

THE FLETCHER SCHOOL OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY

**The Constantine Karamanlis Chair in
Hellenic and Southeastern European Studies**

Karamanlis Working Papers in Hellenic and European Studies



No 7 / July 2008

**The Dynamics of Celebrity Activism:
Mia Farrow and the ‘Genocide Olympics’ Campaign**

by

Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis

The Constantine Karamanlis Chair in Hellenic and Southeastern European Studies has the aim of promoting the study and research of – and, more generally, awareness and familiarity with – Greece in its political, economic and cultural relationship to its European and Mediterranean context. The Chair brings distinguished scholars to The Fletcher School and the Tufts University community, encouraging a renewed focus on modern Greece, the Mediterranean, and the European Union and the crucial role these regions play in world politics. The Chair’s endowment provides a basis for scholars to teach courses on Greece and Europe viewed through history and culture as well as economics and politics.

While supporting new research aimed at addressing changing conditions in Southeastern Europe, the Chair also forges a strong bond between the Boston area Balkan/Greek community and members of academia whose interests lie in current Greek, Balkan and European issues. Through this bond, many opportunities arise to deconstruct negative stereotypes, overcome obstacles to cooperation, and create innovative ways to move forward, inspiring peaceful coexistence in the region and beyond.

As funding efforts expand, the Constantine Karamanlis Chair will form the core component of the planned Center for Hellenic and European Studies at The Fletcher School, Tufts University, providing:

- a rotating position for distinguished scholars
- courses for graduate students at Fletcher and for undergraduates at Tufts University
- lectures for the community at large on Greece, the Mediterranean, and the EU
- a Working Paper Series in Hellenic and European Studies
- roundtable discussions, workshops, and conferences
- advanced research

Holders of the Chair:

Professor Thanos M. Veremis. Dr. Veremis, who was the first Chair-holder, is a professor of modern history at the University of Athens, Greece. He was educated at Boston University and the University of Oxford and has written extensively on Greek political history, Balkan reconstruction, and Southeastern Europe.

Professor George Prevelakis. Dr. Prevelakis is a professor of human and regional geography at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, France. He was educated at Athens Technical University and Paris-Sorbonne and has written extensively on Greek geopolitics, the Hellenic Diaspora, and the Balkans.

Professor Dimitris Keridis. Dr. Keridis is a professor of international politics at the University of Macedonia, Greece. He was educated at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and The Fletcher School and has written extensively on Greek foreign policy, Turkey, the Balkans, and European security.

Professor Kostas A. Lavdas. Dr. Lavdas is a professor of European politics at the University of Crete, Greece. He was educated at Panteion-Athens, the University of Manchester, L.S.E. and M.I.T. and has written extensively on Greek politics, EU politics and policy, political theory, and comparative political analysis.

Asteris Huliaras (PhD, University of Hull, UK, 1990) is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at Harokopion University and Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of International Economic Relations in Athens. He is Professor-elect at the Department of Political Science at the University of the Peloponnese. He has taught as visiting professor at the University of York (Canada). His research interests include Sub-Saharan African politics and North-South relations with particular emphasis on official development assistance. His publications include seven books (the most recent is entitled *Geographical Myths of International Politics* – in Greek), several articles published in international journals (*African Affairs*, *Defense Nationale*, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *Geopolitics*, *International Journal*, *The Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *The Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, *Orbis*, *The World Today*) and many contributions to edited volumes in Britain, Canada and the United States. He is co-editor of the *Hellenic Review of Political Science* (the official journal of the Hellenic Political Science Association). He is currently co-ordinating a research project on celebrity diplomacy and North/South relations.

Nikolaos Tzifakis (PhD, University of Lancaster, UK, 2002) is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Political Research and Documentation (KEPET) of the Department of Political Science at the University of Crete and Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy in Athens. He has been a Visiting Lecturer of International Relations at the Department of Political Science of the University of Crete and the Department of Geography of Harokopion University of Athens. His research interests include contemporary Balkan developments, EU external policies the International Relations theory. His recent publications inter alia include articles in *International Journal*, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *Ethnopolitics*, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, *European View*, *Perspectives: The Central European Review of International Affairs* and *Southeast European Politics* as well as, chapter contributions to edited volumes published by *Palgrave* and *Facts on File Inc*. He has published two monographs and a co-edited volume dealing with aspects of the contemporary security problems in the Balkans and he is currently co-editing (with Asteris Huliaras) a book entitled *Human Security in the Balkans*, to be published in 2009 by Nova Publishers in New York.

The Dynamics of Celebrity Activism:

Mia Farrow and the “Genocide Olympics” Campaign

ASTERIS HULIARAS & NIKOLAOS TZIFAKIS

1. Introduction

In recent years Hollywood actors and film directors, British rock stars and German sportsmen - in short celebrities - have taken an active interest in world politics. Quite a number of them have become well-recognized global activists. They have donated significant sums of money for anti-malarial bed-nets and drugs to combat HIV. By visiting poor countries and appearing on TV shows they have raised public awareness on man-made and natural disasters. And by participating in world meetings like the World Economic Forum in Davos they have pressurized individual leaders and governments to take action against global poverty. There are plenty of examples. George Clooney has campaigned against the Sudanese government for the crimes committed by government militias in the western parts of the country. Jessica Lange and Angelina Jolie have visited and distributed aid to refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And the Irish rock star Bono has traveled to some of Africa’s poorest countries and set up a pressure group called DATA which lobbies western governments for debt relief of less developed nations. From the United Nations corridors to the slums of Nairobi and Luanda movie stars and pop singers are more and more active in campaigns against hunger, disease and inequality. In the exaggerated words of a journalist: “With so many Hollywood actors, British rock stars, and American talk show hosts beating a path to [Africa] – building schools, visiting refugee children, raising awareness on AIDS and the fighting in Darfur - it’s a wonder the entertainment industry can still function”.¹

While celebrity activism evolves into an ever-growing internationally visible phenomenon, very little has been written on its causes and, even less, on its impact. Is celebrity activism emerging into a distinct influential factor in international politics, or is it merely an extension (or a new dimension) of those figures’ public relations and image-making strategies? Are celebrities capable (or genuinely intent) of making governments review aspects of their policies, or does their activism represent little more than an ephemeral engagement with issues in order to constantly stay in front of the spotlights? Is celebrity activism principled and strategically designed towards highlighting certain issues and shaping the international agenda, or does it merely follow news headlines?

¹ Scott Baldauf, “Madonna the latest pop star to shine celebrity on Africa”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 October 2006.

The purpose of this study is to research and assess this form of transnational activism. The first section of the article realizes a brief review of the International Relations literature concerning the individual as level (or unit) of analysis. The second part of the article endeavors to systematically organize and present what we know so far on the causes and the repercussions of transnational celebrity activism. Finally, the third section is devoted to a case study. It examines Mia Farrow's activism in respect to China's policy toward Sudan. This particular case-study was chosen for a number of reasons: first, it seems as a sincere effort² by an actor who has an official capacity but also is a free-floater; secondly, this actor attempts to influence the policies of another country towards a third country; thirdly, she works through coalitions with other groups or people and with the extensive use of publicity. The case study's main conclusion is that Farrow's influence seems to have been overvalued.

2. The Study of Individuals in International Relations

In *Man, the State and War*, Kenneth N. Waltz claimed that there are three levels of analysis (indeed, he called them 'images') through which the causes of war can be explained. These are: i) the individual, ii) the state and iii) the international system.³ In the discipline of International Relations, the levels of analysis are not theories in themselves.⁴ Instead, they represent 'locations where both outcomes and sources of explanations can be located'.⁵ As such, they provide different angles for the illumination of partial and incomplete accounts of international politics. Levels of analysis offer complementary findings for the comprehensive analysis of a problem at hand and thus, they are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive.⁶

Subsequent studies to Waltz's work have advocated the addition of more levels to the above analytical scheme making explicit reference to the sub-systemic (or regional) and the subunit (e.g., organized groups, bureaucracies, lobbies) levels.⁷ Another sizeable part of the International Relations literature has dealt with the ontological and analytical preeminence of each level of analysis culminating in the so-called agent-structure debate.⁸

² Mia Farrow, that has helped children from poor countries for decades, said in an interview: "By reaching out to others, I found a life that is meaningful (...) it (...) made me discover the other world, of pain, and fear" (Quoted in 'Africa hot destination for committed celebrities', *The Associated Press*, 19 June 2006).

³ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

⁴ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 70-71.

⁵ Barry Buzan, "The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations Reconsidered", in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, p. 204.

⁶ A. Nuri Yurdusev, "'Level of Analysis' and 'Unit of Analysis': A Case for Distinction", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1993), pp. 82-83.

⁷ Stephen J. Andriole, "The Levels of Analysis Problems and the Study of Foreign International, and Global Affairs: A Review Critique, and Another Final Solution", *International Interactions*, Vol. 5, No. 2-3 (1978), p. 122.

⁸ Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory", *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1987), pp. 335-370; David Dessler,

Nevertheless, while no case has been presented against the validity of any of Waltz's original three levels of analysis, the lack of theoretical work on the level of the individual is stunning. This state of affairs in the International Relations theory without doubt reflects the state-centric nature of the discipline.⁹ Not only is the state considered as the dominant actor in international politics, it is additionally approximated as a unitary rational actor and accordingly, most contemporary work is 'actor-general' (i.e., it disregards the difference that human beings and groups make).¹⁰ Yet, as two analysts remarked, 'How can we explain twentieth-century history without reference to Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi or Mao Zedong?'¹¹

The discussion of the impact of individuals in the process of international politics seems to be exhausted with the study of agents of political authority.¹² The relevant literature is indeed almost exclusively confined within the realm of Foreign Policy Analysis. Several analyses focus on how the personality traits and personal characteristics of leaders impact on their political attitude.¹³ For instance, Margaret G. Hermann and her research partners have proposed a typology of eight different leadership styles (ideal types) through the analyses of such questions as the leaders' reaction to political constraints, their openness to information and their motivation for action.¹⁴ In addition, Hermann attempted to articulate the enabling conditions that facilitate the emergence of the 'predominant leader' as a country's authoritative decision unit (in contrast to single groups or coalitions of autonomous actors).¹⁵ Another thread of work has been advanced by Alexander George through the elaboration of the term 'operational code'. The latter describes the leader's belief system about politics that explains his behavior on specific instances.¹⁶ Above all, owing to the arrival of the behavioral revolution into the discipline of International Relations, a

"What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?", *International Organization*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1989), pp. 441-473.

⁹ Ronnie D. Lipschutz, "Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1992), pp. 390.

¹⁰ Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Grounds of International Relations", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), p. 2.

¹¹ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In", *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2001), p. 108.

¹² See for instance R. Barry J. Jones et al., *Introduction to International Relations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, pp. 20-23.

¹³ See *inter alia* Scott Crichlow, "Psychological Influences on the Policy Choices of Secretaries of State and Foreign Ministers", *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2005), pp. 179-205; Paul A. Kowert and Margaret G. Hermann, "Who Takes Risks?: Daring and Caution in Foreign Policy Making", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (1997), pp. 611-637; Lloyd S. Etheredge, "Personality Effects on American Foreign Policy, 1898-1968: A Test of Interpersonal Generalization Theory", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 72, No. 2, (1978), pp. 434-451.

¹⁴ Margaret G. Hermann *et al.*, "Who Leads Matters: The Effect of Powerful Individuals", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2001), pp. 83-131.

¹⁵ Margaret G. Hermann, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2001), pp. 57-64; Margaret G. Hermann and Charles F. Hermann, "Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Inquiry", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (1989), pp. 369-373.

¹⁶ Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (1969), pp. 190-222.

proliferation of research papers has occurred that seeks to identify correlations between leaders' characteristics and their attitudes which, nonetheless, do not lead to any causal explanations and have questionable practical implications.¹⁷

While the role of statesmen has become object of analysis within the domain of Foreign Policy Analysis, the impact of individuals who are not agents of political authority has received scant, if any, attention in the discipline. To the extent that global civil society and its activities have increasingly emerged in the post-Cold War era as a distinct research field of international studies,¹⁸ absence of interest for the role of individual members of transnational actors should no longer be entirely attributed to the mainstream state-centric view of international politics. Indeed, as Helmut K. Anheier remarked, the problem with the global civil society literature lies in the fact that the debate 'has become very conceptual and overly focused on the issue of definitions relative to empirical research findings'.¹⁹ In this respect, the discussion should move forward to tackle such questions as 'to what extent, under what conditions, and how is global civil society able to create, maintain, and grow zones of nonviolence and predictability'.²⁰ Moreover, most empirical works focusing on the role of specific categories of global civil society actors (e.g., philanthropic foundations or women movements)²¹ are system-oriented in the sense that they attempt to highlight the overall impact of this type of actors. After all, idiosyncratic approaches to issue-specific global civil society actors cannot contribute as such to the formulation of theoretical propositions.²²

The meagre in size and depth literature on the role of individuals who are not state agents in international politics can be analytically divided into two categories. The first concerns studies that examine the enabling (contextual or external) conditions for individuals to adopt a more active international role. The second category includes researches on the personal traits of individuals.

¹⁷ For instance, a study examines the relationship between the age of the leader and his propensity to take risks and concede to the outbreak of violence. See Michael Horowitz, Rose McDermott and Allan C. Stam, "Leader Age, Regime Type, and Violent International Relations", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (2005), pp. 661-685.

¹⁸ It is worth-noting here that neither the emergence of transnational actors, nor the development of theories about them do they represent recent phenomena. For a more detailed account see Thomas Risse, "Transnational Actors and World Politics", in, Walther Ch. Zimmerli, Klaus Richter and Markus Holzinger (eds), *Corporate Ethics and Corporate Governance*, Heiderlberg, Springer, 2007, pp. 253-255.

¹⁹ Helmut K. Anheier, "Reflections on the Concept and Measurement of Global Civil Society", *Voluntas*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2007), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ Helmut K. Anheier and Siobhan Daly, "Philanthropic Foundations: A New Global Force?" in, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius and Mary Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2004/5*, London: Sage, 2004, pp. 158-176; Purna Sen, "Successes and Challenges: Understanding the Global Movement to End Violence Against Women" in, Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius (eds), *Global Civil Society 2003*, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/yearbook03chapters.htm>.

²² See for instance Seckinelgin's very informative work on the attempt of individuals and groups to raise awareness concerning the immediate needs for treatment of victims of AIDS. Hakan Seckinelgin, "Time to Stop and Think: HIV/AIDS, Global Civil Society, and People's Politics" in, Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor and Helmut Anheier (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/yearbook02chapters.htm>.

In respect of the first category, Philip G. Cerny widened the agent-structure debate to allow for a more consistent account of the role of 'social agents'. Although Cerny made no explicit reference to individuals, he did not either exclude them from his conceptualization of 'social agents' in which he assembled transnational cause groups and social movements. Cerny argued that while the structure may constrain or enable the activities of such actors, the latter may, under certain conditions, in turn contribute to the preservation or the transformation of structure. It is worth-noting here Cerny's assertion that the current conditions of globalization are permissive for such a structural change.²³

From a different perspective, Kiyoteru Tsutsui and Christine Min Wotipka examined patterns of citizen participation in global human rights movements through membership in human rights NGOs. Their survey demonstrated that there is a correlation between the citizens' decision to participate in such NGOs, on the one hand, and the extent of domestic and global opportunities as well as, the level of education and development of their country, on the other.²⁴

In respect of the second category of the relevant literature, Sydney Tarrow made a systematic attempt to identify common features and characteristics among transnational activists. The latter are viewed as encompassing

'individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favor of goals they hold in common with transnational allies'.²⁵

According to Tarrow, these activists usually have three common features: i) they emerge from domestic political or social activities (they don't usually begin at the international level), ii) they are better educated and connected and more frequent travelers than most of their compatriots, and iii) they soon return to their domestic activities. Their main difference from national activists is their ability to move between domestic and international levels and take advantage of opportunities for the advancement of their causes.²⁶ Their constant connection to the domestic level leads Tarrow to the adoption of Mitchell Cohen's term of 'rooted cosmopolitans'.²⁷ Moreover, Tarrow made a preliminary attempt to classify transnational activists in relation either to their role (e.g. norms entrepreneurs, on behalf of NGOs, or of social categories), or their disposition towards international institutions (i.e., insiders vs. outsiders).²⁸

²³ Philip G. Cerny, "Political Agency in a Globalizing World: Towards a Structural Approach", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2000), pp. 435-463.

