and to demonstrate how crucial Africans were to the making of the modern Indian subcontinent. It also reminds us that there were many versions of India for Africans, just as there were many different Africas for Indians.

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**Batman Saves the Congo: How Celebrities Disrupt the Politics of Development**, by Alexandra Cosima Budabin and Lisa Ann Richey, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2021, xxvii + 299 pp.

The idea that celebrities play an influential role in politics was once a marginalized andmaligned topic for academics. In recent years, this area of study has been expanded and legitimized as news organizations have increasingly relied on celebrities’ political activities to maintain attention in a virtual media environment. The rise of Donald Trump to political prominence has, likewise, caused many in academia to take celebrity influence more seriously.

One important branch of this literature focuses on celebrity advocacy. Already, the literature has demonstrated the ability of celebrities to dominate headlines, persuade audiences, affect public opinion, mobilize elites and create linkages between transnational advocacy networks. In *Batman Saves the Congo: How Celebrities Disrupt the Politics of Development*, Alexandra Cosima Budabin and Lisa Ann Richey ask an important question: what happens when well-known celebrities inject themselves into the politics of development in Africa? More precisely, what happens when Ben Affleck—who had just begun starring as Batman in a series of movies—decided to “save” the Democratic Republic of the Congo? To answer these questions, Budabin and Richey interview and observe humanitarian and development workers and experts from the US to Britain to the Congo and examine documents and celebrity communications. In addition, they analyze these celebrity interventions through the prism of international political economy: in what ways has the influence of neoliberalism transformed sustainability and development in Africa? Moreover, how do celebrities fit into neoliberal models of development?
Traditional aid organizations depend upon public funding and support, and a level of accountability in distribution of that aid. According to Budabin and Richey, there has been extensive humanitarian and development assistance in the Congo. However, Affleck believed that more support could be diverted to the Congo by harnessing business and market forces to engage in “disruptive innovation,” seen as a positive process to challenge previous models of fundraising and service distribution. Thus, rather than working with government agencies or established non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Affleck established his own NGO, the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI), to offer expertise that he, as a celebrity, did not possess. Then he did what celebrities are good at. Just as he commodifies himself and his creative enterprises, he commodified the Congo as a cause – by connecting traditional agencies to nontraditional actors such as corporations, capital asset management firms, and philanthropies, and suggesting that all would “win” from the arrangement. By simultaneously engaging wealthy and politically connected elites and raising awareness of a country’s needs among the general public, he sought to make it “cool” for people to support this cause. Businesses such as the Westrock Coffee Company and Starbucks sold products sourced from the Congo, and people showed their support through their pocketbooks. As expected, Affleck’s efforts were rewarded with almost universal media support, and he earned a philanthropist award.

However, Budabin and Richey argue that this new neoliberal model privileges business and the market at the expense of traditional actors and the constituents they serve. While the new model is different, it is far from disruptive in the way that Affleck would describe. Instead, it introduces a new set of elites with less experience and different interests than traditional actors. Congolese voices are no more likely to be represented under Affleck’s approach, and these new organizations are less accountable than the old ones. Indeed, this “Brand Aid” commoditization of causes tends to produce consumers rather than activists, and may reduce support for public funding of aid. These “consumer citizens” believe that they are solving the problem by buying coffee. Moreover, stereotypical imperialist tropes have been used to sell the cause: that Congolese are “backwards” and “other,” and that they ultimately need to be “saved” (xxiii–xxiv, 20, 35). Affleck/Batman is the savior figure. Finally, one must question the sustainability of such a model if it is built upon the popularity of a celebrity. When Affleck’s star “fell,” so to speak, so did the fortunes of his organization, a risk that nearly any brand must face when enlisting a celebrity spokesperson.

For students of celebrity influence, these authors bring a greater understanding of process to a field that has produced much scholarship identifying and demonstrating the power of celebrity. This book may offer the most detailed explanation of how celebrities build organizations and reinforce or undermine transnational advocacy networks. The authors also trace a form of celebrity activism back to the nineteenth century. Given the modern saturation of celebrities and social networks, the analogy is not perfect to contemporary times, but offers some excellent historical context.

For Africa scholars, Budabin and Richey spotlight an emergent pattern in development politics. This book narrowly focuses on Affleck and the Congo. However, the neoliberal development model outlined by the authors typifies a new approach to celebrity advocacy in Africa. Celebrities like Bono, George Clooney, and others have formed their own organizations, connected audiences to raise private funds, and enlisted the help of multinational corporations – desperate to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility – to sell their products in the name of a good cause. It also illustrates how old imperialist tropes persist as celebrities and their NGOs attempt to market this cause.
Overall, this book makes an important contribution to both those who study celebrity and those who are interested in the politics of development in Africa.

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Conflicts of Colonialism: The Rule of Law, French Soudan, and Faama Mademba Sèye, by Richard L. Roberts, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, xvii + 337 pp.

At the center of a conflict between two modes of French colonialism, and at the center of Richard Roberts’ most recent book, is a single case. Mademba Sèye, a Wolof employee from colonial Senegal who became an African king in French Soudan, requested to go before a French judge in 1900 when he found himself under house arrest away from his kingdom. The colonial administration was investigating allegations of his abuse of power and malfeasance. The request was denied, but the inquest that put his reign on the line was also abandoned. In a well-crafted exploration of the archival record, Roberts demonstrates how this peculiar case reveals all the many contradictions of the changing nature of French colonization, just as his broader narrative shows what African intermediaries could do when confronted with this change.

In particular, Roberts argues that where French colonization began with a militarily imposed indirect rule of coercion, it increasingly gave way to the civilian rule of law (or at least to the promise of it). The conflicts between these two modes of colonial power and the development from one paradigm to the other presented different bargains of collaboration for enterprising Africans who, for power, prestige, and wealth, were happy to make colonial rule possible. Having pioneered the exploitation of underused legal cases for the African social history of colonization in previous work, Roberts provides a return to this method in a work that might otherwise be mistaken as biography. Accordingly, Conflicts of Colonialism will be of interest to students of African historiography for a long time to come as well as to anyone interested in African intermediaries, Francophone West Africa, French imperial history, or the legal history of colonialism.

Readers should not skip the preface and the acknowledgements, as they both complement the introduction. We learn how much Mademba Sèye, as a historical character, has occupied the career of this accomplished scholar. Roberts also offers a number of methodological reflections about the place of the archives in African history and the ambivalence of the social historian who undertakes a biography. The introduction succinctly positions the book in a long arc of colonial studies that have gone beyond colonial discourses of civilization and the rule of law to show their historical deployment as ideological weapons within the imperial project itself. It also explains the reasons why Sèye’s case was so very important at a critical juncture in colonial rule.

The first five chapters examine Sèye’s life and the broader context of French colonization of first the Senegal valley and then the greater Sahelian–Sudanic zone. This approach is especially effective as Sèye is implicated in colonial affairs from his education as a boy at the École des Otages in Saint-Louis through his career moving up the ranks of the Telegraph Service, all