high point in the 1980s. It served, in a way, as a tool in making neoliberalist principles inherent. For example, the concert appealed to consumers by offering merchandise. In the western world, taken in with marketization and consumerism, being able to buy things was very attractive. By anticipating this trend, Live Aid contributed to the vast installment neoliberalism as a perfectly common way of life. As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism started to influence the way people viewed virtually every part of life, from events to democracy to government.[147] Brown's argument underscores how neoliberalism accomplishes a marketized look at practically every possible aspect in everyday life. Even so, her argument

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[144] Helen Shaw, "16-hour TV show to help hungry," *The Irish Times*, July 6, 1985, p. 8.
[145] Davis, "Feeding the World," 96.
[146] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."
[147] Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory & Event* 7, no. 1 (2003).

applies to Live Aid, too. Jones, for example, argues that "Band Aid [and Live Aid] was ultimately all about maximizing its own fundraising potential, to raise money which could then be spent on aid projects."[148] Live Aid, thus, can be clearly positioned within Brown' argument, considering the way it shaped its goals in and around monetary ends.

Consumerism occupies an important position in Brown's theory, because it characterizes the marketization-inspired way of life and viewpoint. Consumerism, especially in relation to Live Aid, was popular for two reasons: first, consuming on itself made people aware of their effective citizenship, and second, having a souvenir from the "Greatest Show on Earth" and "the biggest concert ever" according to Richard Harrington, certainly gave them a sense of pride for having attended it.[149] Merchandise, thus, was an extremely appealing phenomenon that tied in perfectly with consumers' desires. Just like people at rock concerts who bought shirts featuring all locations from the current tour, people at Live Aid had a whole range of items ready for them to purchase. The options included concert footage, concert programs, books, clothes, and press passes and concert tickets for sale.[150] Richard Harrington in *The Washington Post* alerted readers to expect "a glut of Live Aid merchandising featuring the official logo," which everyone who followed some news would recognize.[151]

Taking into account all these developments related to marketization, Band Aid and Live Aid exemplified, in Jones' words, "a shift towards consumer-led charity," and this in turn led to the philanthropic market.[152]

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[148] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 198.
[149] Brown, "Neo-liberalism."
[150] Davis, "Feeding the World," 102.
[151] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."
[152] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 202.

Live Aid and the philanthropic market

"The price for saving a life this year is a plastic record," Bob Geldof said, after having received the Congressional Arts Caucus Award for his work with Live Aid.[153] He captured the essence of one of Live Aid's legacies in this sentence: the rise of the philanthropic market. Not coincidentally, the philanthropic market mainly originated and rose to prominence over a decade that was marked by increasing marketization, as explained earlier. Live Aid combined philanthropy with market, which led to the creation of a new tradition within cultural humanitarianism.

The influence of marketization in the creation of the philanthropic market can be defined as the shift in philanthropic legitimacy. Marketization had caused a change in the way welfare and charity were normally legitimized; Jones formulates this as the shift "away from state-led welfare solutions towards more individualized and market-driven forms of action."[154] These forms of actions were, Jones argues, "articulated through the realms of consumption and culture."[155] The reason Bob Geldof was able to make straightforward inquiries for more money and more donations, directly addressing the public, was this change in legitimacy: charity was no longer solely dependent on state or other established parties' solutions, but on the individual. Marketization undoubtedly contributed to this change, because it stimulated individualized action and non-state charity resolutions. Individuality is a complex phenomenon in relation to changing the world, Geldof said in an interview with filmmaker Errol Morris: "The paradox at the heart of individualism […] is that it only works when we act in concert for the common good," thereby acknowledging the importance of the

[153] Richard Harrington, "Geldof's Plea for the Starving," *The Washington Post*, July 24, 1985.
[154] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 191.
[155] Ibid.

public in charity and fundraising events.[156] Geldof did still appeal to governments for substantial funds: for example, he appealed to the U.S. Congress to provide additional help for Africa.[157] However, the role of the public in charitable causes became increasingly important over the course of the early 1980s, because of marketization's emphasis on individualism: the people were the ones, after all, who were potential consumers.