²⁴ Kiyoteru Tsutsui and Christine Min Wotipka, "Global Civil Society and the International Human Rights Movement: Citizen Participation in Human Rights International Nongovernmental Organizations", *Social Forces*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (2004), pp. 587-620.

²⁵ Sidney Tarrow, "Rooted Cosmopolitans and Transnational Activists", *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, No. 2 (2005), [http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/Govt/faculty/Tarrow docs/rooted cosmopolitans.pdf](http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/Govt/faculty/Tarrow/docs/rooted%20cosmopolitans.pdf).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mitchell Cohen, "Rooted Cosmopolitanism," *Dissent*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1992), pp. 478-483.

²⁸ Sidney Tarrow, "Rooted Cosmopolitans and Transnational Activists", pp. 12-13.

David Chandler offered a different view of two seemingly divergent sets of actors i.e., radical anti-globalization activists and radical Muslim activists. The author suggested that these categories of activists have the following three common traits: i) the non-instrumentality of their actions, ii) the low emphasis on arguments and ideas, and iii) the highlighting of differences and divergences of identities.²⁹ According to Chandler, this type of radical activists represents expression of a ‘post-territorial’ form of political community. Protest takes the form of individuated acts of symbolism that allegedly aim at raising awareness. Nonetheless, Chandler suggested that the actions of these activists have rather as objective to elaborate upon their individual identity and ‘make us aware of their “awareness” rather than engage us in an instrumental project of changing or engaging with the outside world’.³⁰

Above all, Paola Grenier has probably made the most thorough attempt to study the role of individuals in the international scene.³¹ She employed the term ‘pioneer’ that was put forward by Lord Beveridge in 1948 to describe those people who crafted the UK voluntary sector in the 19th century. Beveridge had identified three factors that seem to enable the emergence and success of pioneers. These were: i) middle class origin, ii) strong motivation, and iii) access to material resources.³² In this respect, Grenier took into account Beveridge’s earlier work in order to study the profile of 27 leading global civil society figures. Grenier’s research led to the formulation of three propositions. The first was an endorsement of Tarrow’s concept of ‘rooted cosmopolitans’ denoting the pioneers’ ability to connect local and global opportunity structures. Grenier attributed this ability to the international exposure and experience that many pioneers witnessed during childhood and upbringing. The second proposition is that the pioneers get involved as a result of their perception of the existence of ‘systemic paradoxes’ and ‘disharmonies or anomalies between different institutions and practices’. It is their feeling of injustice that makes them take action. Finally, the third proposition is a confirmation of Beveridge’s argument that there are certain enabling conditions facilitating the emergence of a pioneer. More precisely, Grenier used the term ‘transformational capacities’ to describe a pioneer’s leadership capacities, education level, access to financial resources and personal motivation.³³

Having briefly presented the theoretical discussion and the gaps in the literature concerning the role of individuals in international politics, the next sections examine a specific category of social agents: celebrity activists. First, we identify the causes and the characteristics of celebrity activism. Then, we examine its impact on raising public awareness, political lobbying and fundraising.

3. Celebrity activism

²⁹ David Chandler, “The Possibilities of Post-Territorial Political Community”, *Area*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2007), p. 116.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

³¹ Paola Grenier, “The New Pioneers: The People Behind Global Civil Society” in, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius and Mary Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2004/5*, London: Sage, 2004, pp. 122-157.

³² Cited in Paola Griener, pp. 122-125.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-150.

Celebrity involvement in politics is not a new phenomenon. Bob Dylan, Neil Young and John Lennon made, with their songs, pop protest fashionable in the 1960s. George Harrison and Ravi Shankar organized a concert for Bangladesh in 1971 and Bob Geldof raised tens of millions of dollars for Ethiopian famine victims with the 1984 Band Aid. Also Jane Fonda was probably as much known as an activist as well as a movie star. And actors like Ronald Reagan followed the route to political office. But the current scale of celebrity involvement in international politics, with particular emphasis on the less developed world, has no historical precedent. The links between Hollywood and international philanthropy are stronger than ever. Movie stars represent UN agencies in disaster areas and lobby the Capitol Hill for peacekeeping missions. And it is now a must for British singers to show an interest for an African country or campaign on a development issue. Today celebrities generate hundreds of millions of dollars in donations and engage the media in global issues more than any time in recorded history. In 2006 *Time* magazine put Bono on its cover, declaring him – along with billionaire Bill Gates – “person of the year” for having “persuaded the world’s leaders to take on global poverty”. What is happening? What really drives celebrity activism for global issues?

Indeed the basic answer is globalization. With the growth of interdependence among nations and increasingly porous borders, a new concern for distant and different others became more and more apparent.³⁴ Technological advances played a crucial role. The development of transnational television networks and the capacity for “real time” coverage of international crises unleashed an “electronic internationalism”.³⁵ Barriers of citizenship, religion, race and geography that once divided moral space broke down, creating an emergent “global conscience”.³⁶ The rapid expansion of the Web provided not only an important means for information but also a critical networking and organizing tool. Several people with a sense of mission found ways to co-operate and coordinate their actions. In that sense the rise of celebrity diplomacy is clearly linked to the increase of Non Governmental Organizations, the growth of corporate social responsibility and the reappearance of large-scale private philanthropy. The number of transnational NGOs increased spectacularly in the 1990s and within the last fifteen years, several billionaires like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and George Soros devoted impressively large sums to philanthropic causes. Why celebrities, with their extremely comfortable and highly internationalized lives, should be an exception?

However there are specific factors that explain celebrity activism in international relations. First, it is the United Nations. Especially since 1997, the organization has made an extensive effort to use movie stars, singers and athletes. Thus it has played a very important role in mobilizing celebrities for global causes. The concept of “goodwill ambassadors” was first introduced by UNICEF several decades ago. According to the UN agency:

³⁴ R. D. Sack, *Homo geographicus: A framework for action, awareness and moral concern*, Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 257.

³⁵ M. Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s honor: Ethic war and the modern conscience*, New York: Henry Holt, 1997, p. 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

“Fame has some clear benefits in certain roles (...). Celebrities attract attention, so they are in a position to focus the world’s eyes on the needs of children, both in their own countries and by visiting field projects and emergency programmes abroad. They can make direct representations to those with the power to effect change. They can use their talents and fame to fundraise and advocate for children and support UNICEF’s mission to ensure every child’s right to health, education, equality and protection”.³⁷

Danny Kaye, the comic movie star, was the first in a long list of UNICEF ambassadors. Indeed the idea has not always worked on smoothly. Sofia Loren was heavily criticized for “turning up for her UNICEF appointment ceremony in a brown Rolls Royce that matched her fur coat”.³⁸ And more recently, when Harry Belafonte declared President George W. Bush “the greatest terrorist in the world”, many UN officials felt extremely uneasy. Nevertheless, the number of UNICEF’s Ambassadors continued to rise unabatedly as the successful appointments clearly dominated the scene. In the late 1980s early 1990s, Audrey Hepburn - with her strong commitment to children issues - created a role model for star involvement in global causes and the idea of “Goodwill Ambassadors” was copied by several other specialized UN agencies.

The man who gave particular boost to the UN courtship of celebrity was Kofi Annan. The African who became Secretary-General in 1997 had the propensity to view all the criticism directed against the UN as a public relations problem and decided to extensively use writers, actors, singers and sportsmen in order to persuade reluctant governments to honor their rhetorical pledges made in UN fora and to inspire the otherwise passive international public opinion to support UN causes.³⁹ His vision led to a spectacular growth of goodwill ambassadors. By 2008, UNICEF had 28 international, 9 regional and more than 150 national ambassadors, UNESCO had 40, FAO 25, UNAIDS 16, UNFPA 14, WFP 10, UNDP 6, UNHCR 7 (among them Angelina Jolie and Giorgio Armani), UNIFEM 3 (including Nicole Kidman), UNODC 3, WHO 3 and UNIDO 3. In addition to these the UN created in 1997 an elite group of celebrities called “Messengers” of Peace in order to “help focus global attention on the noble aims of the UN”. By 2008 there were 9 Messengers of Peace, including George Clooney and Michael Douglas. The use of celebrities by the UN has proved particularly effective both in raising public awareness and in fundraising for the organization’s agencies.

