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Perceived mobility of impact: global elites and the bono effect

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine how the globally mobile elite (GME) uses its capital and networks to create a perception that market-driven solutions to social problems are superior to the efforts of government and civil society.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on a number of emerging literatures, the authors introduce and develop the concept of the “perceived mobility of impact” and use the case of the “Bono effect” to illustrate how this phenomenon is enacted. The authors then employ a critical lens to challenge the consequences of this perceived mobility of impact.

Findings – Global elites use their mobility to generate network capital, which in conjunction with celebrity affinity for global humanitarian causes builds a self-reinforcing consensus and legitimizes market-driven solutions to social problems. While this approach may make the GME feel generous about their contribution, it raises questions about accountability and representation in shaping global social policy.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on the GME, offering a unique critical perspective on their motives and actions, and introduces the concept of ‘perceived mobility of impact’.

Keywords Neoliberalism, Mobility, Global elites, Network capital, Philanthrocapitalism

Paper type Conceptual paper

Described interchangeably as an ideology, a strong discourse, a Utopian project, a policy package and a naturally occurring phenomenon (Bourdieu, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Rachleff, 2006; Steger and Roy, 2010), neoliberalism is characterized by processes such as the privatization and deregulation of publicly held resources and institutions, the extension of various forms of free trade agreements, and the discrediting of government assistance (Harvey, 2005). The key tenets of neoliberalism are individualism, the free flow of capital and the centrality of market exchange in society, which results in a form of global governance that upholds a *laissez-faire* economic system (Steger and Roy, 2010) and represents “a programme of the methodical destruction of collectives” (Bourdieu, 1998).

One of the deepest convictions borne of neoliberalism is a faith in transnational corporations (TNCs) and, ultimately, the market to solve social problems that were once considered to be the primary domain of the state (Sklair, 2002). A growing body of scholarly work emphasizes the power of TNCs under neoliberalism (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Haslam, 2007; Steger and Roy, 2010), the status of individuals who



amass and move capital through the leadership and ownership of TNCs and the sociopolitical infrastructure that supports them (Carroll, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Sklair, 2001). What is less widely studied, however, is the process by which wealthy and powerful individuals pursue a neoliberal agenda for social change.

In this paper, we introduce the concept of perceived mobility of impact to explain how globally mobile elites (GMEs) utilize their capital and their networks to create a perception that market-driven solutions to global social problems are superior to the efforts of government and civil society. We then use the case of the Bono effect (Carnegy, 2002; Cooper, 2012) to exemplify how this system is enacted. To develop our concept, we draw on a number of emerging literatures, including the GME (Carroll, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Wedel, 2009), network capital (Elliott and Urry, 2010; Urry, 2012), global contact zones (Yeoh and Willis, 2005), global elite conferences (Carroll, 2010; Carroll and Carson, 2003; Graz, 2003; Richardson *et al.*, 2011), global philanthropy (Hay and Muller, 2013; Morvaridi, 2012; Newland *et al.*, 2010), celebrity humanitarianism (Bell, 2013; Cooper, 2008; Kapoor, 2012; Tsaliki *et al.*, 2011; Yrjola, 2009) and philanthrocapitalism (Bishop and Green, 2008; Bosworth, 2011; Edwards, 2008).

In short, we argue that the GME use their mobility to generate network capital at elite conferences, which in conjunction with celebrity affinity for global humanitarian causes builds a self-reinforcing consensus that legitimizes market-driven or philanthrocapitalist solutions to social problems. Our overarching goal is to understand and critique how global elites create a perception that deploying their vast and unbounded private wealth is the most effective way to address global social problems such as poverty, disease and environmental degradation. While this approach may make the GME feel generous about their contributions, it raises serious questions about accountability and representation in shaping global social policy.