Live Aid, as illustrated, cleverly tapped into consumerist desires: there was a substantial amount of merchandise available to the concerts' visitors. But the merchandise is one side of Live Aid's consumerism-based character: the concert as a whole is exemplary for consumerism as well. The essence of the concerts was that people would buy a ticket, by which they would donate money to the famine, but they would get something in return for that donation: a place at the concert. As K. Rozario puts it, "donors began to be treated and courted as consumers who had to be entertained" in order to raise charity money.[158] Again, Brown's argument about neoliberalism inducing the lens through which society was viewed is true: people who donated money were no longer simply donators but they began to be treated as consumers. This, I believe, exemplifies a broader shift in humanitarianism: a kind of trading system in donating for good causes. In that sense, donations are not merely donations anymore, but simply trading tools in return for which, one gets entertainment.

The entertainment side is where celebrity activism comes in. Celebrities very much act within the realm of consumerism and they often enjoy an international public. They are, therefore, very useful to humanitarianism, because they attract worldwide attention – and

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[156] Ted Mills, "Bob Geldof Talks About the Greatest Day of His Life, Stepping on the Stage of Live Aid, in a Short Doc by Errol Morris," *Open Culture*, August 11, 2016. https://www.openculture.com/2016/08/bob-geldof-talks-about-the-greatest-day-of-his-life.html

[157] Harrington, "Geldof's Plea."

[158] K. Rozario, ""Delicious Horrors": Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2003): 419.

donations. Live Aid made clever use the power of consumerism and celebrity appeal in order to make more money.

Live Aid thus combined philanthropy with the market, renewing humanitarianism: in fact, because of this combination humanitarianism became bigger than it had been before. Only when philanthropy was transformed into a commercial market tool, humanitarianism grew into a mass phenomenon.[159]

The transformation of celebrity activism

Prior to Live Aid, celebrity activism had already built up an undeniably impressive curriculum vitae. Ever since World War I, according to Rozario, numerous charity organizations had started to understand and use the opportunities put forward by the new "mass culture of movies and mass-circulation newspapers" in order to move people towards undertaking humanitarian action.[160] Andrew Jones also acknowledges that "[m]any humanitarian agencies understood the advantages of being associated with popular culture" in the decades before Live Aid.[161] Celebrity activism was not new, yet it experienced a transformation with Live Aid. Popular engagement might have been there before, but never to the extent of Live Aid. The concerts boosted a new kind of celebrity activism: one that was influenced and affected not only by transnationalism, technology and mass media, but also by the new emphasis on market and consumerism.[162]

Ultimately, Live Aid celebrity activism was different from previous forms because the activists were more driven to be more occupied with their own purposes and fame than they had been in earlier decades. Because of the technological options and transnational appeal, it was hard not to consider Live Aid a boost for one's musical career. Michael Mitchell told *The*

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[159] Elaine Jeffreys, "On Celebrity Philanthropy," in *Celebrity Philanthropy*, Elaine Jeffreys and Paul Allatson, eds. (Bristol, England: Intellect Ltd, 2015): 31.
[160] Rozario, "Delicious Horrors," 423.
[161] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 195.
[162] Ibid., 200.

Washington Post that there were so many celebrities wanting to participate in Live Aid they had had to "shrunk several sets down to 10 minutes" in order to give everyone a change to perform: "A lot of people who've never sung together are going to sing together, just so they can be involved."[163] Performing was not only a way to help, but also a means of showcasing oneself. As Davis argues, "compassion was redirected away from the famine victim toward the celebrity singing on behalf of the victim."[164] New technology and the transnational community, thus, offered more and faster ways to profit and gain more fame. In fact, Joe Breen reported in *The Irish Times* that it would be "the telethons which each country has agreed to run in exchange for the rights to televise the show that will generate the most money," technology being an essential tool for celebrities to make their 15 minutes on stage memorable since it was to be shown on a plethora of television screens.[165]