A second factor that explains celebrity activism is that, like the UN, Non-Governmental Organizations understood that global celebrities can direct media attention on certain issues, raise public awareness and provide access on the highest levels of government. In the words of the Phil Bloomer, head of advocacy for the NGO Oxfam UK: Celebrities “can reach into people’s lives and speak to them in ways that Oxfam spokesmen cannot (...) They can [also] reach out to people who might not normally listen to what Oxfam has to

³⁷ http://www.unicef.org/people/people_ambassadors.html.

³⁸ Andrew F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008, p. 21.

³⁹ Mark D. Alleyne, “The United Nations’ Celebrity Diplomacy”, *SAIS Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (2008), pp. 175-185 (esp. pp. 177-8).

say”.⁴⁰ Several NGOs agree. Celebrities “are master recruiters”, adds John Predengrast of the NGO Enough.⁴¹ And celebrities can have access to decision-makers. “It’s going to be hard for a foreign government to say no to Nicole Kidman” argues Donald Steinberg of the NGO International Crisis Group.⁴² According to the American Institute of Philanthropy, many NGOs have now celebrity promoters.⁴³ The American Red Cross has a 50-member Celebrity Cabinet that includes Jamie Lee Curtis and Jackie Chan. Save the Children works with more than dozen celebrities, including singer David Bowie, Melanie Griffith and Antonio Banderas. And Oxfam America, copying UN agencies, has 13 “ambassadors” including archbishop Desmond Tutu, the rock band Coldplay and actors Kristin Davis, Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson.

A third, far more specific, but particularly important factor that explains celebrity activism, is that movie stars enjoy far more freedom to act than some decades ago. In the words of an analyst the “entertainment industry is not as authoritarian as it once was”.⁴⁴ Celebrities have more freedom to move around and more space to manage their own brand. Within the last decades, the power in Hollywood has shifted from moguls to actors. Even the most well-known directors can have difficulty in getting a film off the ground unless a big-name actor or actress is part of the package. Now many actors are able to command multi-million dollar fees for their appearances (the fees of Tom Cruise exceed 1/3 of a film’s budget). Indeed corporate moguls - like Summer Redstone of Paramount Pictures or Rupert Murdoch who controls 20th Century Fox – continue to enjoy a lot of power. But to a large extent celebrities have much autonomy and more power than ever before. Quite a few of them have become moguls themselves. Nichol Kidman commands more than \$15 millions a picture. And George Clooney and Brad Pitt, apart of actors, have also become directors as well as producers.⁴⁵

A fourth, and probably the most important factor is that celebrities embrace global causes or take political initiatives in order to remain celebrities. We live in the world where fame cannot be retained without continuous publicity. Celebrities need to differentiate themselves from the lesser stars of stage and screen. And there is no doubt that the image of a star in a war-torn African country, surrounded by undernourished black children that make a nice contrast for photographers, attracts immediate attention and helps to distinguish the real celebrities from the tawdrier brethren. It is certain that interest in Africa or in global poverty offers celebrities excellent branding opportunities. Moreover the positions of goodwill ambassadors provide international clout and offer to their holders “clear advantages of both credibility and ability to expand personal networks”.⁴⁶ Also celebrity activism can reflect other self-interests like the effort to change a tarnished image or to

⁴⁰ Peter Ford and Gloria Goodale, “Why stars and charities need each other”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 January 2005.

⁴¹ Quoted in James Traub, “The Celebrity Solution”, *The New York Times*, 9 March 2008

⁴² Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴³ http://www.charitywatch.org/hottopics/africa_crises.html.

⁴⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, “Foreign Policy Goes Glam”, *The National Interest*, No. 92 (November/December 2007), p. 23.

⁴⁵ Louis Hau and Peter How, “The Star Economy: The Top-Earning Actors Over 35”, *Forbes*, 14 November 2007.

⁴⁶ Andrew F. Cooper, “Beyond Hollywood and the Boardroom”, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2007), p. 127.

distract public attention from past scandals. Whatever the reasons, celebrities clearly have personal interests that drive their involvement in global causes. When they visit poor countries or donate money to charities they usually do it with the maximum of publicity. When, in January 2005, Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher decided to contribute \$10 millions to tsunami relief, he did not act discreetly: his manager announced the gift live, in a phone call to a nationally broadcast telethon in German TV.⁴⁷ That's not an exception. Celebrity activism is done rather professionally: many stars employ "philanthropic advisors" that prepare notes, organize meetings and develop priorities. There is no doubt that some celebrities are at least as much motivated by self-promotion as well as by philanthropy. But the commitment and quality of celebrity engagement varies widely. And there is a lot of evidence that many of their actions reflect genuine interest. As Bill Clinton, who like Jimmy Carter became a celebrity-activist himself after leaving the Presidency, said in a recent interview:

"It's easy ... to say 'Oh, this is not serious, [artists, including movie stars] are just trying to get press'. My experience has been this is not true".⁴⁸

Some celebrities seem extremely sincere. However, it is in general extremely difficult to find out what people's motivations really are. Angelina Jolie has an interest in the suffering of refugees that seems really genuine. She has not only visited refugee camps around the world but she has also donated more than \$6 millions to help them. The actress has said that she gets paid a "ridiculous amount of money" and that she has decided to donate one third of it to charity.⁴⁹ Others however dispute her good intentions. According to a suspicious commentator "when Angelina Jolie attends the Davos Economic Forum or sponsors a Millennium Village in Cambodia, she's trying to create a brand image that lets American forget about her role in breaking up Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston".⁵⁰

Finally, there is a fifth factor that explains celebrity activism: diffusion. Celebrities mobilize celebrities. A clear case is Bono who "built the superhighway between Africa and Hollywood".⁵¹ In 2004 who was invited in Brad Pitt's home to address a group of celebrities that included Tom Hanks, Sean Penn, Julia Roberts, Justin Timberlake and the architect Frank Gehry. Pitt joined and Bono played a crucial role in mobilizing many celebrities on the One Campaign⁵² to push for "an additional 1% of the U.S. budget toward providing basic needs like health, education, clean water and food" in Africa. Bono has also recruited George Clooney. He and some other celebrities (like Hepburn) have also acted as examples that impressed others who attempted to mimic their commitment. In other cases celebrities have pressurized other celebrities to become more active.⁵³

⁴⁷ Peter Ford and Gloria Goodale, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Danna Harman, "Star Power Brings Attention to Africa", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 August 2007.

⁴⁹ Danna Harman, "Can Celebrities Really Get Results ?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 August 2007.

⁵⁰ Daniel W. Drezner, *op. cit.*, p. 24

⁵¹ Quoted in James Traub, *op. cit.*

⁵² [Http://www.one.org/](http://www.one.org/).