Neoliberalism and its instruments: the global elite

Neoliberalism builds its stronghold from “the political and economic power of [an elite] whose interests it expresses” (Bourdieu, 1998). The growing influence of this semi-organized network of individuals from business, government, academia, civil society and the media has gained the attention of scholars in the USA over the past several decades. Whether designated as the “power elite” (Mills, 1956), the “old boy network” (Rogers, 1988), the “inner circle” (Useem, 1984) or the “upper class” (Domhoff, 2009), the notion of a geographically centered, cross-sector elite has also infiltrated the popular media, even in the ostensibly classless American society. Mechanisms such as attendance at elite universities, memberships in country clubs and secret societies, engagement in politics and interlocking directorates serve to build, maintain and reinforce the ties among the individuals who comprise the American elite (Domhoff, 2009; Mills, 1956; Rogers, 1988; Useem, 1984).

Increasingly, hyper-globalization is dismantling the *locus* of power of the economic elite, traditionally situated in North America, and is dispersing that power across the globe (Carroll, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Rothkopf, 2008). Because of the geographic shifts in the accumulation and flow of capital under neoliberalism, more recent scholarship has coined terms such as the transnational capitalist class (Carroll, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Sklair, 2001), the Bilderberg people (Richardson *et al.*, 2011), the Davos man (Huntington, 2004) and the superclass (Rothkopf, 2008) to describe wealthy global citizens who lack alignment with any one country and have social ties across the globe,

based on capital, education, interests and activities rather than on geography (Brown and Lauder, 2009). Scholars have long debated the composition of the global elite. Working in the power structure tradition, Carroll (2010) focused primarily on interlocking directorates and capital accumulation as signifiers of the elite. Sklair (2001) argued that the transnational class is more broadly constituted, consisting of four factions: owners and controllers of TNCs; global politicians and bureaucrats; globally oriented technical professionals and those involved in global trade, media and advertising. Similarly, Rothkopf (2008) identified over 6,000 individuals from around the world as the superclass, and included the highest-ranking figures in the largest companies, banks and investment firms and the most influential leaders in government, the military, media, religion and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in his list. In this paper, we adopt Sklair's (2001) broader definition of the global elite.

While it is difficult to define precisely who constitutes the global elite, scholars agree that this group can be characterized by their commitment to neoliberalism (Robinson, 2011; Sklair, 2001; Steger and Roy, 2010) and their spatial and political identification with the global system rather than with their localities (Robinson and Harris, 2000; Rothkopf, 2008). As agents of neoliberalism, members of the global elite serve as "cross-pollinating institutional nomads" and "flexions" (Wedel, 2009, p. 193) because of their ability to move in and out of multiple roles in the landscapes of global governance. They move deftly between the public and private sectors, maneuvering among roles as government advisors, business consultants, think tank intellectuals and media pundits to serve their own group's interests (Wedel, 2009). Such agency demands movement, and through movement, the development of vast networks that connect the nodes of global capital (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Mobility and network capital

The ability to move about quickly and freely in a globalized world is a key indicator of global stratification (Elliott and Urry, 2010; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Nomadic and extraterritorial elites are characterized not only by their wealth, but also by their unique relationship to space and time (Bauman, 1998). The GME is untethered to place, unlike most of humanity, and can move about seamlessly, without scrutiny or penalty (Bauman, 1998). Speed of movement also exemplifies stratification: how quickly one moves through an airport, for example, conveys one's status (Bauman, 1998). Those who travel first-class have access to amenities such as complimentary limousine services, special lounges and early boarding and can even pay extra for an iris scanning system that fast-tracks them through security, immigration and customs (Miles, 2011). Thus, a distinguishing feature that the GME share is frictionless mobility (Smith and Favell, 2006), allowing them to connect and reconnect with one another across time and space (Elliott and Urry, 2010).

According to Bourdieu (1999, p. 27), "capital makes it possible to keep undesirable persons at a distance at the same time that it brings closer desirable persons and things." The capacity to connect and reconnect with "desirable persons," via frictionless mobility, is an emergent form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1999) that is best described as network capital (Urry, 2012). Network capital is an accumulation of tacit knowledge that allows an individual to create and sustain social relations with those who are like them but not necessarily proximate, which in turn generates emotional, financial and practical benefit (Elliott and Urry, 2010; Urry, 2012). The concept of network capital

conveys the way that co-presence and trust, as the components of strong network ties, can be generated at a distance by those with means in the global economy (Urry, 2012).

