

(BRAND AID)

Shopping Well to Save the World

Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte

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In memory of Nereo Ponte

The **RED** pill makes you larger. Just say yes. You buy a **RED** product over here, the **RED** company buys life-saving drugs for someone who can't afford them over there. That's it. So why not shop 'til it stops. Why not try some off-the-rack enlightenment. We can spend and destroy. We can wear our inside out. You will be a good-looking Samaritan because, and this is very good news for some of us, sinners make the best saints.

—Product **(RED)** video,
Emporio Armani “One Night Only”

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PREFACE

If you read the advertisements for the RED American Express card, you will find that “you can feel great about spending, whether you are buying cappuccinos or cashmere.” American Express asks readers to ponder what we consider to be one of the more perverse outcomes of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa—“Has there ever been a better reason to shop?”¹

Both of us have done field-based research in Africa since the early 1990s. When the first RED products were launched at Davos, we had recently returned from working over the previous year on separate research projects in South Africa. Part of Lisa’s research involved months as a participant-observer in an AIDS treatment clinic in the oldest township of the Western Cape. Part of Stefano’s research dealt with how corporations were changing their ways of running a business in postapartheid South Africa.

Our own personal responses to the things we have seen and heard in the field have been diverse, and certainly not always completely thoughtful or constructive. Spending hours listening to negotiations between AIDS patients, their healthcare providers, and their virus is always emotional and difficult. Making sense of “Black Economic Empowerment” initiatives in the context of rampant unemployment and continued labor exploitation in South Africa is not straightforward either. Inadequacy and frustration is what we have both experienced with our own understandings. For example, it was difficult to maintain

analytical distance when an eight-year-old girl dressed in a school uniform—the African mirror image of one of our own daughters—walked into the clinic to get medicine to manage the disease passed to her by a sexually violent relative. Yet never, in response to the complexity and frustration, the hope or gratitude of understanding the impact of HIV and AIDS in Africa, did we ever imagine that this might provide “a reason to shop.” What could one possibly expect to buy that might get us out of such a predicament?

The Product RED initiative and its public uptake fascinated us in its portrayal of both AIDS and trade in Africa. Thus, this book stems from a critical theory impulse and a moral dissatisfaction with Product RED. The complex scripts of race, gender, and global economic inequality are ignored with justifications that “AIDS is an emergency” (see Calhoun 2008) and, thus, normal rules do not apply. At the same time, the “normality” of consumption and the social and environmental relations of trade and production that underpin poverty, inequality, and disease are not questioned. It is also essential for Product RED that the beneficiaries are strangers, reduced to bare lives, which can be counted in the calculation of “lives saved” as easily as pill counts or merchandise inventory. Africans with AIDS are presented in smooth, virtual representations in which “global politics” is reduced to style.

Both of us have been conducting research projects with extensive fieldwork in Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa, and shorter stints in other African countries. Lisa’s other books look at issues of health, gender, and international development in Africa (Vavrus and Richey 2003; Richey 2008). Since 2005, she has been working in South Africa and Uganda on the politics of access to antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for HIV/AIDS. Stefano’s other books are on market liberalization in African agriculture, the changing role of Africa in the global economy, and commodity trade (Ponte 2002; Gibbon and Ponte 2005; Daviron and Ponte 2005). Since 2005, he has been working on the political economy of food-safety standards, environmental and social labels, and corporate codes of conduct.

Methodologically, this book is an intermediary study, so we are not researching the motivations of the people who give aid (either the consumers or the corporations) or the perceptions of those who receive

it (the beneficiaries of Global Fund–supported initiatives in Rwanda, Lesotho, Swaziland, or Ghana). The point of our book on Brand Aid, like branding in general, is to demonstrate the privileged role of this intermediary realm—where value is created.

This is a book based on an analysis of academic, popular, and practical business literature and on the plethora of publicly available information from the RED campaign. We have spent countless hours researching the frequently updated RED Web site, are Facebook fans who receive RED news and marketing, and are members of the “joinred.com” community. We have also engaged in participant observation in various shopping venues with RED products in the United States and UK.

Early along in the project, we attempted to conduct interviews with the companies involved in RED on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and RED-specific activities. These were largely unsuccessful (with the exception of Armani). We did not conduct fieldwork, so there were no independent site visits of the RED companies’ suppliers’ factories in developing countries, nor did we interview the African women and children with AIDS who were “saved” by RED, at least not specifically for this book.

The disconnect between the RED treatment virtualism (in which “saving AIDS victims” is reduced to buying them pills) and witnessing the daily negotiations of AIDS patients with chronic illness and poverty—how their supporters, their doctors and counselors, and patients themselves were struggling and living in a context where ARV drugs are available—has resulted in this book. As a response to such a vast chasm between a global initiative and how Africans with AIDS are saving each other and saving themselves, it is meager. This book is not engaging in academic regret, mourning the loss of authenticity in development, manifest in the example of RED, but instead is trying to understand the nature and conditions of what RED means and what it does. Product RED is an innovative modality of international development financing, and one that is likely to spawn a variety of similar Brand Aid interventions. It provides an easy solution to current crises in international development—one that enables corporations to raise their CSR profile without substantially changing their normal business

practices while consumers engage in low-cost heroism without meaningfully increasing their awareness of global production–consumption relations or the struggles of living with HIV/AIDS. In this form of Brand Aid, the problems and the people who experience them are branded and marketed to Western consumers just as effectively as the products that will “save” them.

The Product RED initiative is variously referred to in the media, the Web sites of RED companies, and its own Web site www.joinred.com as RED, Product(RED), Product RED, (RED)[™], plus permutations of the RED theme combined with the RED companies’ names and products. In the rest of the book, we use only the term “RED” to avoid confusion, except when a different form is included in a quotation or when a specific RED product is mentioned.

