

# CELEBRITIES' ROLE IN THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESSES: GEORGE CLOONEY IN SOUTH SUDAN

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**Abstract:** The present article discusses the role of celebrities in the conflict resolution processes presented by the case study of George Clooney's engagement in South Sudan. Methodologically, it is a critical discourse analysis of published articles in selected media. The main argument of the article is that the role of celebrities in conflict resolution processes is overestimated by media and the image of celebrities' involvement reproduces stereotyped understanding of distant regions as lacking agency and dependent on the actors from the West. The image of Clooney's role in the South Sudanese peace process creates an idea that celebrities have been crucial actors in this process. The present article brings critical new insights on the engagement of celebrities, including the fight against the violation of human rights and points out the corruption of South Sudanese politicians.

**Keywords:** *celebrity diplomacy, conflict resolution, development, South Sudan, media, critical discourse analysis*

## Introduction

Celebrities' involvement in Africa started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the campaign of famous writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Joseph Conrad against the brutal administration of Belgian King Leopold in Congo, and continued with the activism of Sylvia Pankhurst against the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s (Cole, Radley and Falisse 2015). Since then, there have been a number of celebrities engaging in various issues in connection with this continent, especially in the era of independent African states, such as Audrey Hepburn who used her fame to fight poverty in Africa and in Somalia and Ethiopia in particular (Wheeler 2011). Celebrities have engaged themselves as UN ambassadors, drew attention to humanitarian disasters and poverty, and advocated for the elevation of the Third World Debt. However, the turning point in the celebrity humanitarianism was

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the famine in Ethiopia in 1983–1985 with the emergence of Band Aid and the engagement of Irish singer and political activist Bob Geldof. During this campaign, as Müller (2013a) points out, the crisis was presented in a simplified manner as a result of natural causes rather than political ones. Instead of addressing the political and structural causes of famine, the humanitarianism promoted by celebrities, mainly at the Live Aid festival in 1985, focused solely on the popular campaigns to raise money.

Besides engaging themselves in charities, however, celebrities have also an impact on policy-making processes in particular issues. Originally, celebrities engaged themselves, for example, in the protests against the Vietnam War, which was regarded negatively by American high-profile politicians, or, currently, they have become advocates for issues of the violation of human rights and have even become active in the conflict resolution processes as it is apparent in the case of South Sudan. The celebrities' interest particularly in Africa is a result of imagination about Africa as a continent of starvation and despair and of Africans as suffering objects. This narrative has been created since the colonial era and in fact reveals more about “the nexus of western interests in African affairs, or their imaginations of themselves, than they do about Africa and the Africans” (Yrjöla 2012: 369). At the same time, however, their engagement in African humanitarian as well as political affairs helps to promote and reproduce very similar simplified and stereotyped images of the continent and its people.

The role of celebrities in articulating development policies (e.g. Piknerová and Rybáková 2017; Müller 2013a, Müller 2013b; Kapoor 2012), their mutual relations with various developmental NGOs (e.g. Brockington 2014; Budabin, Rasmussen and Richey 2017) or advocating human rights (Budabin and Pruce 2018) have been well elaborated in scholarly work. However, the role of celebrities in conflict resolution processes has not been the subject of much interest and, therefore, has not yet been analysed systematically. Therefore, the present article seeks to fill this gap with the aim to discuss the possible roles that can be attributed to celebrities in the conflicting areas. It seeks to contribute to scholarship about the celebrities' involvement in the political processes and to evaluate the images that are created by the media about them, using the comparison of international and local online news portals.

The research is multidisciplinary and placed at the interface between international relations, political science, and cultural geography. It is based

on the literature about celebrities from media and cultural studies. The research is anchored in the concepts of celebrity diplomacy and celebrity humanitarianism, evaluating celebrities' involvement in political and developmental issues (Richey and Brockington 2019). These concepts are further elaborated and applied to the political engagement of celebrities and their role in the conflict resolution processes. For the purpose of this study, we distinguish between humanitarian in the sense of the promotion of humanitarian and development aid, charitable work and philanthropy (Richey 2016: 11; Kapoor 2012), and political engagement, including the promotion of human rights and conflict resolution in particular. Methodologically, this is a critical discourse analysis, by which the author seeks to answer the following research questions: Which roles are ascribed by media to celebrities in the conflicting areas? How do these imagined roles correspond with the real politics? And what is the particular role of George Clooney in the conflict resolution process in South Sudan as represented in the media?