The free market legitimized consumerism as a way to get involved in global affairs for both celebrities and the public.[166] For the public, this meant that by actively participating in cultural affairs, they made a satisfactory contribution to other people's suffering. By paying for Band Aid records or Live Aid tickets, for example, consumers felt they had contributed to crises such as the Ethiopian famine. This ethical consumer market, as Davis calls it, "was both identified and unified through acts of consuming and purchasing within the famine relief site."[167] By participating in famine relief in the form of attending fundraising concerts such as Live Aid, or donating in another way, the public created a structure that enabled people to buy off the call for aid as it reached them personally. Jones argues something similar when he writes that by "[participating] in Band Aid [and Live Aid], […] western consumers could position themselves as activists and donors, […] compatible with an emerging neoliberal

[163] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."
[164] Davis, "Feeding the World," 98.
[165] Joe Breen, "Live Aid: countdown to blast-off," *The Irish Times*, July 13, 1985.
[166] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200.
[167] Davis, "Feeding the World," 103.

ethos of individual responsibility."[168] Consumerism, thus, allowed the individual to fulfil one's responsibility in the wake of a humanitarian crisis.

However, this kind of consumerism gave its donators something in return: music, a place at a concert, enjoyable experiences, making it less characteristically consumerism but rather resembling barter. Providing aid became more of a recreational venue: paying money to have some fun, while at the same time, the payment contributed to feeding starving people. Many consumers undoubtedly wanted to contribute to aid programs supported by Band Aid and Live Aid, and considering the time in which they were living, it is not strange they made use of existing structures and events, such as Live Aid and the philanthropic market. Therefore, consumerism became more tightly bound up in notions of humanitarianism over the 1980s and especially after Live Aid.

The same is true for celebrities and their involvement in humanitarian causes: their efforts as humanitarian actors became increasingly connected to consumerist desires as well as to the sense of feeling good about their provided aid. As mentioned, attending events meant to do something about humanitarian issues and to alleviate suffering carries an inherent feeling of self-gratification, and if that is true for the public it is certainly true for those that are employed to entertain the donating consumers.[169] Whereas someone in the crowd feels good because he has paid forty pounds to get in, knowing his money has allowed ten more people to eat, the celebrity on stage feels good because he or she is donating precious time, talent, and well-deserved money, because most celebrities at Live Aid and many at nowadays' benefit concerts do not get paid.

But there is more to this side of the story. By performing at Live Aid, celebrities enjoyed worldwide fame. For example, after experiencing some difficult years in which they

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[168] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200.

[169] Chris Rojek, "Leaderless Organization, World Historical Events and Their Contradictions: The 'Burning Man City' Case," *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 361.

had not been together, Queen's performance at Live Aid catapulted the band's fame.[170] Queen's remaining members, who recently cooperated in the making of the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*, also consider their Live Aid performance one of the most important events in the band's career, judging from the prominence of the Live Aid concert scenes at the beginning and end of the movie.[171]

Queen's success does not necessarily say mean that their commitment to contribute to famine relief was not sincere, but singer Freddie Mercury himself admitted that he was not participating for the good of others. "I'm doing it out of pride, pride that I've been asked as well as that I can actually do something like that," Mercury declared. "And so basically I'm doing it out of feeling that one way all the hard work that I've actually done over the years has paid off, because they're actually asking me to do something to be proud of."[172]

Even though many celebrities present at Live Aid undoubtedly wanted to contribute to providing humanitarian aid, for most of them, such as Mercury, their own interests also played a large role. In addition to Mercury, other celebrities at Live Aid also mainly look back at it remembering details that are related to their own gain. Tina Turner, for example, said in an interview with Carl Wilkinson for *The Guardian* that "[t]he only thing I remember of the day is stabbing Mick in the foot with my high heels in the middle of 'It's Only Rock and Roll'. And then they put us on the cover of *Life* magazine!"[173] Similarly, the band U2 won huge momentum during Live Aid, having been relatively unknown until that point.[174] After Live Aid, in fact, they went on to become one of the most famous bands connected to

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[170] "Queen at Live Aid: the real story of how one band made rock history," *Louder*, November 12, 2018. https://www.loudersound.com/features/queen-at-live-aid-the-real-story-of-how-one-band-made-rock-history

[171] Ibid.

[172] "Queen at Live Aid."