As we worked on this book, friends and colleagues sent us encouragement in the form of scholarly articles, links to Web sites, celebrity gossip, a RED t-shirt, and the opinions of their own friends, colleagues, and children on Product RED. It is a pleasure to thank them here. We benefited from many thoughtful readers and supporters of this work, to whom we owe a great debt. Thanks to Rita Abrahamsen, Ann Anagnost, Melanie Bielefeld, Simon Bolwig, Dan Brockington, Alexandra Budabin, Pdraig Carmody, Sylvia Chant, Amal Fadlalla, Didier Fassin, Peter Gibbon, Margaret Gifford, Daniele Giovannucci, Andrea Goldstein, Lene Hansen, Graham Harrison, Jim Igoe, Steven Jensen, Sam Jones, Ippolytos Kalofonos, Peter Kragelund, Christian Lund, Peter Lund-Thomsen, Henrik Secher Marcussen, Claire Mercer, Vinh-Kim Nguyen, Elina Oinas, Colleen O’Manique, Jim Pletcher, Lone Riisgaard, Hakan Sechinlgin, Morten Sigsgaard, Dan Smith, Howard Stein, Grahame Thompson, and Lindsay Whitfield.

We had the opportunity to present parts of this work to audiences of scholars and students at the University of Toronto, the University of Michigan, the London School of Economics and Political Science, the School for International Studies at the University of Toronto, the Center for Advanced Security Theory and the Department of Geography at the University of Copenhagen, the Communication for Development Program at Malmö University, the Centre for African Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and the Center for Gender,

Power, and Diversity at Roskilde University. We benefited from comments on our presentations as part of the “Social and Political Aspects of AIDS” working group at Makerere University in Kampala, the “Cultural Production and Experience Strategies, Design, and Everyday Life” conference and the “Politics at the Margins of the State” seminar and Roskilde University Development Day in Roskilde, the UNESCO-SSRC-organized conference on Gender and HIV/AIDS in Paris, the “International Network on Religion and AIDS in Africa” conference in Copenhagen, and the “Branding AIDS” conference in Toronto (special thanks to Yuvraj Joshi, who organized this inspiring event).

Thanks to our colleagues who participated in the panels we organized on this work at the “Nordic Africa Days” conference (Cissy Kityo Mutuluza, Louise Rasmussen, and Danai Mupotsa) and those at the International Studies Association panel (Craig Calhoun, Andy Cooper, and Johanna Hood). We are also indebted to audiences at the meetings of the African Studies Association (U.S.), the International Studies Association, the Association of American Geographers, the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, the Association of European Centres of African Studies, and the Nordic Media Association. Lisa gratefully acknowledges research support from the Danish Development Research Council. The book benefited from the attentive work of three anonymous reviewers and our editor, Richard Morrison. Finally, very special thanks to our research assistants Mike Baab, Ekaterina Bang-Andersen, and Anna Maria Escobar Fibla.

We appreciate the patience of Sasha, Arianna, and Zeno William.

INTRODUCTION

RED and the Reinvention of International Aid

RED

Bono's launch of RED at Davos in 2006 opened a new frontier for financing development aid. The Irish singer from the world-famous rock band U2 is the front man for the first attempt to fund one of the largest providers of global AIDS treatment through the purchasing power of Western consumers. RED is "a business model to raise awareness and money for the Global Fund by teaming up with the world's most iconic brands to produce RED-branded products."¹ Consumption, trade, and aid wed dying Africans with designer goods. With the engagement of American Express, Apple, Converse, Gap, Emporio Armani, Hallmark, Motorola, and now Dell, Microsoft, Starbucks, and many others, consumers can save HIV/AIDS patients in Africa. They can do so simply by shopping, as a percentage of profits from RED lines goes directly to support the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

According to RED's official Web site, "RED is the color of emergency and the color of blood, which is life, and our soil, which feeds us."² From an Emporio Armani RED watch to a RED iPod™ and from Converse (RED) sneakers to a (RED)GAP sundress, a percentage of the profits from the sale of all RED co-branded products is contributed by the "iconic" partners directly to the Global Fund. Companies pay a licensing fee to RED and commit to a five-year partnership. In its first

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five years of operation, RED donated over \$160 million to the Global Fund. RED grants are made through the Fund's standard disbursement processes and have been dedicated to the Fund's best-performing programs for AIDS in Africa—initially to Ghana, Lesotho, Rwanda, and Swaziland, and more recently to South Africa and Zambia.³

RED products include laptop computers, Frappuccinos, tennis shoes, greeting cards, skateboards, and a cashmere bikini. RED goods have been heavily marketed and made widely available in the UK and the United States. Selected RED products have been released in many other countries, including Japan, Switzerland, France, Canada, and Singapore.

RED has received extensive media attention, including promotions on CNN's *Larry King Live*, two RED issues of *The Independent* (edited by Bono and Giorgio Armani), Trafalgar Square's MOTO(RED) concert featuring the Scissor Sisters, and a massive \$25 million marketing campaign by Gap. This campaign included stars photographed by Annie Leibowitz and wrapping Chicago's three-story Michigan Avenue Gap flagship store in red vinyl.⁴

The launch of the U.S. RED campaign was the feature topic of a whole episode of the *Oprah Winfrey* television show. The *Oprah* episode opened in its usual studio, with a duet sung by Bono and Alicia Keys. Oprah wore a Gap RED "INSPI(RED)" t-shirt that she credited with the power to save the world. Oprah explained:

You know clothes are usually not important or significant. They usually just cover your body, but I'm wearing the most important t-shirt I've ever worn in my life. I love this so much, I've bought one for every person in this audience. The t-shirts that we are all wearing today are from the Gap's new RED line, and the Gap gives half of the profits of their RED products to fight AIDS in Africa and that means that just the t-shirts that this audience is wearing today will provide enough medication to prevent transmission of HIV from mother to child [the camera cuts to two young, white, concerned women in the audience] for over fourteen thousand pregnant women [audience cheers]. This show today is about getting the medicine to the people who need it. So by just

buying a t-shirt, a pair of jeans, even a cell phone, you can actually begin to save lives.⁵

Then Oprah and Bono jumped in a red Ford Thunderbird and sped over to Chicago's Michigan Avenue. They alighted onto a red carpet in front of the Gap flagship store to begin their "fashion spree." Inside the shop, there was a fashion show of RED clothes with Christy Turlington, Penélope Cruz, and Kanye West as models. They talked and bought at the Gap and then continued up Michigan Avenue to Apple, Armani, and Motorola shops as well. This RED launch was covered by over three hundred broadcast media outlets in the United States. On a television spot, Bobby Shriver of the famous American Kennedy clan and cofounder of RED stated that after the *Oprah* show there had been a run on Gap RED products, which would continue to be sold for the next five years.