The main aim, then, is to reveal the modes of representation of George Clooney's influence in the conflict resolution in South Sudan and to identify the imagined roles ascribed to him by selected media. Richey and Budabin (2016a) and Richey (2016: 10) mention that celebrities' actions are diverse, and they can play different roles shaping the North-South relations. In the South, for example, they establish development organisations, perform site visits, work with international NGOs etc. In the North, they act as ambassadors (Angelina Jolie for the UNHCR), act as witnesses (testify before Congress), fundraisers and activists, lobbyists. Besides that, celebrities, according to the author of the present study, may be seen as peace makers and influential advocates for the political issues. The main argument of the present article is that media overestimate the role of celebrities in the conflict resolution processes as shown by the case study of George Clooney's engagement in South Sudan. Media present an almost non-critical portrait of Clooney's engagement in South Sudan and ascribe to him a significant impact on the conflict resolution process in the country. He is presented as an influential actor in the Sudanese politics, which is in conformity with the post-colonial and stereotyped understanding of distant regions and distant others (Scott 2015; Yrjl 2009), in which Africans themselves lack agency and they are Western actors who are responsible for development in the South. Due to reproduction, these narratives are rooted in

the foundational superior morality of the west and its grand histories of progress [...] “Africa” becomes located, through these interpretations, outside western modernity, freedom and civilization, rendering the continent as a central battleground between good and evil (Yrjölä 2012 cited in Wheeler 2013: 168).

The reproducing of simplified picture of conflicts and overestimating the role of celebrities in political processes may lead to a risk of producing stereotyped images of distant places and reducing complex issues to the “single story” as explained by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009). Moreover, misunderstandings and simplifications lead to support of the corrupt parties of the conflict as apparent in South Sudan and, in fact, promotion of the interests of Western businesses and elites and then, reproducing the North-South inequalities. In turn, the negation of African agency and the reproduction of images of Westerners as saviours of Africa “serve a purpose in the maintenance of western activity and agency in Africa, but are also instrumental in constructing the consensus on the existing world order, where the global south is, and remains, in a subordinate position to the west” (Yrjölä 2012: 171).

South Sudan has been selected as a case study for the study of celebrities’ involvement in peace processes because a long-term attention has been paid to the conflict and also celebrities have been engaged in Sudanese humanitarian crisis as well, starting from American actress Mia Farrow’s involvement in Darfur. Apart from her, the American actor George Clooney is another leading celebrity well-known for advocacy of human rights in Sudan. He is able to articulate the issues and influence the actions at the level of international politics. For all of his characteristics, as defined by Cooper (2008) and access to state officials, Clooney may be considered a celebrity diplomat. Originally, he engaged himself in advocating for human rights in Darfur but later he dedicated his efforts to support the South Sudanese independence. Therefore, he started to engage himself in advocacy for conflict resolution and supported particular South Sudanese conflict parties. George Clooney has cooperated in his efforts with various actors, such as religious groups, NGOs, representatives of Sudanese diaspora in the USA. Thanks to his popularity and influence, he has been able to promote their agenda. In this respect, he has closely cooperated with John Prendergast, a human rights activist with a long-term experience with human rights issues

and anti-corruption activities in Africa, and founder of the Enough project, a “policy organization aimed at countering genocide and crimes against humanity” (Enough Project 2017). Therefore, for all of these reasons, he has been selected as a representative celebrity for the present study.

The outline of the article is as it follows: after the introduction, methodological background and a short evaluation of the role of civil society in conflict resolution processes, the author discusses the role of celebrities in current international politics. The next section is dedicated to a treatise about the South Sudanese peace process. The crucial parts of the article are dedicated to the role of George Clooney in South Sudan which is evaluated using the method of critical discourse analysis.