A pertinent aspect of network capital is that it allows one to escape and be elsewhere, offering “the capacity to thwart whatever debilitating circumstances arise within local contexts” (Elliott and Urry, 2010, p. 79). The higher one resides in the global hierarchy, the more detached one is from local circumstances and the more connected one is to the global elite network. As they are dispatched internationally from city to city, the GME move from one expatriate enclave to another, avoiding local obligation and tending primarily to their global community. This feature of network capital breeds a lack of loyalty and commitment to place, and an increased commitment to the global community that surrounds (Elliott and Urry, 2010).

To be rich in network capital, then, mobility is a necessity. While phone calls, text messages, email and videoconferencing are essential practices for staying in touch with members of one’s network, technology does not afford the same depth of connection as co-presence (Urry, 2012). Consequently, building network capital entails extensive travel and meetings, which require substantial resources of time, objects, access and emotion. Networking is a resource-intensive form of work, and mobile lives involve the planning, holding and interpreting of meetings of many different types (Elliott and Urry, 2010). In sum, “transnational elite networks are not immaculately conceived; they are the products of design” (Richardson *et al.*, 2011, p. 2) and, thus, face-to-face gatherings are a vital part of network capital formation for the GME.

The global meeting as contact zone

As Carroll and Carson (2003, p. 31) point out:

[...] the articulation of a transnational capitalist interest requires sites beyond the boardrooms – places where business leaders can come together to discuss issues of shared concern, to find common ground and to devise strategies for action.

Network capital among the GME is built in the contact zones of global capitalism, in spaces that facilitate alliances and face-to-face interactions with people traveling across national borders (Pratt, 1992; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). These contact zones represent “an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt, 1992, p. 7), denoting both a sense of embodied presence within geographical space as well as a social and cultural metaphor. For the GME, contact zones are the *locus* for building network capital and can take the form of intentional meetings such as conferences and conventions or informal and happenstance gatherings that occur in the spaces of the vast mobile institutional infrastructure (Freeland, 2011).

Intentional meetings create a structured setting for the creation of a global governance system that builds on and reinforces the logic of neoliberalism. In their study of the network of global corporations and elite policy groups, Carroll and Carson (2003) focused on five organizations that have come to comprise a field of transnational policy formation, two with long histories and three whose origins lie within the contemporary wave of economic globalization: the International Chamber of Commerce; the Bilderberg conference; the Trilateral Commission; the World Economic Forum (WEF); and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. From this study, Carroll and Carson (2003) found that a well-integrated, highly influential global

corporate elite has formed, and that the meetings of global policy groups have been instrumental in its formation.

The WEF and other global conferences, as contact zones where network capital is built, serve to “reinforce the formation of an overall capitalist class consciousness” (Graz, 2003, p. 24) by cultivating, reinforcing and disseminating consensus among the GME. By drawing a clear line between those included and those excluded, global conferences rely on a vast gulf between those sufficiently powerful to interact behind closed doors and those having no place in such exclusive arenas. Moreover, the mobilization of creative and powerful forces takes place in a confined and privatized space entirely cut off from the public sphere. Due to the economic, political and social positions of power held by the participants, the privatized environment of global conferences epitomizes the rising importance of non-state actors in world politics (Graz, 2003).

The WEF’s annual meeting in Davos is the most exclusive, powerful and established meeting of the GME. Participation is by invitation only and the cost of attending is approximately US \$40,000 (Armstrong, 2013). Invitees represent a wide range of institutions divided into a hierarchy of component bodies that include: the chief executive officers of the top 1,000 TNCs, who are known as Foundation Members and form the core of the WEF; representatives from 100 of the most influential media groups worldwide, who are dubbed World Media Leaders; key policymakers from national governments around the world and representatives from international organizations, who are called World Economic Leaders; and select academics and experts from political, economic, scientific, social and technological fields, who are designated as Forum Fellows (Carroll and Carson, 2003). The WEF is also notable for the presence of celebrities, social entrepreneurs and philanthropists.