Oprah interviewed Christy Turlington (also sporting an "INSPI(RED)" t-shirt), who identified not as a supermodel, but as a "mother of two." Turlington gave a concise summary of the RED initiative: "It doesn't get any more simple or bigger than that."

As of December 2010, RED had contributed \$160 million to the Global Fund, less than 1 percent of the total (public and private) \$18.2 billion disbursed by donors to the Global Fund since its inception. Ninety-five percent of disbursed funds came from "traditional" bilateral donors. The rest came from private sources. Within private sources, "traditional" philanthropy provided the bulk (the Gates Foundation provided 69 percent of all private funding alone). RED is actually the second largest source of private funding. So, from one point of view, RED is a small drop in the Global Fund's large bucket. From another point of view, it is an important source of funding within the private sector, and it is being taken seriously as a potential funding modality by the Global Fund itself.

In the popular media, criticisms of RED for having a limited impact on AIDS in Africa, given its great expenditure in product marketing, have been quickly and skillfully rebutted by RED supporters, including regular media appearances by Bono.⁶ RED promoters argue that because the product mobilizes a previously untapped constituency

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to contribute to aid for AIDS in Africa, this constitutes “new money” going to fight the disease. Marketing money would have been spent anyway by major corporations. Thus, any contribution made by RED is better than the contribution that would have been made without it—nothing.

But, as we will discuss in the book, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly popular, and there is no reason why one can assume that RED budgets would not have been invested by these companies into other ethically oriented initiatives. One cannot take for granted that consumers’ RED choices simply replace their previously “unethical” ones, thus leading to a more positive outcome. However, we can observe that the framing of the impact of RED as measurable and concrete (comparable only to nothing at all) is part of the construction of the initiative itself. RED promotes itself as if it were in a vacuum, not part of the many different kinds of consumption choices that individuals can make every day that actually affect the lives of women and children with AIDS in Africa.

But the point of our inquiry is not to adjudicate the “success” of the RED initiative in raising funds, nor is it to compare RED as a modality of aid financing with other types of existing interventions. Our investigation demonstrates how RED functions using the guarantee of celebrity together with the negotiated representation of a distant “Africa” to meet competing, and incommensurable, objectives. We demonstrate how RED solves the contradictions between shopping and helping within its own modality, and how in doing so, it creates surprising relationships entwining compassion with consumption.

Aid Celebrities and Hard Commerce

Aid celebrities—Bono, Jeffrey Sachs, and Paul Farmer—guarantee the “cool quotient,” the management, and the target of the RED modality of aid financing. Bono is the rock star who led his fans to believe that they could solve Africa’s problems of AIDS and poverty. Jeffrey Sachs is the economist behind the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Global Fund. And Paul Farmer is the physician who convinced the world that treatment of AIDS was possible in even the poorest communities. Thus, these aid celebrities guarantee that RED

can be taken seriously as a practical step that Western shoppers can take to help solve important global problems. By claiming to be linked to commerce, and not philanthropy, RED reconfigures international development around aid celebrities and consumer-citizens united to do good by dressing well.

The RED genesis story as popularized through mass-media coverage depicts RED as the creative fruit resulting from many seasons of labor by the aid celebrity extraordinaire, Bono.⁷ RED is described as the outcome of Bono's having thought that his ideas for helping the poor needed to be marketed in a less "misty-eyed, bleeding-heart way."⁸ And in fact, according to popular media buzz on the initiative, "the real surprise is that Bono turns out to be a card-carrying capitalist. He wants companies selling RED products to make a profit by helping the poor—doing well by doing good."⁹ In the words of the American Express RED launch representative at the Davos meeting, it is "conscientious commerce"—good for business, good for all.¹⁰ Product RED provides a new mechanism for development finance that weds "hard commerce" with help, consumers with celebrities, and doctors with rockers.

Giorgio Armani was most explicit in his recognition of the capitalist bottom line with his speech launching the RED Emporio Armani product line at Davos: "The new formula is that this is charity to the world of course, but particularly it is the fact that commerce will no longer have a negative connotation."¹¹ Bono explicitly rejected that he was being used by companies to restore their reputations.¹² "We are not endorsing their products, these products endorse us," Bono claimed.¹³ RED consumers are encouraged to "upgrade their choice" in the products they buy as one would upgrade an airline ticket or a portable computer model. In RED, moral choice-making is framed within logics of market rationality and individual entrepreneurship: in other words, "profitability is the moral framework" (Banet-Weiser and Lapsansky 2008, 1255; emphasis in the original).

RED as "Best Practice"

RED is a quintessential concoction of current understandings of "best practice" in corporate strategy, aid, and trade. In relation to corporate strategies, it promotes the concept that CSR is good for societies,

environments, and profit. Two decades of civil society action against corporations' labor practices, environmental mismanagement, predatory extraction of natural resources, unfair trade practices, and high prices for HIV/AIDS drugs have pushed CSR onto the agenda of many mainstream corporations. Often, corporate responses to CSR concerns have been reactive, rather than proactive.

In contrast, RED proactively seeks to engage businesses in its version of CSR that marries co-branding and help to Africa. The fact that such successful brands participate in this exercise implies for others that it meets their financial, social, and environmental objectives (the so-called triple bottom line). Also, RED's architecture takes its inspiration from the currently favored form of corporate organization, the "network" company—flexible, organized by projects, lean, and generally better able to plug into several other networks (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999).

