

MVB25: Authors Meet Critics: Alexandra Budabin and Lisa Richey's 'Batman Saves the Congo: How Celebrities Disrupt the Politics of Development'

When: Monday, Mar 28, 2022, 8:00 AM

*Your Local Time: Monday, Mar 28, 2022, 3:00
PM*

Where: Virtual Room 25, ISA Virtual Platform

Sponsored By:

Global Development

Participants:

Discussant: Lisa Ann Richey
(Copenhagen Business School)

Discussant: Alexandra Budabin
(Free University of Bolzano)

Participant: Annika Bergman
Rosamond (Lund University)

Participant: Ilan Kapoor (York
University)

Participant: Ami Shah (Pacific
Lutheran University)

Participant: Andrew F. Cooper
(University of Waterloo)

Participant: Catia Cecilia
Confortini (Wellesley College)

Participant: Laura E. Seay (Colby
College)

Abstract/Description:

This roundtable discusses Alexandra Budabin and Lisa Richey's book on the power of celebrityized business solutions and the development contexts they create. Their book asks whether a celebrity can be a "disrupter," promoting strategic partnerships to bring new ideas and funding to revitalize the development field—or are celebrities just charismatic ambassadors for big business? Examining the role of the rich and famous in development and humanitarianism, Budabin and Richey argue that celebrities do both, and that understanding why and how yields insight into the realities of neoliberal development. The book provides a study of entertainer Ben Affleck, known for his superhero performance as Batman, who in 2010 launched the Eastern Congo Initiative to bring a new approach to the region's development. Our roundtable brings together scholars from critical development studies, international relations, African studies, political science and political economy to discuss the implication of this book for the study and understanding of new actors and alliances in development and humanitarianism. The book reveals worrying trends around special access, diversified funding, and significant support of elites within political philanthropic, development, and humanitarian circuits that will be of interest to practitioners and scholars.

Keywords:

Activism; Development; Humanitarian Intervention; Neoliberalism; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); Popular Culture; Sustainable Development; Sociology; Sub-Saharan Africa; Political Economy

**TVA29:
Celebrity interventions in
development, security and
diplomacy: gendered, racialized,
colonial and capitalist power
dynamics**

When: Tuesday, Mar 29, 2022, 6:30 AM

Your Local Time: Tuesday, Mar 29, 2022, 1:30 PM

Where: Virtual Room 29, ISA Virtual Platform

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender Studies

Participants:

Discussant: Emil Edenborg
(Stockholm University)

Chair: Emil Edenborg (Stockholm
University)

Author (virtual): Annika Bergman
Rosamond (Lund University)

Author (virtual): Claire Elder
(London School of Economics)

Author (virtual): Alexandra
Budabin (Free University of
Bolzano)

Author (virtual): Natalie Florea
Hudson (University of Dayton)

Author (virtual): Lisa Ann Richey
(Copenhagen Business School)

Author (virtual): Alexandra
Budabin (Free University of
Bolzano)

Author (virtual): Elsa Hedling
(Lund University)

Abstract/Description:

This panel investigates the role of celebrities in global politics, focusing on development, security, gender, diplomacy and media. The panel rests on the premise that individuals matter in global governance, with celebrities engaging in diplomatic practice, activism, entrepreneurship and humanitarianism across a range of settings and issue areas. Celebrities are able to communicate their messages to global audiences in more visible ways than other actors, a trend enhanced by social and digital media. Their ethical legitimacy is derived from the recognition of their potential impact amongst politicians and international organisations. While celebrities often work on their own initiative outside formal settings, they also are invited by states and organisations to front diplomatic campaigns or promote development and security projects from within. NGOs frequently use celebrities to shape global narratives, drawing attention to their causes and to raise funds. Yet, celebrities' role in global governance is not straightforward, since they are rarely democratically elected and frequently located within western privilege, promoting their own brand rather than seeking to transform the global world order. This panel critically explores celebrity diplomacy and humanitarianism by taking stock of the gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power relations that undergird such activism.

Keywords:

Activism; Capitalism; Colonialism; Development; Diplomacy; Feminism; Gender Politics; Security; Humanitarianism; Advocacy
Gender Equality

Notes for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Paper for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Full Details

Digital Celebrity Diplomacy and activism within and beyond the UN: gendered violence and disaster relief

People:

Author (virtual): Annika Bergman
Rosamond (Lund University)

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender
Studies

Abstract:

Celebrity activism has come to have an increasing influence on global politics, often communicated through digital channels. This paper seeks to unpack the emergence of digital celebrity diplomacy by taking stock of entertainers' activism within and beyond formal international organisations. We have seen a former reality TV star being elected to the White House, opposing multilateralism as a mode of diplomatic practice, but also celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Priyanka Chopra performing the role of UN envoys and goodwill ambassadors. While scholarship has investigated celebrity activism, less has been said about the ways in which global institutions shape celebrity humanitarianism and diplomacy and how that relationship is digitally communicated. This paper contributes to filling that gap through a comparison of the role of celebrity diplomats as insiders and outsiders in global governance. The paper zooms in on celebrities who chose to partner with the UN and those working on activism of their own accord, unconstrained by institutional structures. To empirically illustrate this nexus we zoom in on the areas of sexual and gender-based violence as well as disaster relief, unpacking the gendered and colonial dynamics informing both UN-led initiatives and celebrities who act on their own accord.