Although it was once considered to be a bastion of free-market, conservative thought, in the past decade, the WEF has changed course “to establish ‘global initiatives’ that distinguish it as the most paradigmatic example of neo-liberal structuralism” (Carroll and Carson, 2003, p. 35). By the mid-1990s, this new focus produced a project on human social responsibility, followed by a number of social issue task forces such as the *Global Health Initiative* and the *Global Governance Initiative* (Carroll and Carson, 2003). In the new millennium, discussions at the WEF have focused primarily around key issues of global concern, such as international conflicts, poverty and environmental problems and possible solutions (Graz, 2003; Rachman, 2011). These new priorities align well with the increasingly widespread practice of corporate social responsibility among TNCs, the rise of the discourses of global corporate citizenship (Carroll and Carson, 2003) and business as an agent of world benefit (Maak and Pless, 2009).

Philanthrocapitalism, celebrities and perceived mobility of impact

The prevalence of social issues on the WEF agenda parallels the emergence of a trend in charitable giving branded the “California consensus” (Morvaridi, 2012) and more popularly known as “philanthrocapitalism”. Described as philanthropy aligned with for-profit capital markets, philanthrocapitalism applies techniques drawn from the private sector to solve social problems and speaks in the discourse of investors and social return (Bishop and Green, 2008). Philanthrocapitalists are wary of NGOs and non-profit organizations, believing that they perform far below their potential and should be replaced by the private sector (Edwards, 2008). Thus,

philanthrocapitalism is the means by which the GME consensus of doing social good through market-based initiatives is expressed and enacted. Celebrity participation in and endorsement of this consensus grants it legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

The philanthrocapitalist movement has its origin in the immense wealth built by advanced computer and telecommunications technologies, novel financial products and the global entertainment industry (Edwards, 2008; Morvaridi, 2012). The beneficiaries of this wealth – primarily entrepreneurs and venture capitalists – who by virtue of their success gained a great faith in market mechanisms, decided that if programs to alleviate poverty and eradicate disease are to be effective, they must measure success in financial terms. At the same time, they realized they could also increase their own fortunes along the way (Edwards, 2008). Bosworth (2011) describes today's philanthrocapitalists as having royal status, glamorized for their innovation and risk-taking in expressing a doing well by doing good philosophy.

Another strong driver of the philanthrocapitalism movement has been the rise of celebrities who seek to affect social change and conduct diplomacy using the wealth achieved through their entertainment ventures (Bishop and Green, 2008; Cooper, 2012; Tsaliki *et al.*, 2011; Yrjola, 2009, 2012). Over the past 15 years, entertainers such as Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Elton John, George Clooney, Mia Farrow, Robert Redford, Sharon Stone and Sting have devoted significant amounts of their time and resources to promote humanitarian agendas. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, for example, established The Maddox Jolie-Pitt Foundation to assist with humanitarian crises worldwide. To launch the foundation, the couple donated \$1 million to Doctors Without Borders and Global Action for Children. Jolie was also named a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador. In this capacity, she has traveled on field missions to meet with refugees in more than 20 countries, including Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Cambodia (Cooper, 2012; de Waal, 2008).

To understand how philanthrocapitalism flourishes among the GME, we introduce the concept of “perceived mobility of impact”. This concept captures the process by which the GME use their mobility to generate network capital at elite conferences which, in conjunction with celebrity affinity for global humanitarian causes, builds a self-reinforcing consensus that legitimizes market-driven solutions to global social problems. Perceived mobility of impact is characterized by a hubristic belief that capital gained in the global marketplace can be mobilized and deployed around the world for social benefit more effectively than the resources of governments or civil society. Consequently, members of the GME view themselves to be a force for good in the global arena, as they espouse a commitment to public interest and social responsibility (Sklair, 2001).