In relation to international development assistance, RED fits the sought-after model of aid efficiency. It is a private initiative providing funds to a public-private organization (the Global Fund), which channels them to successful applicants who are responsible for local implementation. RED is an initiative that is not burdened by additional bureaucracy. All the elements are present already: the Global Fund, which prides itself of having overhead costs of only 3 percent;¹⁴ DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa)/ONE, Bono's own lean organization from which RED emerges;¹⁵ and the flexible and efficient corporations that produce the fashionable goods (or rather, they market them). The Global Fund notes explicitly that "the agreements with RED and its partner companies do not add significant administrative work for the Global Fund or its recipients, ensuring that the funds raised go to where they are needed most."¹⁶

Finally, RED fits a recently consolidated paradigm that both aid *and* trade are central to development. RED is removed from both the old days of leftist tirades against trade (aid, not trade) and from the opposing stance against aid (trade, not aid).

RED, the Global Fund, and "Worthy Recipients" of Aid

RED is a new modality of aid *financing*, not aid delivery per se. The Global Fund acts as a regranteeing intermediary between local applicant

organizations who will implement the activities and funders, most of which are traditional bilateral and multilateral donors. RED is the only Global Fund contributor thus far to determine where its monies will go: RED funds are allocated to the best performing programs on HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Significant changes in the past decade involving increasing access to antiretroviral (ARV) drugs for treating AIDS in Africa have reconfigured the landscape of aid for global AIDS. The recipients of RED funds, “women and children with AIDS in Africa,” are quite different from the more controversial target groups of AIDS interventions elsewhere, or those of the pretreatment era. As we describe in chapter 2, RED profits go to “good AIDS,” and to deserving recipients. In many ways, the distant others helped by RED resemble more closely the proximate others helped by the “pink ribbon” corporate campaigns to support breast cancer in the West. King documents how breast cancer funding is dependent on its easy fit with “corporate values” with its focus on “mothers, daughters, sisters and friends” and the common cultural perception that “among people with breast cancer, there are, thankfully, no men, no gays or lesbians, no IV drug users, and no sex workers” (2006, 77–78). In both campaigns, beneficiaries are people who are not directly associated with sexual deviance or substance abuse. The particularly heterosexual transmission pattern of African AIDS combined with the recent opportunity to treat the disease with ARVs makes it possible to save women and children with AIDS in ways that appear ethically and politically uncomplicated.

AIDS provides the quintessential cause as the outlet for RED’s hard-commerce approach to doing good also because, like fashion, rock music, or celebrity, it is about money, power, and sex. As described in the *Sunday Times*, “the sex appeal of red” comes also from stars like Scarlett Johansson, “the sizzling face of Bono’s new ethical brand.” “Johansson is peeling off her clothes in a photographic studio in LA, in preparation for becoming the pin-up for Bono’s new plan.”¹⁷ Johansson’s interpretation of why the product is called RED is that “It’s a sexy, hot color that’s vibrant and attention-grabbing. It has been since the 1940s, such a time of high glamour and red lipstick and red nails. That’s probably why they chose it for this campaign—glamour!”¹⁸ The sexy messages promoted by RED are unrealistic and contradictory to

the “Abstain, Be faithful, or use Condoms” (ABC) approach to sex in the HIV/AIDS era. Consumers are encouraged to express their sexuality, their attractiveness, and their desire through consumer choices, with no recognition that sexual exchange is often part and parcel of successful consumption patterns in the societies most affected by AIDS (see chapter 2).

Taking RED Seriously

While RED may seem far removed from conventional aid, we argue that it would be a mistake to dismiss it. RED is not simply media glitz aimed at mainstream consumers of midrange products. The 5 August 2006 issue of the internationally prestigious medical journal the *Lancet* was a co-branded product: (*The Lancet*)^{RED}. This was the first time the journal had included advertisements, as RED product ads covered its pages in between cutting-edge articles on medicine. The *Lancet* wrote a compelling editorial blurb in favor of RED and also contributed \$30,000 “in support of this important project.”¹⁹

Product RED is listed, together with the Global Fund, in a recent list of “new networks mobilizing citizens, voters, and consumers to take personal action against poverty” (Nelson 2008, 156–57). Also, the Global Fund takes RED seriously, and its internal documentation suggests that RED is viewed as the precursor to other attempts to fund the organization through consumer campaigns (see chapter 3).

The impact of RED is important on two related fronts: the material and the representational. On the material front, as we will show in chapter 4, RED is a “disengaged” form of CSR—mostly separated from the operations in which the RED corporations are involved. RED does not attempt to change or improve the normal functioning of business and trade. At the same time, RED’s beneficiaries are distant—Africa, AIDS victims—constructed as “over there” and not likely to be part of the RED companies’ core consumer group. RED does not attempt to implement better work, social, or environmental conditions of production. In other words, RED is focused on the welfare of Africans with AIDS in its beneficiary countries, not on the welfare of workers in factories producing RED products. RED seeks to support a social cause that is removed from the everyday lives of most of its consumers. Yet

RED's use of media presents these sufferers as if they were close and known by consumers who are led to believe that they can be meaningfully involved in the scene of suffering. Within the emerging realm of "causerism" (or shopping for a better world), we argue that RED facilitates a shift from "conscious consumption" to "compassionate consumption" and deflects attention from addressing the causes of problems to solving their manifestations.

But the power of RED is not simply a material power that stems from the way that the initiative engages corporations and consumers. RED's impact is also based in its images, its pictures of the world (see chapter 2). AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease for which there is currently no cure. Yet Western shoppers are animated by a confident Bono who speaks from American television screens claiming: "We can be the generation that ends extreme poverty. This is our moment to show what we're about." As Arabella Lyon argues in her own work analyzing the bloated and exploitative nature of pity, "Long before globalization and mass media, emotion was understood as useful for political manipulation" (2005, 175).

