Afterword

The book *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development* came together faster than anything I have ever written. The first draft emerged in a whirlwind of writing, reading and ideas at the end of 2012. It could do so because I was living undisturbed in the backwaters of rural Tanzania. I was going through the slow process of setting up research permissions and contacts during a period of sabbatical research, and had time to write. I put the MS down after completing all but the concluding chapter and settled into the sort of traditional anthropological programme of research that I first began in this country in 1995. I visited homes, listened to histories, participated in meetings and the business of day-to-day life, enjoyed happenchance discussions and just ‘hanging out’. I tried learn Iraqw (my wife’s mother-tounge) which proved to be one of the most complex and obstreperous languages I have ever encountered. The work gave my neighbours a time to quiz me on all sorts of issues – what development means to my compatriots, why do we have so much of it, what do Europeans think of Africa (it was embarrassing answering that one), what I was doing here, and why I could not pronounce easy words like ‘garmawookágheéke’.

All of this gave me a useful distance from the celebrity advocacy that I had been writing about and made the actual business of living in ‘developing’ countries more prominent in my mind. I am not claiming any special empathetic insight as a result of this time in Tanzania. Empathy is not my strong point. Nor am I claiming the authority of any ‘authentic’ experience of living through the challenging experiences of life in the rural South. Mine was a comfortable existence, indeed princely by local standards. I was drawing my University salary and staying in a large comfortable house with decent water supplies, electricity and my own quiet office space. My point is just that this research on a topic far-removed from celebrity put this book in a different perspective.

One of the joys of anthropological fieldwork is that it does not just look at the world through the lens of ‘poverty’ or ‘development’. Many of my more elderly neighbours here grew up in times when their status and fortune was reflected in the vigour of their families, farming and herds. Land, I am told, was plentiful. The forest rivers draining Mt Hanang behind us were full and clean. There were few schools and hospitals, no tarred road or phone coverage. The infrastructure required for a prosperous state was even more parlous than it is now. But elders here did not necessarily define themselves according to modern criteria involving education, large brick houses, aluminium roofs or electricity. They may well have been ‘undeveloped’, but they were not poor.

There are still elements of that condition present. What the Wilsons, working in this country decades ago, called ‘an enlargement of scale’ in people’s worldviews and terms of reference is still unfolding.1 Indigenous definitions of wealth and poverty still apply, and apply differently from the framework imposed by the development industries.

But it is also true that many people’s scales here are now large. They compare themselves to the northern lifestyles portrayed in films and western music videos shown constantly in the smallest settlements, and aspire to different futures from their grandparents. Modernity has been promulgated by the Tanzanian state for over 50 years. Modern understandings of the good life, and of poverty, have been internalised.
Most of my neighbours want ‘development’. An anthropology of life here is also an anthropology of poverty.

The vast majority of people here know that they do not have ‘uwezo’ (means) that the ‘watajiri’ (the rich) in the village are few, and have, comparatively speaking, comfortable and easy lives. They know that getting their children through school, or to clinics and struggling with the dictates of farm labour is hard. Few would call themselves ‘maskini’ (poor), but many recognise that they have to have strategies to become more prosperous (young households) or to delay the decline as their powers wane (the older homes).

So when I came to write the conclusion of this book, doing so was depressing, for all that is missing in it. For I could not summarise from all this research that celebrity advocacy for international development makes any noticeable difference to public attitudes towards development, towards cosmopolitanism and the needs of distant strangers. It has made only a limited difference to the structures of global society and economy which produce poverty and inequality. It has not effectively challenged the thinking and ideas which have continually made it so difficult for poorer countries to pursue viable and coherent development policies.

I would love it to be otherwise. I would love celebrity advocacy to be producing deeper and stronger responses among increasing numbers of the British public. I would love politicians to be listening to NGO messages and lobbying in a way which made a significant difference to economic relations between rich and poor countries. I would love corporate relationships with celebrities and NGOs to be defined by a deep and rigorous concern for others, rather than their deep and rigorous concern for brand. I would love it because these are good things to achieve, whatever the actual personalities involved might be like.

I feel strongly because I write this Afterword still surrounded by the evidence of decades of poverty and failed development and with my notebooks and brain full of the stories of people who have had to live with it. My children’s primary school has classrooms with holes in the walls for windows, no electricity and a shortage of teachers. We have lost my sister-in-law (to AIDS-related complications), and her granddaughter (to pneumonia at just two weeks old) while living here. All around us on the farms most people’s time is consumed tending maize and bean fields with hand hoes. Any shortage of labour through sickness, drunkenness or failings in social networks will mean suffering later in the year, for there is no social security or other safety net here. Mentally and physically handicapped children in neighbouring houses, and their families, have no state provision to assist them. Local government institutions are locally renowned for their weakness and failings.

I am surrounded too by stories of resilience and self-reliance, of homes carefully husbanding their resources, planning their families, investing in assets, working hard on their farms, borrowing money to invest in business, setting up loaning associations and, as we say here ‘wanapambana na maisha’ – they are taking life by the horns. Few people go hungry, many are investing in good houses and children’s education. There is colour, laughter, fun, relaxation, freedom and delight in so much of what we do day-by-day. The home-built church just five minutes from our house rings with song and
drumbeats on many evenings, and much of the night over the weekend, drowning out the hyenas calling from the forest reserve. But there is also poverty. This is a part of the world which has much to gain from fair and effective development and international economic policies.

I am under no illusion that prosperity buys happiness, or that it is likely to reduce intra-country inequality here. Nor will it fix the problematic family relations and qualities of character that shape so strongly the immediate experience and causes of poverty here. But I would still dearly love something powerful, enduring and effective to transform the prospects of my children’s friends, and to make the old age of my friends and relatives here as secure as mine is likely to be.

Having examined how celebrity advocacy in so much detail, and having explored the development problems it tries to tackle, I find much of the complaint and carping against celebrity dissatisfying. It does not matter how annoying Bono is, or how rich he or any other celebrities happen to be; it does not matter how stupid Geri Halliwell sounds every time she opens her mouth; how much nausea *Hello! Magazine* induces, or how ludicrously luxurious Elton John’s white tie parties are.\textsuperscript{iv} What matters, the only thing that matters, is the difference celebrity advocates make to global inequality. They may be symbols of an unequal order, and happy to play that role; they may make inequality easier to sustain because they encourage acquiescence, and make it harder to imagine alternatives. Their parties and gatherings may constitute some of the means by which economic inequality leads to inequalities of power and influence. But the issue for me is are they at the roots of inequality? Or, as I suspect, are they merely a more decorative consequence of more powerful engines of inequality? If there are economic and political relationships at work – trade rules, economic policies, taxation regimes – that are more directly responsible for more inequality than celebrity, then it is not the most important thing to be worried about.

However this reasoning also means that if celebrity advocacy is not targeting the main drivers of inequality then it is at best a distraction, and at worst irrelevant. Thus far I doubt that celebrity advocacy has made a sufficiently appreciable difference to the core development problems it needs to address. This is despite the considerable efforts of the celebrities and NGOs involved. I would love, and certainly my current neighbours would love, for them to be more successful. But if celebrity advocacy cannot support effective development advocacy and policy, then what purpose does it serve?

Dan Brockington, Sagong, 15\textsuperscript{th} August 2013.


\textsuperscript{ii} All the terms in this paragraph are Swahili.

\textsuperscript{iii} The translation (from Swahili) is a loose one.

\textsuperscript{iv} The people names are all famous musicians.