The concept of perceived mobility of impact offers a consolidation of several burgeoning research threads, as it pulls together newly emerging ideas articulated in the areas of mobility studies (Elliott and Urry, 2010), elite influence (Richardson *et al.*, 2011), global philanthropy and humanitarianism (Newland *et al.*, 2010; Tsaliki *et al.*, 2011) and critical geography (Harvey, 2006). Hay and Muller (2013), for example, call for more geographical work on the super-rich and their patterns of philanthropic giving, and this concept will hopefully help to stimulate such research. Likewise, Newland *et al.* (2010) implicitly make the case for better understanding of cross-border philanthropy through an emphasis on market-based philanthropists, strategically employed philanthropy and increased global mobility.

To offer an example of how this perceived mobility of impact is enacted by a celebrity GME, we use the case of the “Bono effect” (Carnegy, 2002; Cooper, 2012).

Perceived mobility of impact: the case of the Bono effect

No celebrity exemplifies the perceived mobility of impact more than the Irish rock star Paul Hewson, better known as Bono. With three Nobel Peace Prize nominations and an honorary knighthood for his humanitarian work, he is one of the most influential celebrity activists in the fight against poverty, hunger and promoting international debt relief. Bono helped create the ONE Campaign, Debt AIDS Trade Africa (DATA), (RED) (detailed below) and EDUN, an organic clothing company with the mission to drive sustainable employment in developing countries. Moreover, he was named the most politically effective celebrity of all time by the *National Journal* and held the top spot on *Forbes’* Generous Celebrity List for his humanitarian work worldwide (de Waal, 2008; Falksohn, 2006; Farrell, 2012).

Bono’s fame as a rock star grants him access to the spaces of power, brings him to the attention of world leaders and allows him one-on-one meetings with heads of corporations and states (Farrell, 2012; Yrjola, 2009). His persona as a rock star also contributes to his perceived outsider status as a political activist; he exists independently from mainstream political institutions, a non-partisan who is able to work with labor or conservatives, democrats or republicans. In an interview with Fox News, George W. Bush stated that Bono and he “became pals because we shared a common desire to help others on the continent of Africa. Bono’s the real deal” (Glueck, 2013). Contrary to Bono’s cool attire and his representation as a detached political outsider, however, he is part of a network of corporate interests that are ideologically driven by a belief that market methods can provide solutions to social problems (Bell, 2013; Farrell, 2012).

More than other celebrity philanthropist, Bono has built extensive network capital that he utilizes to rally the GME around his preferred causes. What Bono appears to comprehend more than any other celebrity is that international meetings create a perfect site for his brand of public advocacy (Bell, 2013). He frequents the contact zones of network capital, regularly attending the WEF meetings and G8 summits, constantly interacting with prominent members of the corporate and political elite (Carnegy, 2002; Farrell, 2012). For example, he:

[...] has so much clout that he has no trouble gaining access to some of the world’s most powerful leaders [...] to campaign on behalf of more justice and more charitable giving (Falksohn, 2006, p. 1).

In addition, he has aligned himself with “star” academics such as US economist Jeffrey Sachs, who has become a global spokesperson for poverty reduction, particularly in Africa (Dieter and Kumar, 2008).

Bono’s ability to influence GME attitudes toward social causes has been dubbed the “Bono effect” (Carnegy, 2002; Cooper, 2012). The use of this term dates back to the 2002 WEF meeting when Bono shared a platform with Nobel peace prize-winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel and the foreign minister of Afghanistan to debate foreign aid solutions. Since that moment, the term “Bono effect” has referred to the phenomenon whereby celebrities provide GMEs with a high-profile model to emulate and offer a populist recognition and legitimacy they are

unable to generate on their own (Cooper, 2008). Celebrities and their managers know how to engage effectively with the media in a way that business leaders and diplomats may not, providing access to diverse audiences through a myriad of channels and nontraditional media outlets (Cooper, 2008, 2012). Moreover, they know how to network in a broad and systematic fashion, presenting the GME with varied avenues for investor solicitation. Most importantly, celebrities provide the GME with a focus for public empathy, an emotional interpretation of a social cause or situation for which the general public has little knowledge or understanding (Cooper, 2012; de Waal, 2008).