RED shifts focus from the product it is selling to the people with the problem it is solving. This dislocation results in depoliticizing both trade and AIDS in Africa as RED works on solving the manifestations of a problem without considering its causes. "As 'infotainment' on the nightly news, images of victims are commercialized, they are taken up into processes of global marketing and business competition. . . . Suffering, 'though at a distance,' as Boltanski (1993) tellingly expresses it, is routinely appropriated in American popular culture, which is a leading edge of global popular culture" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996, 1–2). As explained by Susan Sontag: "The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferer—seen close-up on the television screen—and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power" (2003, 102). Thus, RED is a poignant example of the global appropriations of suffering, one that sells both their suffering and our power to ameliorate it as effectively as it sells computers, greeting cards, or lattes.

A close examination of RED will demonstrate how relations of

inequality are inherent in donor-recipient exchanges, and that RED is a new player operating within the context of a long and contentious debate on international development aid to Africa. Negotiating the terms of giving speaks as much about the donors—or in this case, the consumers—who give, as about the needy Africans with AIDS, who receive. Product RED relies on the mutual coexistence of proximity and distance, or empathy and separation, between the shopper/helpers and the producer/sufferers. RED is manufacturing a certain kind of awareness through its representations of Africans with AIDS and the international interventions that can save them. It is also modelling a form of CSR that privileges moving away from tackling the normal functioning of production and trade toward solving the problems of distant others. In RED, consumers can be good, companies can do good, and Africans who need some good done for them can get it.

In sum, RED should be given serious analysis as a manifestation of (1) the impact of aid celebrities on policy making, (2) the legitimacy of consumption as a vector for helping, (3) the shift away from businesses' emphasis on "engaged CSR" to helping "distant others," and (4) the construction of Africans with AIDS as worthy recipients of profits generated from heroic shopping.

BRAND + AID CELEBRITY + CAUSE = BRAND AID

In this book, we argue that RED is to date the most advanced manifestation of the rise of what we call "Brand Aid." Brand Aid is the combined meaning of "aid to brands" and "brands that provide aid." It is "aid to brands" because it helps sell branded products and improve a brand's ethical profile and value. It is "brands that provide aid" because, like other cause-related marketing initiatives, a portion of the profit or sales is devoted to helping others. As a response to the crisis of legitimacy in international aid to Africa, Brand Aid also helps to rebrand aid itself and aid to Africa in particular (see chapter 3). At the same time, it legitimizes a corporate involvement in "doing good" that is not related to corporations' own actions and operations, and in which beneficiaries are distant others.

Brand

Brand Aid (as the heading above suggests) is based on three pillars: a brand, one or more aid celebrities, and a cause. The first pillar of Brand Aid, branding, is about conveying a mark to consumers. It is a commitment to consistently delivering a material and symbolic experience of a certain quality. Brands, as we will see in chapter 5, have a monetary value of their own, with many of the most successful ones representing more than 40 percent of the owning company's total market value. But as brands can become valuable assets with proper management, they can also turn into liabilities. They are vulnerable to negative media exposure, which in turn can affect consumers' brand perception and shopping choices. Managing the ethical profile of a brand is therefore a key issue for companies. This can be done by adhering to codes of conduct, labeling, and certification schemes on labor, environmental, and social issues related to production and trade. It can also be achieved by building an "iconic profile" for a brand, a profile built on culture rather than the product itself (Holt 2004). Brand Aid can be an attractive vector for building the ethical component of brand reputation and for turning brands into icons. It does not question the fundamentals of "hard commerce" and at the same time can help increase sales, visibility, and brand equity. In the case of RED, Brand Aid also helps to shift attention from the product to a cause by enacting the myth of "just capitalism," a capitalism that is good for all, a win-win solution to the world's most pressing problems.²⁰ The fact that RED is a co-branding exercise helps in managing individual brand risk by spreading the risk of failure or of negative repercussions among several brands and by externalizing it to the nonproduct brand, RED itself.

Aid Celebrities

The second pillar of Brand Aid is the aid celebrity. As we will discuss in chapter 1, aid celebrities transport the modalities of the celebrity into the realm of international development. They embody a manufactured consensus, let simple moral truths substitute for rational debate, and thus manage the affect of those who would solve the world's problems. There is a "felt need" for grounding the impulse to "do good." We are

not critiquing the impulse to do good globally, for Africa or elsewhere, but suggest that this is where the power of Brand Aid exists beyond the material realm of stylish clothes and smart gadgetry: it exists through the mobilization of affect to produce certain kinds of donors who care.

Within Brand Aid there is no expertise outside of the celebrity modality. We make a distinction in our analysis of RED between the celebrities who are brought in as a supporting cast for various products, performances, and the brand itself and the “aid celebrities” who are fundamental to the social contract on which RED is founded.

Famous faces abound in all aspects of the RED campaign; celebrity models like Gisele Bündchen and Christy Turlington, actresses like Penélope Cruz and Scarlett Johansson, singers like Joss Stone, and artists like Damien Hirst engage in highly publicized activities in support of RED and its products. The use of celebrities to sell products is of course nothing new, but RED moves beyond mere celebrity endorsement by relying on the appeal of aid celebrities for the brand’s credibility. In *Product RED*, Paul Farmer provides the ethical guarantee that AIDS is an important problem that can be solved in poor countries, Jeffrey Sachs provides the efficiency guarantee that the RED brand and the Global Fund are effective means for solving this problem, and Bono provides the attention guarantee that exposure and access will come from linking aid celebrities to other famous celebrities to insure the cool quotient of the initiative. Bono may seem less “expert” than the other aid celebrities, but in fact, he has the broadest scope and carries surprising legitimacy in practitioner and academic circles. Bono gave the 350th commencement address for graduates of Harvard University in 2001, in which he praises Jeffrey Sachs, Bobby Shriver, and the pope for their work on debt relief—“A rock star, a Kennedy, and a Noted Economist crisscrossing the globe, like the Partridge Family on psychotropic drugs, with the POPE acting as our . . . well . . . agent.”²¹

The aid celebrities are there to guarantee that the consumers’ desire to help save distant others will be fulfilled through the correct product choices. Brand Aid brings modernization theory into post-modern times: consumption becomes the mechanism for compassion and creates new forms of value. Celebrities are the lubricant for this

political-economic formation, acting as emotional sovereigns, mitigating the threat to capitalist accumulation posed by the need to display corporate social responsibility.