⁵³ A good example is provided in the case study that follows. It concerns Farrow's assailing of Steven Spielberg for working as an artistic consultant to the Beijing Olympics

In short, the current celebrity activism is different from the past in terms of scale for a variety of pull (like UN) and push (like publicity) factors. But it is also different from the past in terms of content. In the 1960s most politicized celebrities “understood themselves to be engaged in a rather subversive, radical, anti-establishment kind of politics”.⁵⁴ By sharp contrast, in the 1990s, celebrity activism is less radical. Indeed there are still highly politicized celebrities. George Clooney, for example, has been characterized as “the commander in chief of Hollywood’s anti-Bush forces”.⁵⁵ And Sean Penn was very much engaged in the campaign against the US invasion of Iraq. However most celebrity activists today tend to avoid the most controversial domestic or international political issues. There is an obvious reason for that: political controversies endanger their careers. When Michael Jordan was once asked to endorse a Democratic Party candidate for the Senate he refused by saying: “Republicans buy sneakers too”.⁵⁶ The fight against global malnutrition and AIDS or the call for the deployment of a peace-enforcing mission in Darfur are indeed political but, in a sense, rather “softer” issues for western governments’ foreign policies. Celebrity campaigners’ real message to governments is more a call for “more attention” to Africa than a demand for radically changed policies. Bono asks for more aid and more debt relief. He does not question the structures of the global economic system. Celebrities tend to endorse legitimate causes. This in turn has enabled politicians to sign up to celebrity causes and pop singers and actors are courted at the highest level of national government. In 2002 the White House insisted that, during the announcement of the Millennium Challenge Account, Bono should stand next to President Bush. During the 2007 G8 Summit in Heiligendamm the U2 singer secured separate meetings not only with the US President but with the German Chancellor and the French President as well. When Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister of Canada, said he was too busy to meet him, Bono argued that it was Harper who had “blocked progress” on aid to Africa. The Canadian prime minister changed course and promised to find time for a meeting with the Irish singer.⁵⁷ Politicians have found out that they cannot – even if they chose – to ignore celebrities. In short, what is new in the content of celebrity activism is that their discourse is not extremely anti-establishment. This has led politicians – that feel the erosion of their legitimacy as less and less people turn to vote – to find in celebrities “a perfect way to connect with the population at large and to give the sense that politics can make a difference”.⁵⁸

How effective is celebrity activism in fighting global poverty? The answer can be discussed at three levels: public awareness, fundraising and political lobbying.

Celebrities are particularly effective in raising public opinion interest. This is to a large extent the result of the emergence of soft news. Many Americans do not get their information on world politics from the *New York*

opening ceremony. See James Christie, “Athletes join celebrities, activists to protest against China’s record in Sudan”, *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 2008.

⁵⁴ James Panton, “Pop Goes Politics”, *The World Today*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (June 2007), p.

5.

⁵⁵ Mark Lawson, “Unfair and Unbalanced”, *The Guardian*, 10 February 2006.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Daniel W. Drezner, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Gideon Rachman, “The aid crusade and Bono’s brigade”, *Financial Times*, 29 October 2007.

⁵⁸ J. Panton, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Times or the NBC but from “soft-news” outlets ranging from talk-shows like the Oprah Winfrey Show or Dave Letterman’s Late Show to imitation news programs including Inside Edition and Entertainment Tonight. All these are programs where traditionally the entertainment industry enjoys constant coverage and where Hollywood celebrities usually appear.⁵⁹ These tabloid-like programs focus on breathtaking episodes of human drama. However, in recent years they increasingly cover international events. This coverage is often the only information on global issues that their viewers receive. The result is that “celebrities have a comparative advantage over policy wonks in raising public interest for global issues.⁶⁰ In the words of a commentator: “The baby born in Namibia to Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt probably put that south African desert nation on the map for many of her parents’ fans”.⁶¹ But does this raise public awareness? An analyst argues that people who watch soft news become more “attentive”, but they do not necessarily acquire more in-depth knowledge of global issues. “It is unclear whether more information necessarily makes better citizens, particularly if the quality of that information is suspect” he writes.⁶²

But, irrespective of the power of soft news, Hollywood movies attract a lot of attention from traditional media outlets and, if they are political, they do – they always did - influence public discussion on certain issues. The last years several successful movies have focused on Africa. Among them many blockbusters like “Tears of the Sun”, “The Constant Gardener”, “The Interpreter” and “The Last King of Scotland”. Some of these movies were heavily criticized for the way they portrayed Africa and the “Let the Bwana do it mentality” that dominated their scenarios. A commentator has argued that in each of them “beleaguered black folks marooned in forlorn, blood-drenched African nations get to see justice done because of the heroic efforts of some truly fabulous white people, a glorious tradition that stretches back at least as far as the Tarzan movies”.⁶³ However, all these films helped to raise Africa’s coverage in the major TV networks and other media outlets and helped raising awareness for the plights of poor nations. According to a recent study, in the week that the Hollywood film ‘Blood Diamond’ was released in theatres, the major news networks ABC, CBS and NBC mentioned the role of conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone’s civil war 11 times. In contrast, during the more than a decade-long war (from 1991 to 2003) the issue of diamonds that played a major role in fuelling the war was mentioned an average of twice a year.⁶⁴ Moreover, because all these movies were filmed on location, they changed the ways celebrities tend to see the world and created charitable impulses in both the cast and crew. For example, actors and other staff that filmed “The Constant Gardener” set up a charity to try to improve conditions in Kenyan slums.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Matthew A. Baum, *Soft News Go to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

⁶⁰ Daniel W. Drezner, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶¹ “Africa hot destination for committed celebrities”, *The Associated Press*, 19 June 2006.

⁶² Matthew A. Baum, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

⁶³ Joe Queenan, “Tarzan’s children: Why movies about Africa require white saviors”, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 January 2007.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Danna Harman, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ “Africa hot destination ...”, *op. cit.*

In terms of fundraising celebrities have given to charity significant sums of money but have also been successful in mobilizing resources from private companies and the general public. Billionaire entertainer Winfrey Oprah tops the celebrity generosity league. In 2005, she donated \$52 millions and in 2006 another \$11 millions to various charitable causes (including her own foundation).⁶⁶ Angelina Jolie's contribution to UNHCR totalled more than \$3 millions, while Sandra Bullock donated, in 2005, \$1 million to the American Red Cross.⁶⁷ Several others have donated to charities several millions of dollars: Steven Spielberg, Arnold Shwarzenegger and Paul McCartney appear in the top 10. Moreover celebrities can be particularly effective in raising of money from private companies and the general public. When George Clooney, after a visit in Africa, appeared on Winfrey's show in April 2006, contributions to UNICEF rose by 20 per cent.⁶⁸ And when Angelina Jolie gave an interview in CNN, donations to UNHCR spiked by more than half a million dollars.⁶⁹ Name brings interest and support. Almost nine years after Princess Diana's death, the charitable fund set up in her name is still collecting money (it has raised almost \$200 millions) that is being spent in asylum seekers and other causes.⁷⁰

Finally in political lobbying, and in contrast to public awareness and fundraising, the results of celebrity activism are not very impressive. Indeed celebrities have helped to put certain issues on the table. As Jeffrey Sachs, the "Mother Teresa of the economics profession", has argued: "thanks partly to the work of celebrities the poverty issue is higher up the global agenda than ever before".⁷¹ But this does not necessarily mean action. Star activism has not been particularly successful in persuading rich states to do more for the poor countries of the world. Of course there are exceptions. The Jubilee 2000 campaign for the reduction of Third World debt – which was a combination of celebrity and NGO activism – could be considered as a success. In addition, the Live 8 concerts that Bob Geldof organized to coincide with the 2005 Gleneagles G-8 Summit led to a pledge by G8 governments to double foreign aid. At that time the pledge was greeted as a "great success" but unfortunately in the subsequent years it failed to materialize.

If we consider celebrity effectiveness within the last decade there is clearly an improvement. Celebrities have *learned* how to act. They learned that they should be advised by professionals who *know* how to raise issues and mobilize supporters. Moreover, they have learned from their mistakes, avoiding simultaneous campaigns and sending strong signals on single issues. Take for example Bono. In the 1980s he campaigned for a number of international causes – opposition to apartheid, AIDS, the environment, global poverty etc - with no particular success. In the 1990s he progressively focused on third world poverty and both publicity and influence spectacularly

⁶⁶ Mmoma Ejiofor, "Generous Celebs", *Forbes*, 5 May 2006; See also *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* at <http://philanthropy.com/>.

⁶⁷ M. Ejiofor, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Nora Boustany, "Hollywood Stars Find an Audience for Social Causes", *The Washington Post*, 10 June 2007, p. A01.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Catherine Bennett, "Why have the 7/7 victims received such pitiful compensation?", *The Guardian*, 6 July 2006.