A conspicuous example of the Bono effect at play, whereby Bono influenced the GME to donate to a philanthrocapitalist venture, is the initiative known as (RED) (Farrell, 2012; Yrjola, 2009). (RED) was launched in January 2006 as the brainchild of Bono and Bobby Shriver, the former mayor of Santa Monica, California and member of the Kennedy dynasty. According to its Web site, (RED) promotes itself as a “business model” and a “simple idea that transforms our collective power as shoppers into a financial force that helps those affected by AIDS in Africa.” Bono and Shriver have enlisted some of the world’s most iconic brands as partners, including American Express, Apple, Dell, Gap, Nike and Starbucks, among others. These partners produce and sell (RED)-branded products and then donate 50 per cent of their profits to HIV and AIDS programs in Africa.

Heralding this act of philanthrocapitalism, Bono stressed that (RED) is a commercial venture and not merely philanthropy (Weber, 2006). As such, Bono chose the 2006 WEF meeting to launch the campaign, where he was surrounded by members of the GME, instead of a rock concert where he would have been surrounded by fans and consumers. At the time, media commentators expressed surprise that Bono turned out to be “a card-carrying capitalist” (Bishop, 2006), given his rock star and activist identities. Thus, Bono was able to market (RED) to corporate leaders as a political act and a way to demonstrate their company’s philanthropic prowess by associating it with his activist credibility and star power.

Through participation in celebrity philanthrocapitalist ventures such as (RED), global elites identify themselves as popular and agile networkers and as social do-gooders with the perceived power to effect large-scale change in distant locales. Thus, the GME possess both a sense of empowerment and, arguably, a degree of self-delusion. As opposed to heroic, they can be thought of as “vain agents overemphasizing their ability to transform the world” (Graz, 2003: 337) by engaging in ventures that “are not acts of material generosity so much as ones of intellectual and managerial hubris” (Bosworth, 2011: 387). Below, we address this latter perspective by problematizing the concept of perceived mobility of impact.

Social implications of the perceived mobility of impact

Early on in our philanthropic journey, my wife and I became aware of something I started to call Philanthropic Colonialism. I noticed that a donor had the urge to “save the day” in some fashion. People (including me) who had very little knowledge of a particular place would think that they could solve a local problem. Whether it involved farming methods, education practices, job training or business development, over and over I would hear people discuss transplanting what worked in one setting directly into another with little regard for culture, geography or societal norms (Buffett, 2013, p. 1).

Product (RED) and similar distal philanthrocapitalist engagements place the GME at the helm of global social initiatives. Yet, celebrities and their corporate counterparts lack a public mandate to become active in global politics; they are self-appointed. This unintended role raises the question of why the GME should be the key decision-makers concerning global social good. Some critics of philanthrocapitalism question the agenda-setting and policymaking powers that accrue to corporate leaders and celebrities who may be ill-equipped to tackle the global governance responsibilities that accompany their forays into large-scale social ventures (Rogers, 2011). Criticism has therefore emerged concerning celebrity and corporate GME's lack of legitimacy and accountability, as well as the effectiveness of ventures they promote.

While neoliberalism and its market-based solutions can be enormously productive in the material sense, techniques that boost productivity in the corporate world may not be successful in the public sector (Bosworth, 2011). The GME are "so convinced of their transcendental objectives, and so convinced of the enlightened nature of their worldview, that they fail to recognize it as inherently partisan" (Richardson *et al.*, 2011, p. 214). Thus, the GME may display great conceit in believing that their knowledge of money and markets translates into an ability to implement large-scale social change. This mindset is often driven by the:

[...] need to find technological solutions, the same "fix-the-problem" mentality that allowed [these GME] to succeed as hedge-fund managers, capital-market investors, or software-developers (Ramdas, 2011, p. 1).

Because of this technical, metrics-driven emphasis, many philanthrocapitalists neglect to include social experts in their endeavors, instead hire management consultants or industry lobbyists (Ramdas, 2011).