Celebrities are fundamental in selling products to the masses, and with Brand Aid, international development assistance becomes another marketable product. Brand Aid promises resolution to a myriad of historical conflicts about the possibilities of being a donor and of confining the most intrinsic problems of development within a geographical demarcation that can be kept separate from the Western self.

When the RED Web site advertises that “There are hundreds of ways to support the elimination of AIDS in Africa,”²² they are not referring to the provision of condoms or legal reforms to uphold women’s rights, nor are they referring to improving communication between spouses or one-stop shopping for all kinds of reproductive health services; they are not referring to effective microbicides or reducing socio-economic inequality. The “hundreds of ways,” represented by small, colorful pictures that move onto the screen of the RED Web site one after the other, are consumer products—greeting cards, take-away lattes, fancy computers, and stylish sunglasses. Product promotion and aid fund-raising are united in RED. We are accustomed to celebrities who sell cars and songs; aid celebrities who sell development interventions are both familiar and new. In RED we see celebrities who sell the possibility of saving someone else’s life. Saturating RED communications with celebrity content normalizes the celebrity modality. Even members of the corporate elite share common attributes with celebrities like Angelina Jolie (Cooper 2008c). Thus it becomes not simply acceptable, but expected to find a photograph of Bono accompanying any major piece of news on African development in the media.²³ The popular assumption that international development is a field populated by experts who tour exotic places in the company of supermodels helping grateful masses is a powerful virtualism. As we discuss in chapter 2, our use of virtualism draws on its political-economy manifestation articulated by Carrier and Miller (1998) who are, notably, ethnographers. Virtualism is based on a profound degree of abstraction, disengagement with the embodied, lived experience, and a decontextualization of the highest form (see Miller 1998, 205–13). AIDS treatment

as represented in RED is a pragmatic abstraction of a complex experience, that is, not the opposite of “reality” but a making of reality that produces particular effects. This virtualism of AIDS in Africa, limited to ARV pills, is an example of how “reality” becomes performed more and more like it was imagined in the first place.

Cause

The third pillar of Brand Aid is the cause. A spate of recent books examines the possibilities of whether a form of capitalism that is more creative and to scale, termed “philanthrocapitalism,” can solve both global and local problems that historically were subjected to political debate in democratic societies (Bishop and Green 2008; Edwards 2008; Kinsley 2008). A growing number of analysts and leaders, such as former U.S. president Bill Clinton,²⁴ see potential in what the rich and large corporations, assisted by professional intermediaries and celebrities, can do in solving the world’s problems. Such potential stems not only from the money they can spend, but from the leverage they can apply on others (NGOs, governments) to use resources more innovatively, efficiently, and in a “business-like” manner. As Bill Gates put it, “the challenge is not to identify the right problems but to identify the right solutions” (cited in Bishop and Green 2008, 152).

Yet others, such as many of the contributors to Kinsley (2008), argue that business should focus on what it does best: provide goods and services to consumers and maximize profits. Edwards (2008) is critical of philanthrocapitalism, but from another standpoint. He argues that it is a symptom of an unequal world, rather than being its cure. He also highlights that the involvement of business and markets to bring about changes that traditionally rely on social movements has had quite mixed results, typically stemming from the differing perceptions on redistribution and social justice. Still, Brand Aid is predicated upon the notion that business can work effectively to promote international causes.

Philanthrocapitalism, “creative capitalism” (as termed by Bill Gates), social entrepreneurship, and Brand Aid all work on solving existing problems—how “we” (in the West) mobilize resources to solve a problem instead of asking questions about how the problem came to be. In

chapter 5, we argue that RED, as a form of Brand Aid, enacts the myth of “just capitalism” to reconcile the contradictions of global wealth and poverty. It does so by portraying the idea that capitalism can be fixed to rein in its excesses and target its creativity and resources to help groups of “deserving others” (Africans suffering from AIDS). And in a period of economic crisis and financial insecurity, RED can still exploit the myth of just capitalism by portraying itself as a workable alternative to “casino capitalism” and as a modality where consumption and cool can be channelled toward a good cause.

Brand Aid and other forms of creative capitalism may be useful for solving existing problems when these are not acknowledged to be explicitly linked to the normal functioning of capitalism or the companies themselves. These sorts of initiatives will not be able to tackle problems to which businesses are closely linked. And the more resources go to ameliorating the symptoms, the less likely resources will go to examining the root causes of existing problems. Problems are created and understood only in the way that allows them to be solved by these interventions. Thus, in the RED example, AIDS can be thought of in no other way outside of the primacy of drugs.

Brand Aid: Precursors, Contemporaries, and Prospects

Brand Aid, as epitomized by RED, does not come out of nowhere. It is a form of cause-related marketing, increasingly used by companies to build up their brand image, sell products, and in the process, help a cause. Many examples of linking product sales with donation and celebrities have been seen over the past two decades—among many others, we find MAC lipsticks sold to fund the MAC AIDS foundation, Kenneth Cole’s “Awareness” line of clothing and accessories to support various charities, and a special edition C350 Mercedes to support breast cancer causes.²⁵

Other RED-like initiatives that use shopping as a means for solving global concerns are becoming increasingly popular. For example, in February 2008, Benetton launched its “Africa Works” campaign, promoting the Birima microcredit program in Senegal, a cooperative credit society founded by the Senegalese singer Youssou N’Dour. Images on billboards and in the press throughout the world featured

photogenic West Africans as “everyday people” who are “depicted with the tools of their trade against a neutral background.”²⁶ When shoppers buy an “Africa Works” clothing item from Benetton, an unspecified percentage of the profit supports the Birima project. However, these sorts of initiatives also differ from RED in a number of important ways that we will discuss in chapter 4.