[173] Carl Wilkinson, "Live Aid in their own words," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2004. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/oct/17/popandrock5

[174] Ibid.

humanitarian causes, having been involved in numerous charity projects and fundraising concerts over the decades following Live Aid.[175]

Adding on to celebrities recalling personal memories while leaving out the actual cause of the concert, Queen-band member Brian May recalls his own memories of the concert saying that he "remember[s] a huge rush of adrenalin as he went on stage and a massive roar from the crowd, and then all of [them] just pitching in."[176] Nowhere does he mention the famine or the fundraising. In fact, most stars simply recall the memories they have relating to Live Aid's hugeness; the event seems to overshadow the cause. This is also illustrated by the fact that a potential duet between Madonna and Rod Stewart that could not be realized because, according to Richard Harrington, "they couldn't agree on a song."[177] Personal objectives clearly weighed more if one was not willing to put such differences aside for the sake of a humanitarian cause.

Several stars were also in awe of the fame of other present celebrities. *The Guardian*-reporter Terry Coleman spoke to someone backstage who told him: "Great place to do business today. Anyone who's anyone will be here."[178] Phil Collins recalls being very impressed by Cher, whom he met on his flight to the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia; he invited her to just come to the concert, and later found himself next to her on the stage: "She'd just turned up!"[179]

Bob Geldof, in contrast to the celebrities mentioned above, emphasized the cause of Live Aid throughout interviews during the 1980s. In an interview with *The Irish Times*, he said that "[t]he reason for the event is more important than the event itself."[180] This illustrates

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[175] Zachary Laird, "U2's Charity Work: Global Relief," *The Borgen Project*, September 11, 2020.
[176] Wilkinson, "Live Aid."
[177] Harrington, "The Greatest Show."
[178] Terry Coleman, "Comment on the Live Aid rock concert," *The Guardian*, July 15, 1985. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/1985/jul/15/artsfeatures
[179] Wilkinson, "Live Aid."
[180] "Channelling the vitality of rock to feed hungry," *The Irish Times*, July 13, 1985.

the difference between Geldof's view and the celebrities' views on Live Aid. Geldof appealed to celebrities' aim for fame: when he asked stars to participate in Live Aid, he often promised them Live Aid would be huge – and it was. This promise, however, seems to appeal more to the will to make a name rather than the will to participate in something to help the poor. When inviting Queen to perform, for example, Geldof reportedly told "the old faggot [Freddie Mercury] it's going to be the biggest thing ever…," knowing that Mercury would react to this.[181] Geldof had seen the situation in Ethiopia, and that is what triggered him to organize Band Aid and Live Aid, but he did not use these same motivations to convince celebrities to participate. Instead, he used promises of fame and gain to draw them in.

Live Aid transformed celebrity humanitarian activism. Celebrities were no longer solely humanitarian actors when they contributed to a cause, but their motives were essentially compromised in a marketized and money-oriented society. When the market is defining in most societal areas, goals and purposes are adjusted to live up to common standards. Live Aid, an event in the middle of this marketized culture and thus heavily drawing upon the working of this culture, was landmark: even if performers had good intentions, their performances were co-opted by the marketization processes.

The neoliberalist branch of celebrity activism as it originated within the 1980s changed the tradition of cultural humanitarianism fundamentally, in a way that is still visible today. Band Aid and Live Aid, according to Alex de Waal, sparked a pattern of "publicity-driven emergency responses," a situation in which "[t]he market for emergency relief is set by those who pay the bills, not those who eat the food, and donors wish to see their brand names on television when journalists arrive to cover the disaster."[182] In this emergency relief market, Live Aid functions as a key development. With celebrities acting as spokespersons in the

[181] "Queen at Live Aid."
[182] Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival: A Celebrity Vogue," *World Affairs* 171, no. 2 (2008): 52.

humanitarian arena, public participation in the philanthropic market became very fashionable.[183]