Another problem with GME's distal social impact ventures is that they offer overly simplistic solutions for social problems, lacking the depth or complexity for instilling deep-rooted change (Dieter and Kumar, 2008; Yrjola, 2009, 2012). This simplicity is not necessarily benign; it can be dangerous and may worsen a crisis situation by prolonging it and preventing the population from helping itself (Dieter and Kumar, 2008; Farrell, 2012; McGoey, 2012). The objectives and ambitions of the GME do not necessarily coincide with those of intended beneficiaries (Newland *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, these ventures often neglect to address the needed social reforms to create long-lasting and sustainable social change (Edwards, 2008). For example, Bill Gates' foray into education reform in the USA, "refuses to review the broader social impact of the economic system" that has been contributing to the demise of public education (Bosworth, 2011, p. 387).

At the same time, as failing to create long-lasting change, the GME undertaking these global social impact ventures do not acknowledge the irony that some of their members accumulated their wealth on the backs of the people they are trying to serve through their social initiatives (Farrell, 2012; Kapoor, 2012; Morvaridi, 2012). Moreover, violence, economic inequality, labor abuse and ill-health outcomes – some of the social ills that these philanthrocapitalists purport to be addressing – are perpetuated by the neoliberal policies and practices that allowed the GME to achieve great financial success (McGoey, 2012). In examining India's recent rapid growth in GMEs, for example, it appears that the same factors that "helped create the billionaires may have also exacerbated social injustice and inequality, malnutrition, and disempowerment for millions of poor people" (Ramdas, 2011, p. 1).

Is such giving, then, merely a means to sooth the GME's conscience (Hay and Muller, 2013; Morvaridi, 2012)? Buffett (2013), son of billionaire philanthropist Warren Buffett, would respond affirmatively, labeling such philanthropy as "conscience laundering". In this light, initiatives such as (RED) can be viewed through a postcolonial lens (Prasad, 2003; Said, 1993) whereby African people become victims of poverty and disease, social problems which seemingly emerged from unfortunate circumstances having nothing to do with the global economic conditions caused by neoliberalism (Bell, 2013). RED is built upon the mass purchase of consumer goods, which ultimately makes it an accessory to the global economic conditions that contributed to the HIV/AIDS crisis (Bell, 2013). Nonetheless, consumers of (RED) products can feel proud that their purchase is helping to civilize and modernize the insubordinate global South (Yrjola, 2009).

In the same vein of postcolonial critique, many of the social impact ventures of the GME also lead to a simplistic dichotomizing of the world into north-south, developed-less developed and core-periphery in terms of projected impact. These dichotomized categories are, for the most part, no longer valid, and their perpetuation represents a superficial and historicized view of development (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Prasad, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Said, 1993). In addition, the GME have an increasing ability to manipulate space so as to create enclaves and insulate themselves from local have-nots (Robinson, 2011). Because of this insulation, and because of the potential global recognition and access gained through their vast network capital, GMEs often neglect to consider that there are local social problems that need to be addressed. Why tackle HIV prevention in your home city's hospital when you can more glamorously try to save all the AIDS victims in Africa? Bono, in adhering to this dichotomized perspective, constructs Africa as a grand canvass eternally lacking, sitting in waiting for the arrival of Westerners' ethical values and good deeds (Yrjola, 2012). Bell (2013, p. 1) explains how celebrity GME conceive themselves as "redeemers of distant Others" and how this philanthropic role weaves in with a celebrity's media persona to create the "White Saviour", a compelling image of cultural authority.