⁷¹ Interview with Jonathan Watts, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2006.

increased.⁷² Also celebrities learned to avoid highly contested political issues. Global poverty is much less contested than the opposition to the US military campaigns. Sean Penn's prewar tour of Iraq with its "credulous, childish appearances with members of the peace-loving Baath Party"⁷³ became a negative example. And also Madonna's adoption of a Malawian baby with procedures of dubious legality was a lesson learned for other celebrities. Some commentators sarcastically joked that Madonna, who was never particularly known for acts of philanthropy, could use part of its \$850 millions fortune to adopt the entire country.⁷⁴

Some celebrities are in Tarrow's terminology 'insiders' in the sense that they have an official capacity (i.e. UN goodwill ambassadors). Others (like Bono) can be categorized as 'outsiders', or free-floaters. Quite a few have an official capacity but also have developed their own agendas. Both pull and push factors explain their activism. Indeed celebrities' lives are unpredictable and their long term commitment to global causes should not be taken for granted. But how we can consider their activities? Through a positive or a negative prism?

For their supporters, by raising money and public awareness and by pressurizing politicians, the stars are making the world a better place. There is undoubtedly a lot of truth in it. What really matters is not their motives but the results of their actions. Others however think otherwise. In Europe many commentators not only consider celebrity interest in global issues such as poverty and Africa non-genuine but criticize celebrities for doing damage to Africa. Bono and the Live 8 campaign have even been assailed for "perpetuating the undignified stereotype of Africans as poor, helpless and hapless".⁷⁵ There is a lot of wariness in European comments on celebrity activism. Some analysts have expressed doubts about the moral value of celebrity actions. An op-ed in the Financial Times argued that "the awkward lifestyle gap that yawns between [celebrity] rescuers and the rescued undercuts the moral seriousness of the enterprise and occasionally gives it an exploitative feel".⁷⁶ Several left-wing analysts argue – relatively persuasively – that celebrities are basically conservative: by bringing important issues in the mainstream, they tend to de-route and eventually suffocate more radical forms of protest and political mobilization and in reality they legitimize the status quo. Celebrities, according to these critics, have marginalized alternative sites like the World Social Forum and have, through their activism, "even enhanced the status of stars from the North over the fortunes of those potential celebrity entertainers from the global South".⁷⁷ American commentators are undoubtedly far more positive. But US public opinion in both parts of the Atlantic does not seem to particularly enjoy celebrity engagement in the global agenda. Polls in the United States show an increase in public hostility towards celebrity activism.⁷⁸ It seems that a sizeable part of

⁷² Rob Long, "Using Your Star Power", *Foreign Policy*, No. 154 (May/June 2006), pp. 74-78.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ David Patten, "Charity with strings attached", *The Guardian*, 5 October 2006.

⁷⁵ Nathalie Rothschild, "The right to aspire", *The Guardian*, 26 March 2007.

⁷⁶ Michael Fullilove, "Celebrities should stick to their day jobs", *Financial Times*, 1 February 2006.

⁷⁷ Andrew Cooper, "Beyond Hollywood ...", *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁷⁸ D. Drezner, p. 28.

both the American and European publics resent the use of star power for political purposes.

Celebrities are often accused of naivety, that they tend to describe things in simplistic terms of good versus evil, of white versus black. That's to a certain extent absolutely true. Celebrities are prone to easy generalizations and often employ a highly emotional language. For example, in May 2003, during a visit to Ethiopia, Bob Geldof, astonished the aid community by praising the Bush administration for helping Africa: "You'll think I'm off my trolley when I say this, but the Bush administration is the most radical - in a positive sense - in its approach to Africa since Kennedy," he said.⁷⁹ Several NGOs accused the Irish singer for reaching simplistic conclusions, ignoring the continuation of American farm subsidies and forgetting Washington's emphasis on sexual abstinence as a basic tool to stop AIDS. However, not all celebrities tend to reach easy conclusions. The economist Jeffrey Sachs, who has worked with Bono for six years, has said that Irish singer "knows far more about the subject under discussion than the politicians do".⁸⁰ But Bono is more an exception than the rule. According to Steinberg of the NGO International Crisis Group: "There is a tendency for celebrities to treat Africa as a victim on a Jerry Lewis telethon".⁸¹

It could not be otherwise. This is by definition the nature of celebrity activity: spectacle. As Andrew Cooper argues, "the mode of operation is decidedly populist in style".⁸² But still populism can sometimes be useful. Especially if it talks about poverty and a continent that usually politicians ignore. The next section of this paper focuses on a particular celebrity (Mia Farrow) and its activism in respect of a particular issue, i.e., China's policy toward Sudan.

4. Mia Farrow and the "Genocide Olympics" campaign

Mia Farrow was until relatively recently better known for her relationship with Woody Allen and her movies. Her breakthrough performance was in Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) but she also starred in other well-known films such as *Hannah and her Sisters*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Husbands and Wives*. Arguing that she needed more time to devote to raising her 14 children (10 of them adopted) Farrow worked less frequently in the 1990s. And within the last five-six years she was transformed to a transnational activist, an impassionate political campaigner – focussing especially on the Sudan. She has travelled to African refugee camps, has written op-eds in major newspapers on the Darfur crisis, has appeared on TV shows talking on war crimes and has even testified before the Congress. In 2008, Mia Farrow has been proclaimed by the *Time Magazine* as one of the world's 100 most influential people, figuring in the category 'heroes and pioneers'.⁸³

⁷⁹ Rory Carroll, "Geldof back in Ethiopia", *The Guardian*, 28 May 2003.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Curiel, "Star power: When celebrities support causes, who really winds up benefiting?", *Chronicle*, 5 June 2005.

⁸¹ Quoted in James Traub, *op. cit.*

⁸² Andrew Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy, op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁸³ Paul Rusesabagina, "Mia Farrow" in, *The 2008 TIME 100*, TIME Magazine,

In a sense Farrow's story is similar to those of other Hollywood celebrities courted by the United Nations. In 2000, she became a UNICEF goodwill ambassador. Indeed this did not come as a surprise. After all, in the words of the Sunday Times, "Farrow adopted ten children from deprived parts of the world before Angelina Jolie made it fashionable".⁸⁴ Farrow – now at 63 – seems different from other celebrities. Although she was a privileged child – her father was the director and writer John Farrow and her mother the actress Maureen O' Sullivan – she contracted polio at the age of nine, an experience that made her, in her own words, "feel like a pariah and left [her] with the desire to relieve suffering". "Today", she added, "I still feel I'm in a lifeboat pulling in all these people in the world in pain and distress".⁸⁵ It is thus no coincidence that as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador she worked extensively to draw attention to the eradication of polio. Moreover, Farrow does not seem to have the same motives as other mid-career celebrities looking for publicity – though she continues to act and has recently starred in a re-make of the film *The Omen* (2006). But, in contrast to other celebrities, Farrow looks far more sincere: her activism does not seem to be a part of a career strategy.

By 2004 the crisis in Darfur of western Sudan attracted her attention. According to a recent interview, she was moved by two articles on the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide written by the Pulitzer prize winning journalist Samantha Power.⁸⁶ Farrow decided to travel to Darfur to see by herself. There she met a woman whose baby had been torn from her back and killed by the Sudanese militia, the Janjaweed. Farrow said that this woman told her: "Tell people what is happening here in Darfur or we will all be slaughtered by our own government".⁸⁷ Returning back to the States, Farrow launched a website (www.miafarrow.org) devoted on the Sudanese crisis. Although her first trip to Darfur was made with her official capacity (UNICEF) she returned to the region seven times as an individual. Each of these trips made her more and more passionate. She gave a number of interviews and appeared on several TV shows talking about the atrocities. Her photos of Darfur appeared in *People* magazine in July 2006. But above all she chose to campaign through major newspapers, writing (often with her 19-year old son Ronan or the Nobel Peace Prize winning activist Jody Williams) in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *LA Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and other dailies. She started to focus on the Chinese government for its close relationship with Sudan. The most influential of her op-eds was a March 2007 piece in *The Wall Street Journal* where Farrow and her son used the term "genocide Olympics" to characterize the 2008 Olympic games.⁸⁸ "Beijing", argued the Farrows, "is uniquely positioned to put a stop to the slaughter, yet they have so far been unabashed in their refusal to do so". In particular they cautioned director Steven Spielberg – the artistic director of the 2008 Olympics – that he could go down in history as the Leni Riefenstahl

http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1733748_1733756_1735264,00.html

⁸⁴ Ann McFerran, "Mother Waif calls to the forsaken", *The Sunday Times*, 9 December 2007.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ "Powerful Acts: An interview with Mia Farrow", *Guernica Magazine*, July 2007, http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/367/powerful_acts/.

