

To Be Long Or Be Too Long (2005)

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There are songs . . .

In 1984, Band Aid, the charity founded by Bob Geldof, released a single called *Do They Know it's Christmas?* It rose to number one in the pop charts. I remember it was the album by the coalition 'USA for Africa', *We Are the World* which was popular with me. The mixture of Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones was irresistible. A charity album in its own right, looking back, I now realise they said 'we' and not 'they'. I suppose the fate of Africa was as much theirs as mine.

Twenty years on, the airwaves are filled with:

And there won't be snow in Africa this Christmastime
The greatest gift they'll get this year is life
(Oooh) Where nothing ever grows
No rain nor rivers flow
Do they know it's Christmastime at all?¹

Being greeted on all fronts by BAND AID 20's *Do they know it's Christmas?* at the end of December 2004 set up a personal paradox. Does one dismiss the goodwill of others offhand? Treat such a deliberate outpouring as acceptable benign ignorance? Is my irritation the same as denying the reality of extant conflict? How does one interrogate the repetition of malignant stereotypes? Am I to ignore the return of a bad penny? Be actively silenced in the face of another good cause? Strive to understand the sentiments that meant over 72,000 copies of the single were sold on the first day of its release?

There may not be snow in Africa in December, but things do grow in the land, and Africans will know it is Christmas this year, the same as last year. The constant repetition of the refrain does not deal with the reality of life that most Africans live. When year after year, the same statements that a continent is starving and dying are paraded, there is an eradication of space for making objects for cultural and critical impact. The irony that pop singers gather to perform on behalf of a continent systematically denuded of resources

¹ Band Aid [Do they know it's Christmas?](#) 1984.