Looking at the bigger picture, global social impact ventures arguably subordinate democratic process because a wealthy few select their favorite causes, dominate decision-making and conceivably shape society in ways they believe are appropriate (Edwards, 2008; McGoey, 2012). It also poses a threat to civil society groups that work for social change, as a displacement effect occurs in philanthropy "drawing precious resources away from activities like advocacy and community organizing which have a proven record in tackling deep-rooted issues of power and inequality" (Edwards, 2011, p. 90). Morvaridi (2012), in his analysis of corporate and elite philanthropy in the New Green Revolution in sub-Saharan Africa, takes a Gramscian hegemonic perspective on these ventures, illustrating how they support the domination of government and civil society by capitalists. Thus, GME philanthropic ventures replace local giving and caring behaviors with market competition and financial incentives, emphasize provision over reform and result in a decline in local participation (Edwards, 2008).

Conclusion: practical alternatives and research directions

In this paper, we have proposed a new concept to explain how a segment of the GME use the contact zones of global meetings and the imprimatur of co-present celebrities to craft, implement and legitimize a neoliberal agenda for social change. We call this phenomenon perceived mobility of impact and use the case of the Bono effect to

illustrate how it is enacted. We conclude that the dominance of private wealth and authority in shaping global social policy raises broad concerns about accountability and representation (Cooper, 2012). Moreover, the neoliberal development model has led to negative outcomes including unsustainable consumption patterns and a global financial crisis. And yet, even as these problems become overtly apparent, the GME are eager to employ the same approach in their attempts to solve social ills (Ramdas, 2011). Rather than offering reparation for the flaws of neoliberal development, GME-driven social ventures require adherence to that same system's ideology.

GME social ventures can be challenged and investigated by practitioners and scholars alike. There are numerous possible paths forward. One practical direction involves encouraging participation by the beneficiaries of GME largesse in decisions that affect their lives and societies and fostering partnerships with experts from civil society and government groups. While this approach is already occurring as TNCs attempt to engage NGOs and local communities (Yaziji and Doh, 2009; USA Institute for Peace, 2013), collaboration may reinforce and perpetuate the status quo. For example, Harvey (2006, pp. 52-53) argues that NGOs "tend to be elitist, unaccountable, and distant from those they seek to protect [...] and prefer direct negotiation with or influence over state and class power." In fact, the perceived mobility of impact phenomenon may also be observed within transnational civil society. Since the Great Recession, for example, some celebrities have chosen to attend the World Social Forum (WSF) in lieu of the WEF (Rachman, 2011). Even before the financial crisis, scholars have critiqued the WSF as replicating some of the same dynamics of the WEF (Huish, 2006).

Given the critiques of philanthrocapitalism, NGO-corporate partnerships and alternative global gatherings like the WSF (Edwards, 2008; Harvey, 2006; Huish, 2006), more organic forms of organizing may have the potential to pursue deeper transformation. Social movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the revolutions of the Arab Spring are recent examples of large-scale popular mobilizations advocating structural change. At the same time and entirely under the radar, alternatives are emerging on the micro-level through the "independent, self-organizing power of individuals and small communities" (Scott, 2012, p. 21). An example is the phenomenon of migrant cosmopolitanism (Kothari, 2008). In a world of porous borders and constant movement, migrant cosmopolitans are globally mobile non-elites who band together to form autonomous local networks for mutual social and economic benefit (Kothari, 2008). These "informal, transient networks of coordination [...] do not require formal organization, let alone hierarchy" (Scott, 2012, p. 21).

Having briefly explored practical alternatives, we will conclude with some directions for future research. Despite the GME's faith in metrics such as social return on investment, the actual impact of their ventures may not be as grand as advertised and may likely be more harmful. However, empirical research is needed to understand actual social impact versus perceived social impact. Just as Sklair (2001) and Carroll (2010) paved the way in delineating the composition of the global elite and the networks in which they operate, scholars have a role to play in understanding the dimensions and dynamics of network capital, as they apply to developing GME-driven social ventures. For example, are the networks of celebrity and business elites who engage in philanthrocapitalist projects fixed or fluid? What other venues exist where business and celebrity GMEs mingle and shape policy responses? What discourses emerge from these interactions to help form and reinforce a consensus? What is the nature of the distrust

among philanthrocapitalists and NGOs? These questions only begin to scratch the surface of a potential research agenda to study the antecedents and consequences of perceived mobility of impact.

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Further reading

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