⁸⁷ Ann McFerran, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ "The Genocide Olympics", *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 March 2007.

of the Beijing Games, a reference to a German director who made Nazi propaganda films. Four days later, Spielberg sent a letter to the Chinese President Hu Jindao, asking Beijing to use its influence in Sudan to “bring an end to the human suffering there”. And after a few weeks, the well-known director announced that he would no longer act as an artistic advisor for the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies.⁸⁹ It was a classical case of a celebrity mobilizing another celebrity.

Mia Farrow created her own “Dream for Darfur” initiative (based on the Olympics motto “One World, One Dream”), demonstrating in front of the Chinese embassy in Washington DC, organizing symbolic torch relays in countries that have suffered from genocides (Rwanda, Bosnia, Armenia, Cambodia) and insisting that Olympic sponsors lean on China to pressure Sudan to let the UN peacekeepers. In August 2007 she offered to trade her freedom for that of Suleiman Jamous, a Sudanese elder. She wrote a letter to the Sudanese president arguing that her freedom was worth sacrificing because Jamous “will apply his energies toward creating the just and lasting peace that the Sudanese people deserve and hope for”.⁹⁰ The Sudanese government did not accept Farrow’s offer but freed Jamous. In general, Farrow’s “genocide Olympics” campaign seems sophisticated and calculated, belying “the image of celebrities as enthusiastic amateurs”.⁹¹ In order to build networks and aiming to mobilize than antagonize athletes, Farrow did not call for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics. She asked only for a boycott of the Games’ opening ceremonies.⁹²

However, press reports on Farrow’s role in the Darfur campaign tend to overestimate her importance and also tend to overestimate its impact on China’s policy toward Sudan. The next paragraphs examine these two “power illusions”, in turn. First, Mia Farrow was neither the first celebrity that focused on the Darfur crisis, nor the first activist that blamed China for its policy vis-à-vis Sudan. In fact Farrow was and is part of a large coalition of US NGOs, ethnic lobbies, religious groups and celebrities that focused on the plight of the western region of Sudan. The Darfur conflict started in 2003 and quickly escalated leading to 200,000 deaths and 2.5 million displaced. In April 2004, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum issued for Darfur its first-ever “genocide alert” At about the same time the American Jewish World Service and a hundred evangelical and human rights groups joined forces to form the Save Darfur Coalition. The Coalition’s membership quickly grew to more than 180 groups and was strengthened by the active involvement of celebrities like George Clooney and Don Cheadle.⁹³ It campaigned constantly aiming to raise public awareness and affecting the policies of the US administration. In August 2004, thirty-five evangelical leaders signed a letter urging President Bush to provide massive humanitarian aid and consider

⁸⁹ Dave Skretta, “Farrow, Spielberg Assail China on Darfur”, *The Associated Press*, 12 February 2008.

⁹⁰ Mike Nizza, “Mia Farrow’s Darfur Gambit”, *New York Times*, 8 August 2007.

⁹¹ Andrew F. Cooper and Andrew Schrumm, “How Mia Farrow Got UN Troops in Darfur”, *Embassy*, 25 April 2007.

⁹² Mark Starr, “Darfur is Low-Hanging Fruit for Beijing”, *Newsweek*, 17 April 2008.

⁹³ J. Stephen Morrison, “Will Darfur Steal the Olympic Spotlight?”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2008), p. 184.

sending US troops to Sudan to stop the “genocide.”⁹⁴ In April 2006, five members of Congress were arrested after protesting outside the Sudanese embassy in Washington over atrocities in Darfur. The same day the President met with Darfur advocates in the White House and lent his support to rallies planned in more than a dozen cities around the United States: “The genocide in Sudan is unacceptable,” he told them.⁹⁵

By 2006 and after an internal debate, the US Darfur activists turned their sights on China. From many respects, it was the obvious target. Apart from having an effectively monopoly over Sudanese oil production,⁹⁶ China was the main arms supplier of the Sudanese government and its policy to block the imposition of sanctions by the UN Security Council had undermined the efforts of other Security Council members to end the crisis. Above all, China was the host of the 2008 Summer Olympics and was considered sensitive to external pressure. The campaign against China gained momentum at the same time that the crisis in Darfur gradually de-escalated. The 2006 speedskating gold medalist Joey Cheek founded Team Darfur, a group of almost 250 athletes from 42 countries.⁹⁷ And in 2008 eight Nobel Peace Prize laureates wrote an open letter to Hu Jindao, urging Beijing to exert its political and economic leverage on Sudan’s government to help end the crisis in Darfur.⁹⁸

So Farrow was far from alone. Even in her own “Dream for Darfur” campaign she worked together with well-known human-rights activists like Jill Savitt, the Smith College professor and Sudan expert Eric Reeves, the basketball player Ira Newble and Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service.⁹⁹ In fact the campaign was characterized by a chain effect that makes it difficult to distinguish who has mobilized whom. For many years, Eric Reeves has been writing articles and giving speeches on Darfur and China’s role there and is considered as the person who coined the term “genocide Olympics”. The Cleveland Cavaliers forward Ira Newble reportedly read a profile of Reeves in a newspaper and not only joined the campaign but helped mobilize various basketball players across the league to create a “Dream Team of Conscience”.¹⁰⁰

Secondly, it is quite common to read stories of how successful the “Genocide Olympics” campaign was in changing Chinese behavior to pressurize Sudan to accept UN peacekeepers. In a recent interview, Anthony Lake, former national security adviser to President Clinton, argued that “the pressure brought on [the Chinese] by people like Mia Farrow and Steven Spielberg over the Olympics apparently led to their doing more (...) over Darfur”.¹⁰¹ Two analysts went even further, writing “how Mia Farrow Got UN

⁹⁴ Asteris Huliaras, “Evangelists, Oil Companies and Terrorists: The Bush Administration’s Policy Toward Sudan”, *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), p. 716.

⁹⁵ Andrew Miga, “5 Lawmakers Arrested At Darfur Protest”, *Washington Post*, 28 April 2006.

⁹⁶ “The Oil Factor”, *The Economist*, 23 June 2007.

⁹⁷ Victor D. Cha, “Beijing’s Olympic-Sized Catch -22”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2008), p. 110.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁹⁹ Nora Boustany, “Symbolic Torch Relay Aims to Shine Light on China, Darfur and Death”, *The Washington Post*, 15 August 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Danna Harman, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ “Brangelina vs. Chinese Mercantilism in Africa”, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2007), p. 17.

troops in Darfur”.¹⁰² And a journalist in the New York Times concluded that the “credit” for the “surprising success” goes to Hollywood - with Mia Farrow playing a “crucial role”.¹⁰³ But was this true?

It is important to look at the hard facts. At the first glance it seems that the campaign played a role in shifting China’s policy toward Sudan. In April 2007, weeks after Farrow’s article on the Genocide Olympics the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun visited refugee camps in Darfur. In an interview, Zhai called Sudan to “show flexibility and accept” the UN peacekeepers.¹⁰⁴ And in June 2007, Khartoum finally agreed to accept a joint 20,000-strong UN-AU force - though it continued to insist that a majority of the soldiers be African and the command of the force to remain with the AU.¹⁰⁵ John Negrepon, the US deputy secretary of state confirmed the general impression by arguing that China had “played a pivotal role in brokering the agreement”.¹⁰⁶ In the words of a commentator, “for the first time in its 35-year permanent membership of the UN emergency room, China actively sought to persuade a sovereign government to assent to the deployment of blue helmets on its national soil”.¹⁰⁷

But a closer look at Chinese policy toward Sudan shows that Beijing’s policy started to change long before the “Genocide Olympics” campaign reached its peak.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Beijing long insisted that the massacre in Darfur was an internal matter. And China had a long-standing policy of granting almost unlimited support to the Sudan in forums of vital importance such as the Security Council.¹⁰⁹ But in 2005 the flotation of the Chinese National Petroleum Company on the New York Stock Exchange ‘had to be withdrawn and refashioned because of negative publicity over what the proceeds might be used to do in Sudan’.¹¹⁰ At the same time, China did not veto the Security Council resolution that referred to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court the alleged crimes that were committed primarily by government forces in Darfur.¹¹¹ Since then, and much before the “Genocide Olympics” campaign gathered momentum, China showed a willingness to engage in Darfur. In November 2006, the Chinese ambassador to the UN attempted to broker a compromise deal on the so-called “Annan Plan” which

¹⁰² Andrew F. Cooper and Andrew Schrumm, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Helene Cooper, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Helene Cooper, “China’s new Olympic challenge”, *International Herald Tribune*, 14 April 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Lydia Polgreen and Warren Hoge, “Sudan Relents on Peacekeepers in Darfur”, *New York Times*, 13 June 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, “China’s New Dictatorship Diplomacy: Is Beijing Parting With Pariahs?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (2008), pp. 38-56.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Holslag, “China’s Diplomatic Manoeuvring on the Question of Darfur”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 54 (2008), p. 83.