Keywords:

Colonialism; Diplomacy; Feminism; Gender Politics; United Nations (UN); Security; Humanitarianism; Public Diplomacy; Social Media; Sexual Violence

Paper for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Full Details

Investing in Somalia's post-war economy: the rise of 'superstar' diaspreneurs and the complex politics of economic and institutional transformation

People:

Author (virtual): Claire Elder (London School of Economics)

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender Studies

Abstract:

Transnational entrepreneurs (or diaspreneurs) have become key allies of humanitarianism, development and privatization in the global south over the last decade. They however have not received any dedicated academic attention in the fields of political economy and international relations. This paper develops a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding how these 'superstar' entrepreneurs, supported within the deep marketization of international development, affect economic and institutional transformation in post-war economies. Drawing on theories of philanthrocapitalism and hostile business-state relationships in the developing world, this paper interrogates the complex politics of transnational entrepreneurship as 'new' models of blended finance solutions. Drawing on 75 interviews with diaspreneurs, other business actors and state officials in Somalia, and survey material of business strategies and impact, this paper challenges current modalities around 'diaspreneurship' as 'innovative' and 'effective' solutions to state financing and failure. Original research findings show how these actors and business strategies – that inherently bear political meanings and consequences and assign a preeminent role to international finance and certain social classes – agitate public anxieties about elite power and structural and intersectional inequalities within the global capitalist system while also supporting anti-democracy and 'bulldozing' domestic capitalism.

Keywords:

Activism; Capitalism; Development; Political Economy; Humanitarianism; Advocacy

Paper for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Full Details

Inside Outside/Outside Inside: Celebrity Advocacy and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

People:

Author (virtual): Alexandra Budabin (Free University of Bolzano)

Author (virtual): Natalie Florea Hudson (University of Dayton)

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender Studies

Abstract:

Celebrities have increasingly but gradually taken up the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and have engaged in communication strategies for (and as) both insider and outsider actors. While it is common to think of celebrities themselves as the consummate insider-outsider figures, the impact of advocating from inside or outside positions in global governance is less understood. Further, the phenomenon of female celebrities advocating for women's rights in the masculinized and militarized spaces of security demands a gender analysis. This paper contrasts how female celebrities as UN ambassadors on the "inside" and as spokespersons for advocacy organizations on the "outside" were (not) able to advance the WPS Agenda. We investigate how different organizational platforms, communication styles, and audiences shape and constrain the advocacy of female celebrities. We find that the UN dictates the engagement of its celebrity advocates while offering insider access; meanwhile, outsider approaches that use popular culture and digital media may reach more of the public but fail to communicate to elites in decision-making spheres. We argue that adumbrating the limits and opportunities for celebrities advocating on gender security from insider/outside platforms reveals important power dynamics within global governance structures and the gendered nature of transnational advocacy.

Keywords:

Feminism; Gender Politics; Human Security; United Nations (UN); Security; Humanitarianism; Global Governance

Paper for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Full Details

From Accountable States to Genial Elites: How Celebrity Strategic Partnerships Shift Global Governance and Disrupt Local Outcomes

People:

Author (virtual): Lisa Ann Richey
(Copenhagen Business School)

Author (virtual): Alexandra Budabin (Free
University of Bolzano)

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender
Studies

Abstract:

Research demonstrates that celebrity advocacy gains media coverage for issues in the short term but has minimal effect on engaging the public in politics in meaningful ways. Yet, perhaps this matters little for understanding the power of celebrities. My co-authored long-term texts on Ben Affleck's work in the Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrate that what sets celebrities apart as humanitarian figures and defines their unique power is the mediated performance of emotional labour, or 'affective visibility' that services both elites and popular audiences. With their access and credibility, celebrities solidify elite endorsement for market-based solutions. Drawing on a case study, including 38 expert interviews, ethnographic work in DRC, and a narrative policy analysis, this paper elucidates how these solutions at the heart of celebrity strategic partnerships remake the concerned public into consumer citizens. When marketing needs are married to the fraught terrain of helping, the outcomes reflect the distorted practices of North-South relations: gendered power dynamics, simplification of complex situations, racial overtones and hierarchies of victimhood.

Keywords:

Capitalism; Development; Gender Politics; Race; Security; Humanitarianism; Advocacy

Paper for TVA29: Celebrity interventions in development, security and diplomacy: gendered, racialized, colonial and capitalist power dynamics

Full Details

The role of social media in the reach and acceptance of celebrity diplomacy: UNICEF ambassadorship and the #heforshe gender equality campaign

People:

Author (virtual): Elsa Hedling (Lund University)

Sponsored By:

Feminist Theory and Gender Studies

Abstract:

This paper explores the ways in which social media affordances condition celebrity diplomacy. Social media platforms may both enable and disable the allure, reach and success of celebrities' efforts of political activism and international diplomacy. In 2017, British actor and UNICEF ambassador Tom Hiddleston's Golden Globe acceptance speech was critiqued online for exhibiting a "white savior complex", coupled with masculinist protection logics. Other celebrities are not only praised for their political engagement but have successfully used social media to establish their political platforms to mobilize support beyond the allure of their fame. Fellow British actress Emma Watson and the #heforshe gender equality campaign serves as an example of expansive celebrity diplomacy, enabled by social media. Drawing on the two cases the paper offers a comparative gender-based analysis of the role of social media in the success and failure of celebrity diplomacy. A better understanding of the variation in the ways in which digitalization interacts with political celebrity may contribute to comprehend the limits of celebrity diplomacy in the digital age, in particular by identifying its gendered and western underpinnings.

Keywords:

Activism; Diplomacy; Feminism; Gender Politics; Security; Humanitarianism; Public Diplomacy; Social Media