Brand Aid is a form of corporate philanthropy as well. But in traditional philanthropy (as in the examples of the Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Gates foundations), the act of giving is formally independent from the act of profit accumulation: normal business practice leads to accumulation of profits, assets, and capital that are then later used for purposes that have little to do with the operations in which the company is involved.²⁷ In contrast, Brand Aid allows the making of profit and donation at the same time. Companies use “doing good” to sell a particular set of products.

Finally, Brand Aid draws upon the awareness created by the fair trade movement and other social movements that have increased consumer knowledge of companies and products and stimulated consumers to assess products vis-à-vis their impact on societies and environments. But there are major differences between Brand Aid and its fair trade precursors. For example, RED is based on “celebrity validation,” which relies on personal capacity, while “ethical and sustainable” trade and CSR are usually based on certifications, labels, and codes of conduct to form “impersonal” and systemic solutions to problems of quality, food safety, environmental impact, and social conditions of production (see chapter 4). Although to consumers, both celebrities and labels are “shortcuts” for very complex socioeconomic and environmental processes, the informational depth of the message carried through is quite different. Codes of conduct and ethical trade initiatives are ultimately about improving the conditions of production for laborers and/or small farmers. RED is about accepting the status quo, maximizing sales and profit, and donating a portion of sales of products (no matter how or where they have been produced) to help “distant others” in Africa.

As with all other corporate philanthropy and cause-related marketing, RED is vulnerable to economic downturns, which puts its long-term viability in doubt. The vulnerability of RED to lower sales (of all

products of partner companies, and of RED products in particular) translates into the vulnerability of the beneficiaries of RED contributions. Public aid and philanthropic giving from private foundations (based on endowments) are also vulnerable to economic crises (lower income from taxation, lower value of endowments if stock markets fall), but both are less vulnerable to market fluctuations than corporate philanthropy.

Perhaps ironically, the value of brands, including the RED ethical co-brand will become even more important as consumers try to buy more with less. Individuals may stop donating, but they will continue purchasing products. Thus, instead of mobilizing in response to economic crisis or engaging in some other form of citizen participation, consumers may continue to try to change the world through shopping, with RED leading the revolution. “Instead of making the center marginal, the marginal is diluted and re-invented so that it seamlessly blends with and validates the center. Brand culture, then, provides a context in which consumers enjoy and enact a kind of agency—one that is precisely anticipated by the brand itself, and thus works to perpetuate the seeming inevitability of brand culture” (Banet-Weiser and Lapsansky 2008, 1254). Brands appear inevitable and business seems the obvious solution to solving global problems in a context in which it can be the only solution. Yet, as Patton argues, “AIDS is not a fixed thing, a natural phenomenon that necessarily engenders one response or another” (2002, 25). However, RED produces a virtualism of AIDS treatment in which “lives saved” is sold as a commodity as much as the t-shirts, bracelets, or computers. In doing so, Brand Aid has found a way to generate capitalist value from those persons whose physical and economic abjection places them completely outside of capitalist reproduction.

SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In this book, we argue that RED is the quintessential manifestation of a phenomenon we call “Brand Aid” that brings consumers and branded corporations into international development through celebrity mediation. We also discuss the specific forms that contemporary capitalism

is taking as the context for the operations of RED companies. We have chosen not to frame our arguments explicitly as part of the massive, and increasingly popularized, critique of neoliberalism. This is because we hold some discomfort with the abuse of “neoliberalism” in current political-economy debates, which has drained the term of much of its analytical force (see also Ferguson 2009). Also, we fear that the weight of connecting the diverse strands of our critique into the existing arguments of neoliberalism would flatten the complexity of the dynamics we are elucidating. We do draw on some of the specific examples of grounded critique within this literature (such as the contributions to Collins, di Leonardo, and Williams 2008) in our arguments. And we believe that many of our critiques in this book are, of course, compatible with and supportive of some contemporary criticisms of neoliberalism, and readers for whom this is a meaningful category of analysis are welcome to consider it in those terms. However, we propose Brand Aid as a disruption to what has become an overgeneralized critique of neoliberalism through a focus on an empirical case study.

Greater resonance exists between Brand Aid and the notion of how affective, immaterial but never nonmaterial, labor constitutes the way in which the “value of labor and production is determined deep in the viscera of life” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 365). “Immaterial labor” is the kind of work that takes place within the post-Fordist context, or “the epoch in which information and communication play an essential role in each stage of the process of production” (Lazzarato and Negri 1991, 86). The link between the material and cultural is epitomized by the concept of brand, which we develop in chapter 5. “Immaterial labor might thus be conceived as the labor that produces the informational, cultural, or affective element of the commodity” (Virno and Hardt 1996, 262). The affective laboring process is done simultaneously in RED by celebrities and by “suffering strangers” with AIDS. Together—and not without the critical elements of material, bodily, labor (see Dyer-Witford 2001)—the interplay of these two sides of the virtualism of AIDS treatment produces valuable commodities. In the archetypical example of the Product RED virtualism (see chapter 2), the lives of people with AIDS in Africa that are “saved” are being sold as commodities to Western consumers in whom compassion, a

most unstable emotion (see Sontag 2003), has been aroused, and shopping, with the guarantee of the emotional sovereign of the celebrity, produces the translation of affect into action.