¹⁰⁸ Stephanie Klein-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, *op. cit.*.

¹⁰⁹ For the evolving Chinese diplomacy on the issue, see J. Holslag, *op. cit.*, p. 71; D. Lange, *Sudan’s Foreign Relations with Asia: China and the Politics of ‘Looking East’*, *Institute of Security Studies Paper*, No. 158, February 2008, pp. 8–11, <http://www.issafrika.org>.

¹¹⁰ P.R. Carmody and F.Y. Owusu, “Competing Hegemons? Chinese Versus American Geoeconomic Strategies in Africa”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (2007), p. 513.

¹¹¹ Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005) of 31 March 2005. Generally, L. Condorelli and A. Ciampi, “Comments on the Security Council Referral of the Situation in Darfur to the ICC”, *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2005), p. 590.

called for an expanded UN peacekeeping role in Darfur.¹¹² And in January 2006 the Chinese vice foreign minister Lu Guozeng visited North Darfur state and even went to the Abu Shuker camp for internally displaced persons.¹¹³ During his February 2007 visit to Sudan – three months before Farrow’s article was published –, President Hu Zindao, while announcing a \$13 millions interest-free loan to build a new presidential palace, aired his criticism and told his hosts that it is ‘imperative’ to stop the deaths in Darfur.¹¹⁴ Thus, in reality, the change of Chinese policy toward Sudan was far less abrupt than many commentators assume. It evolved gradually within a framework of three years from a rather passive posture, to taking a clear position and, finally, to active persuasion. According to some analysts, this was not only the result of external pressure but also an attempt to promote long-term stability and the need to protect China’s long-term interests.¹¹⁵ In short, Mia Farrow’s contribution in altering Chinese policy was grossly exaggerated – probably the result of extensive publicity. In general, our original claim that celebrities’ impact on governmental policies is minimal seems to be sustained. However, the “Genocide Olympics” campaign leads us to the conclusion that celebrities might strengthen policy shifts, especially if they act within existing networks, sent clear signals and link their actions to specific events (the Olympic Games).

Mia Farrow’s campaign confronted some criticism. A commentator argued that “the actions of the idealistic American actress have a narcissistic edge” and that “her singling out of China reeks of a sort of subliminal racism not uncommon among well-heeled liberals”.¹¹⁶ ‘Her narrowly focused idealism’, he concluded, “is teamed with an overly broad demonization that is accentuated by China’s remoteness from her”.¹¹⁷ However, less philosophical and probably more persuasive is the argument that Farrow (and other activists’) stance was short-sighted and in reality is now undermining diplomatic efforts to end the Darfur atrocities. Andrew Natsios, US Special Envoy for Sudan in the 2006-7 period, has argued that “moral outrage” makes things worse:

“The more aggressively ... Western advocacy groups demand justice in Darfur, the more aggressively the Sudanese government is likely to resist the UN-AU peacekeeping force there, even after it is fully deployed”.¹¹⁸

Another expert on Sudan has aired similar concerns by arguing that there are serious doubts that the campaign has affected China’s policies and behavior in a meaningful and enduring way. Despite their successes, he added, US

¹¹² Daniel Large, “Sudan’s foreign relations with Asia”, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, *ISS Paper 158*, February 2008, p. 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ M. Wines, “China’s influence in Africa arouses some resistance”, *The New York Times*, 10 February 2007.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Holslag, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-84.

¹¹⁶ Philip J. Cunnigham, “A Sorry Hollywood Story”, *International Herald Tribune*, 21 February 2008.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Andrew S. Natsios, “Beyond Darfur: Sudan’s Slide Toward Civil War”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (May/June 2008), pp. 77-93.

activists have both “gravely limited the ability of US leadership to seek new compromises” in its dealings with Khartoum and at the same time have embarrassed Beijing by refusing to acknowledge changes in China’s position toward Sudan.¹¹⁹ Although these are the typical criticisms aired against celebrities (“they do not understand the politics”, “simplistic views of reality”, etc.), they also reflect the analytical puzzlement that characterize the ways the academic community and the political establishment regard the phenomenon.

5. Conclusions

This paper briefly overviewed the International Relations literature on individuals and asserted that there is a lack of research work on them, especially when they are not acting as state agents. The underdevelopment of theory on the role of transnational activists is in sharp contrast with the enhanced profile and the more advanced role that the latter have sought to play in our time.

Celebrity activism has been portrayed as a distinct type of transnational political activity that has recently grown in importance and visibility. The study attempted to explicate the development of this form of activism through the identification of several pull (e.g., the UN and NGOs) and push (e.g., augmented autonomy of action and quest for publicity) factors. While celebrities have been criticized for their motives and the way that they approach complex international problems, the overall balance sheet of their activism is positive particularly on such matters as raising public opinion interest, mobilizing resources and, to a lesser extent, on political lobbying. Indeed, although the argument that journalistic accounts tend to overestimate their role has some validity, the impact of individuals should not be taken a priori as negligible. Farrow’s activism seems to have contributed in raising public awareness and in strengthening a gradual shift in China’s policy toward Sudan.

The study by no means gravitates towards an individuated approach to international politics. As David Chandler’s work illustrated, individuated forms of activism have minimal political impact and are best viewed as self-regarding activities, aiming at affirming one’s own identity. Indeed, pioneers and transnational activists have political leverage when they build coalitions and act within larger networks. Mia Farrow’s case demonstrated the operation of a ‘chain-effect’ in her activities. This chain-effect explains not only her *modus operandi* but also, her introduction into activism for Darfur as well as, her attempt to bring aboard more people to this cause.

Farrow’s “Genocide Olympics” campaign additionally showed that celebrities may strengthen policy shifts, especially when they send clear signals and link their actions to specific events. As it was illustrated, Farrow’s activism was not indiscriminately directed against the entire Olympic Games, or the participating countries and their athletes. It symbolically targeted the opening ceremonies. Overall, celebrity activism seems to have recently become more pragmatic in the sense that it avoids getting involved in too controversial issues and it demonstrates greater restraint in its demands and manifestations.

¹¹⁹ J. Stephen Morrison, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Moreover, the study affirmed the main propositions on the pioneers' attributes. Farrow has upper class origin, received university education and has access to important material resources, the most valuable of which is access to media spotlight. Her polio experience during childhood and her son's activities in Darfur provide additional explanations on her motivations. Farrow's status as an American Hollywood actress makes a contradiction in terms to pronounce her activism in the United States as local activism. Yet, her forward and backward fieldtrips to Darfur seem to affirm the thesis that transnational activists take advantage of opportunities at both local and international levels. Finally, in respect of Tarrow's typology of activists' roles, the study illustrated that Farrow commenced as an 'insider', exploiting her affiliation with UNICEF as a Goodwill Ambassador and very quickly slid to a more autonomous role.

To conclude, the paper demonstrated that the literature on the role of individual social agents helped us gain a valuable insight into celebrity activism. Above all, the study additionally highlighted two questions that need further elaboration. First, how do we assess the impact of individuals on causes that receive the support of a large array of actors? Furthermore, how do we account of divergent perspectives of individuals on the same causes?