

BOOK REVIEWS

Alexandra Cosima Budabin and Lisa Ann Richey. 2021. *Batman Saves the Congo: How Celebrities Disrupt the Politics of Development*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 221 pp.

Batman Saves the Congo narrates and analyzes how a Hollywood star (Ben Affleck, of the movie “Batman”) formed a strategic team of humanitarians, showing in the process “how celebrities disrupt the politics of development.” The authors focus on human rights and conflict resolution and on the universal politics of humanitarianism. Their book analyzes what celebrity strategic partnerships are doing to disrupt the humanitarian space. The authors combine ethnography, political economy, and narrative analysis to push the knowledge of celebrity humanitarianism beyond media space and donor activities.

Chapter One, “Celebrity, Disruption, and Neoliberal Development,” captures how Affleck’s Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) enabled him to use his public market value to establish strategic partnerships to drive his developmental enterprise. ECI depended on a complex network. Undoubtedly, the intervention is more durable than the previous celebrity engagements. Hence, its effects on the real work of development and humanitarianism were more significant.

Chapter Two, “Narrating the Congo: Dangerous Single Stories and the Organizations That Need Them,” narrates events that showcase how celebrities use their status and influence to engage foreigners to contribute to the development of Congo. The stars developed and deployed a communication strategy that emphasized “save” and “solve” the burdens of Congo. Admittedly, the transnational engagements wooed foreigners, and the effort produced humanitarian relief for Congo’s internal crises. However, such developmental services are not participatory but dominant.

Chapter Three, “How a Celebrity Builds a Development Organization,” narrates how Affleck established a formidable team of interdisciplinary enthusiasts who drove his development vision for Congo. The strategic team comprised Hollywood actors, American political elites, philanthropists, humanitarians, and advocacy experts. Undoubtedly, their celebrity status was a game-changer as it afforded the ability to engage the elites in ways that the traditional advocates lack. No doubt, the approach caused a paradigm shift and fashioned Affleck as a celebrity humanitarian who brought his star power into the world of advocacy and development.

Chapter Four, “Marketing the Congo: Products that Sell Development,” narrates how Affleck used the Eastern Congo Initiative and a few natural resources to attract some US-based companies to build a global market that engendered local development. For instance, as part of a strategic partnership, ECI promoted a chocolate bar from Theo Chocolate that was sold to generate funds for ECI and raise awareness of development problems in the Congo. Likewise, Affleck partnered with TOMS shoes and Starbucks, and he was able to open up the Congo to American business via promotional efforts, humanitarian actions, and advocacy.

Chapter Five, "Saving Congolese Coffee: Celebrities and the Business Model for Development," analyzes the relationship and partnership between a celebrity-led organization (ECI), traditional aid, the Howard Buffett Foundation, its development partners, a multinational corporation (Starbucks), and their relevant stakeholders. The chapter uses the Kahawa Bora ya Kivu specialty coffee project as a case study to outline how business opportunities can open up new kinds of collaborations and cause disruption in the politics of development.

Chapter 6, "Celebrities and the Local Politics of Development: As Seen from Kinshasa," utilizes field interviews and participant observation qualitative research methods. It shows how development and humanitarian actors view development service providers and US government interventions along with those of humanitarian agencies and celebrity humanitarians. Chapter 6 "argues that celebrity engagement in development has both opportunities and costs, involving funding and expenditures, authority, and accountability that are more related to Northern than to Southern spheres" (p. xxvii).

Chapter 7, "Conclusions on Celebrity and Development: Disruption, Advocacy, and Commodification," reflects on Affleck's disruptive activities in the politics of development in Congo. He raised awareness and funding for neglected causes such as peacebuilding in Eastern Congo. But celebrities and their humanitarian services are not what developing nations need for participatory development. The authors posed some questions to Batman. Why not use your wealth and charisma to convene visionary voices? Why not allow the people to speak about their agenda and not yours?

Admittedly, the celebrities' involvement in Congo's developmental activities has disrupted the traditional developmental practices in the country. However, it has not replaced the dominant approach of development donors with a participatory development pattern. Hence, Batman did not save the Congo; he only brought a twist to the dominant developmental paradigm. Overall, the book reflects the background of the study and the gaps to be filled in scholarship and research methodology. Indeed, *Batman Saves the Congo* should appeal to students, practitioners, researchers and scholars in political science, economics, development studies, globalization, media for development and social change, and communication studies.

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Sheila D. Collin. 2020. *Ubuntu: George M. Houser and the Struggle for Peace and Freedom on Two Continents*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 361 pp.

When the Rev. George M. Houser, a founder of the Congress of Racial Equality, and perhaps the last survivor of the inaugural Freedom Ride of 1947, died in 2015 he had lived for almost a century. Born in Cleveland in 1916 to parents who were Methodist missionaries, he studied at the Chicago Theological Seminary, during which time he became a pacifist. George followed his father into the Methodist ministry after his university education. Houser joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and the War Resisters League during the 1940s and was arrested for resisting the draft. He served a year in jail. In 1942, Houser founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), along with James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and other members of FOR. In 1948, for their efforts to ensure the desegregation of interstate travel, Houser and Rustin received the

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