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**iCare Capitalism?: The Biopolitics of Choice in a Neo-Liberal
Economy of Hope**

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iCare Capitalism?: The Biopolitics of Choice in a Neo-Liberal Economy of Hope

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International relations and global development just got a whole lot easier. Through the conscious choice and purchase of the 'right' kind of coffee, bottled water or t-shirt, now available at one's local supermarket, the caring relationalities of development of the 'fair trade' kind can quite easily be put into practice. For some, these practices provide the space for people's 'everyday' moralities let loose through their ordinary choices that then works to globalize a form of responsibility towards poor Others (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke and Malpass 2011). Here, the weekly grocery shop has morphed into the first line of defence of poor farmers' livelihoods, clean water, women's empowerment and international development. With Brand Aid (Richey and Ponte 2011), with its celebrity- and corporate-brand-drenched marketing campaigns, this 'causumerism' has been taken to the extreme. Now, through the purchase of Product (RED)-labelled commodities, it is instead the *very real case* that saving the *very lives* of poor, Aids-stricken Africans just got a whole lot easier. Put in rather stark, and exceedingly un-ironic and un-problematic terms, in buying a Product (RED) iPod, "you have a new iPod and you helped save a person's life". Over time, however, the Product (RED) campaign has morphed slightly and narrowed the advertised scope of whom it saves. Now, RED provides its drugs predominantly to pregnant HIV-infected mothers in Africa in order to halt the spread of HIV to newborn children designed to usher in an 'Aids free generation' by 2015 (Joinred.org 2012). Thus, in the contemporary incarnation of Product (RED), 'a person's life' has taken on more specific meanings and materialities in the even more stable forms of pregnant mothers and children, while the mechanisms of how they are 'saved' have remained the same.

Consumer choice, as the key mechanism of Brand Aid and its articulations in Product (RED), is literally and figuratively entangled in the biopolitics of the existence and 'being' of African HIV victims; AIDS or no AIDS is merely a matter of choice at the till. Brand Aid is therefore a biopolitics of life (and death) itself (cf. Rose 2001), on sale just like any other commodity, but which are, of course, conspicuously signalled as (RED) through the use of the colour red either on the product or on its marketing materials. And, these are a particular form of biopolitics that enact and are enacted by what Rose (2001: 18) calls an 'ethopolitics' that are '...the self-techniques by which human being should judge themselves and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are'. In Brand Aid, the care of the self through the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods is ingeniously associated with the biopoliticized care of the dying African Other, salvaged through these discrete acts of consumption and discerning self-care. Here then is a relational ethopolitics of the self that can really only be operationalised through discrete connections to disembedded (RED) products, caring corporations, compassionate neo-liberalised capitalisms and poor, HIV-infected African mothers and children, completely absent the histories and socio-economic structures that worked to construct these contemporary connections in the first place.

Stitching together Brand Aid's landscapes of hope are congeries of celebrities and their now requisite global humanitarianisms (Littler 2008). Besides the rich ironies of the fabulously

rich and famous working to 'sell' African health and wellbeing, celebrities are even more broadly in the business of deciding how and in what ways we should care about Others as well as 'do' development these days. Through campaigns, charities and endorsements, '...it is now through the globally-recognized, mega-star that the subaltern speaks' (Goodman, 2010: 105) and so celebrities have quickly become those elevated voices that work to define for us the problems and solutions to global poverty and humanitarian crises (see also, Fridell and Konings, forthcoming). These are a biopolitics of development for a spectacularized media age.

Yet, much more is going on here as the Gates Foundation and other celebrity-fronted foundations (e.g. Pitt/Jolie) are beginning to show in terms of their elevated power to dictate development trajectories. Indeed, in a tantalizing and potentially very far-reaching argument that needs to be followed up, Richey and Ponte (2011: 159) put it this way: 'the celebrity substitutes the state as the external guarantor of welfare, a new form of the social contract that underpins Brand Aid'. In this, we can see the rise of what I have elsewhere called 'celebrity governance regimes' (Goodman, forthcoming), which, with their own internal media and cultural- and political-economic dynamics, work to mediate our affects, but also the processes by which these affects are bounded and materialised in Africa (and elsewhere) as Brand Aid shows in stark relief. And before those ever accompanying choruses of 'at least they (i.e. so-called caring celebrities and corporations) are doing something' become even louder, our job is surely, first and foremost, to be doggedly engaged with and critical about what that 'something' is, where it has come from, how it is done and what its impacts are.

In some ways, it is not very far off the mark to say that Brand Aid is the absolute apex if not the pure essence of consumerist, neo-liberal capitalism: shopping, consumption and choosing determine the very existence of human-being-ness in the form of HIV-infected Africans. Can shopping get any more meaningful than this? Can choice become embedded with more power than this? Can consuming get any more 'real', material, impactful and 'care-full' (McEwan and Goodman 2010) than this? Or perhaps it is better to suggest that Brand Aid is at the apex of some very uncomfortable ethical and moral 'boundary crossing'—what Bono, nonetheless labels as 'hard commerce' that is 'punk rock, hip hop' rather than 'hippy music, holding hands' (Richey and Ponte 2011: 149)—through these explicit connections of shopping and the existence of Others through the branded commodification of their wellbeing? It is in making these transgressions and, indeed, making them work quite well, that Brand Aid problematically normalises an already powerfully extant cultural politics of capitalism in its love affair with the power 'freedom of choice' and its overt penchant for the marketization of literally everything. In Brand Aid, then, the politics of the possible are much further and more deeply colonized by market logics to the detriment of Other forms of development.

These concerns beg two much larger questions: Does Brand Aid constitute a new, emergent and perhaps 'sticky' form of neo-liberalism on the variegated landscapes of neo-liberalisms that, in practice, stalk the globe (Castree 2005; Harvey 2005)? If this is indeed the case, what does what might be called 'iCare' capitalism—the overt creation of economic, brand and self-value out of lives saved and death staved—mean for those engaged and (importantly) *not* engaged in these international development networks? These questions open up discussions very much worth having as the tides of international politics and global development continue to turn around the more prescient debates over what sort of world we want to live in. And, herein is where the intellectual and real-world power of current and future work on Brand Aid will find fertile and, indeed, spectacular ground.

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