To conclude, marketization and consumerism were essential for Live Aid's success: the concert very much relied on the power of sales, consumers, and the marketized culture of the 1980s. Furthermore, Live Aid was an indispensable landmark in the rise of the philanthropic market: it gave this market much room to develop by including celebrity appeal, famine relief, and concert merchandise. In this way, Live Aid combined humanitarianism with philanthropy, thereby renewing the tradition of humanitarianism. Another way in which Live Aid altered cultural humanitarianism is by transforming celebrity activism. Live Aid as a product of marketization influenced the world around it, causing celebrity activism to be compromised from that moment onwards. Especially since the world has become a transnational community, as argued earlier, fame is within reach with every goodwill or humanitarian action that is taken. Live Aid made sure celebrities were on TV on a worldwide basis, making sure the world could see what they were doing for charity. In this, Live Aid has been essential in this motivational change within celebrity activism, and ultimately in the transformation of cultural humanitarianism.

[183] Jones, "Band Aid revisited," 200.

Conclusion

The famine in Ethiopia served as a pivotal moment within humanitarian history. It allowed for cultural developments to come together and culminate into an unprecedented fundraising event, under heavy influence of popular culture, transnationalism, and neoliberalism. This culmination is now known as Live Aid, a watershed event in the history of cultural humanitarianism. Live Aid signaled a shift in humanitarianism, away from state-led initiatives and policies, towards the increased use of the domain of public and popular culture and celebrity appeal for humanitarian causes. Its place in the history and tradition of cultural humanitarianism, thus, is undeniably important and exemplary, while at the same time its contribution to that tradition is unique.

Even though celebrity humanitarian activists had been around for longer, Live Aid with its market-inspired and consumerist character jumpstarted celebrity activism into a new guise. Since Live Aid really exemplified the power of celebrities in stimulating donations and creating awareness, which lead to more money, the concert can certainly be considered a landmark in cultural humanitarianism. Ever since Live Aid, the role of celebrities in humanitarian agencies and causes has skyrocketed: in June 2010, the United Nations had over 175 so-called goodwill ambassadors and twelve "Messengers of Peace" including George Clooney.[184] Organizations such as UNICEF and the WHO also employ numerous celebrities for their causes.[185] Using celebrities, according to Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "has proved particularly effective [for the United Nations] both in raising public awareness and in fund-raising for the organization's agencies."[186] Celebrities have become part of a market in which they are both earners as well as human merchandize.

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[184] Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "Bringing the Individuals Back in? Celebrities as Transnational Activists," in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the world?* Liza Tsaliki ed. (Bristol, England: Intellect Ltd, 2011): 35.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

For this market to be effective, transnationalism was essential. Transnationalism created not just worldwide awareness of humanitarian crises, but also a broader news base, global markets, and an international community. The transnational developments of the 1980s made for an increasingly persistent image of the Western public being connected to faraway people in suffering, rooted in the realization that we are all human beings. Because of the vivid imagery that was delivered into millions of living rooms through the TV, people became increasingly compelled to do something, feeling that they had an obligation to their fellow human beings. International media coverage, in addition to technological options such as film, broadcast, and imagery, made Live Aid the success that it was: it gave the tragedy the concerts were raising money for a face, making it easier for the public to be moved and feel connected.

Live Aid's legacy for today is that it installed mass charity events including celebrity appeal into today's tradition of cultural humanitarianism. Live Aid, I believe, is the starting point of a long tradition of global and transnational benefit concerts with wide attraction. In this tradition, it is not solely about the good cause, but a substantial amount of attention is aimed at the artists involved in the event. For celebrities, performing at these kind of events is attractive because the stage is big and the audience is bigger. In addition, it builds up their reputation. Other than that, the public acts as both donators and consumers at the same time: it provides crisis relief, yet enjoys the perks of living in the Western world by collecting the reward for their donation.

Back in the time of Live Aid, providing aid was important, but the musical treat that was offered in return for a donation sparked an ongoing tradition of consumerist charity and celebrities as humanitarian spokespersons. Live Aid strengthened popular culture as an actor in the humanitarian arena. From that moment on, the role of popular appeal increased: it had to be there in order to get things done. Celebrity actors spoke to the hearts of their public,

which proved to be very effective: they already enjoyed a substantial amount of authority because of their popularity. That is the transformation Live Aid accomplished within cultural humanitarianism: a proliferating, long-lasting legacy in which fame and famine, adoration and aid can be closely connected.

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