But describing AIDS treatment in Africa as a virtualism does not mean that we believe that ARVs do not work to save the lives of women, children, and men with AIDS in Africa. ARV drugs are indeed an essential part of AIDS treatment for patients all over the world whose HIV virus has become advanced enough to diminish their immune system and to prevent vertical transmission of the virus. However, drugs are not the only significant components of a system of AIDS treatment. Saving lives in Africa begins with the actions and beliefs of the people whose lives are to be saved, and interacts with social, spiritual, medical, and political relationships. These power relationships involve local and global points of both solidarity and conflict. RED's depiction of ARVs as sufficient for saving lives produces a virtualism in which treatment becomes understood only in terms of providing the necessary drugs, and thus, interventions are put into place only to provide drugs. This neglects many of the other important aspects of AIDS prevention, care, and treatment, of overall healthcare for Africans who may or may not have AIDS, and of nonmedical needs for maintaining the social as well as the biological life of a human being.

This book develops a two-pronged perspective toward understanding the political economy of culture as exemplified by Brand Aid through our case study of RED. In doing so, the following chapters aim to balance what are in fact two perspectives that are not easily wed: cultural analysis (interrogating the images of Africa, AIDS, gender, and celebrity that make RED so appealing) and political economy (a materialist analysis of the companies involved and the playing of Brand Aid vis-à-vis ethical standards). Chapters 1 and 2 are most explicitly cultural in their approach, while chapters 3 and 4 are material analyses. Chapter 5 on brands combines the cultural and material in roughly equal proportion. Our conceptual "tool" for weaving together a political economy of culture comes from "Brand Aid," which links together the consumption of products and images (branding) and justifies calls for consumption on the basis of contributing to international development aid.

The first chapter, “Band Aid to Brand Aid: Celebrity Experts and Expert Celebrities,” examines the celebrity modality that is constitutive of Brand Aid. We argue that celebrities are playing a significant role in the global economy, acting as emotional sovereigns and guarantors of accountability and social justice. First, we define the meaning of celebrity and aid celebrity, and then place the involvement of celebrities in diplomatic, humanitarian, and development causes in a brief historical perspective. We argue that through Brand Aid, experts are becoming aid celebrities as their persona and aid work become inseparable. The chapter then analyzes the three celebrities who are the guarantors of the RED initiative: Bono, Jeffrey Sachs, and Paul Farmer. Afterward, we explore the relationship among aid celebrities, their claims to expertise, and their management of affect in international development.

Chapter 2, “The Rock Man’s Burden: Fair Vanity and Virtual Salvation,” studies the representational work of the Product RED campaign. Here we argue that Africa has long been the imagined place where well-meaning westerners could do good for distant others. Then we demonstrate how the RED campaign should be understood as an important player in representing African AIDS.

We describe the virtualism of AIDS treatment in which the privileged provision of drugs is disembedded from the social context or the experiences of Africans living with AIDS. Afterward, we look specifically at visual representations of African AIDS used in RED, and in the *Vanity Fair* Africa Issue. Finally, we explain how the virtualism of AIDS treatment in RED draws together nonsectarian versions of salvation and rebirth, and that these images must be understood within the context of selling images of AIDS in Africa, and using such suffering to sell products.

Chapter 3, “Saving Africa: AIDS and the Rebranding of Aid,” places Brand Aid within the crisis of legitimacy that currently characterizes traditional forms of development aid, particularly that to Africa. We argue that RED and Brand Aid are driven by the need to continue mobilizing public support for “lost causes” and to combat the fatigue of individual philanthropists and institutional donors. We begin by briefly considering the current debates over the usefulness of aid (and of aid to Africa in particular) and the various forms of

aid delivery. Then the chapter examines the aid given in response to the crisis of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and the particular emphasis given to AIDS treatment through the provision of ARV drugs. The Global Fund, the recipient of the RED funds, is analyzed. And finally, RED is examined as an “innovative mechanism” for providing funds to fight AIDS in Africa.

Chapter 4, “Hard Commerce: Corporate Social Responsibility for Distant Others,” studies RED within the large umbrella of activities that constitute CSR. We demonstrate the economic logic behind Brand Aid of protecting capitalist accumulation from the threats posed by engaged activism that seeks to foster greater corporate social responsibility. We start by briefly examining the meanings of CSR, corporate philanthropy, and cause-related marketing. Then we conduct an analysis of the CSR activities of the companies that were RED’s first cohort. We look at whether companies’ activities appear to impact the “normal” functioning of their business or whether they are “disengaged” and work like charity or philanthropy. The chapter charts some of the rules and functioning of the “hard commerce” context in which the RED companies operate, then it compares their CSR profiles, and finally looks at each company’s involvement with RED.

Chapter 5, “Doing Good by Shopping Well: The Rise of ‘Causumer’ Culture,” looks explicitly at RED’s promotion of a “causumer culture” (doing good through shopping) and a particular form of commodity fetishism. This chapter explores one of the book’s key concepts—consumption—and how RED relates to other forms of ethical consumption. Specifically, we examine sustainability labels and certifications. Then we move on to analyze branding and how the ()^{RED} embrace can be a good co-branding investment. Finally, the chapter articulates the relationship between RED and commodity fetishism in its promotion of causumer culture to save Africa. We argue that not only are the social relations of RED commodities obscured, but that these social relations stem from and enable continuing forms of dispossession. Brand Aid as a strategy protects companies’ brands from ethical attack while producing value from the commodification of “lives saved.”

The Conclusion, “Celebrities, Consumers, and Everyone Else,” offers insights on the exemplary case of RED and what it might teach us

about Brand Aid. Brand Aid is skillfully tapping into a growing constituency of Western consumers who want to be part of changing the world. Within the context of global capitalism, Brand Aid is a response for brands to do more good and for aid to be done better. Within Brand Aid, aid celebrities serve as the guarantors of the development interventions and as the totemic representations of consumers' desire to help. Brand Aid comes at a time when development aid, especially aid to Africa, suffers from poor public perception and is in need of rebranding, and when business is a popular solution for the problems ailing aid. Brand Aid is a gaunt form of CSR that focuses on distant and disengaged initiatives. Increasing consumption, of the appropriate kind, is at the core of Brand Aid. And when Brand Aid is given, it is to recipients who are worthy of the compassion of consumers, through simple but effective interventions that work at a sufficient distance not to risk intermingling the shoppers and the helpers.