## **Methodology**

The present article is based on the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (e.g. Fairclough 2012; van Dijk 1993; Wodak 2011) building on other scholarly works analysing the celebrity involvement in Africa (e.g. Richey and Budabin 2016b; Budabin and Richey 2018; Repo and Yrjl 2011). It analyses the relations between semiotic terms and social processes in order to reveal how language is used in social practice. Object of the study are imaginations and discourse that is created about the celebrities' roles in conflict resolution processes - not the conflict resolution process in South Sudan itself.

The critical textual analysis is an appropriate method for studying celebrities' engagement in conflict resolution processes, since the value of celebrities lies in “acting as mediators between audiences of western media and the lives of faraway strangers” (Scott 2015: 450). Mass media then mediate the representation of celebrities' influence in the Global South and are seen as a major contributor to the creation of celebrity politicians, which means that they put emphasis on the role of celebrities in the political processes (Driessens 2012: 650), which are in fact imagined. It means that we do not analyse grammatical categories of the language but social categories which are attributed to particular actors and their context.

The corpus created for the purpose of this article consists of media articles from both international and local/regional online newspapers. The articles were selected based on a search of the combination of the words “Clooney” and “Sudan.” There have been 88 articles analysed overall, 40 of them published in *The Guardian*, 48 of them published in the *Sudan Tribune*. Media

were selected according to regional criterion, both Sudanese and international media were included in the analysis in order to compare their positions in the field. As a representative of Sudanese media, the online news portal *Sudan Tribune* was selected. Even though this portal is based in France it covers developments in Sudan exclusively and may be understood as a representative of Sudanese media abroad. It is run by Sudanese and international journalists and editors (*Sudan Tribune* 2020). Other online newspaper, *The Guardian*, was selected because it covers the analysed topic very well and is quite informative in the field. It deals with the topic of celebrities' involvement, and in particular Clooney's involvement to a greater extent, even in comparison to American online newspapers. Moreover, other criterion was readership, since *The Guardian* is one of the most-read newspapers internationally. Media news were analysed in English and attention was paid to the context, not to the semantics or to linguistic analysis. Newspaper articles were first divided into news and opinions, which were analysed separately.

The time-frame stated for this study was 2010–2019. 2010 because it is the year preceding the declaration of independence of South Sudan. There is a presumption that celebrities have engaged themselves immediately before the act of declaration and then the attention focused on the conflict resolution in South Sudan after a new civil war broke out in 2013. Even though the main focus of the present article is the South Sudanese independence and conflict resolution, it came out that it is not possible to separate the South Sudanese case from the Sudanese politics. Therefore, the articles which focus primarily on the Sudanese politics and human rights violations in Sudan and deal with South Sudanese issues only marginally, were included in the analysis as well.

### **Non-state Actors in Conflict Resolution Processes**

The study of celebrity diplomacy in the context of conflict resolution processes may be connected to the discussion about the role of civil society in conflict transformation (e.g. Kopeček, Hoch and Baar 2016) or to general studies of the transformation of diplomacy and the increasing role of non-state actors (e.g. Langhorne 2005) in international relations. The global trend is that many functions previously performed by state actors are now being taken over by civil society, including peace-building (Marchetti and Tocci 2009: 204). Celebrities may be understood as a part of civil society in a wider sense. They are able to raise awareness about the conflicting issues and lobby the influential policy-makers, mostly in the West. Therefore, their engagement

in the conflict resolution processes is in accordance with the concept of track two diplomacy (e.g. Montville 2006; Marchetti and Tocci 2009; Ropers 2004), which, contrary to conflict resolution via official diplomatic channels (track one diplomacy), involves non-state actors. Davidson and Montville (1981: 155) define track two diplomacy as

unofficial, nonstructured interaction. It is always open minded, often altruistic [...], strategically optimistic, based on best case analysis. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness.

The involvement of non-state actors may, according to Dixon and Simmons (2006: 60) include attempts “to mediate conflict directly in the absence of official mediation, prepare the way for such official efforts or work alongside formal talks to improve the climate and contribute to a successful outcome to negotiations.” The celebrities’ role in the peace process lies mainly in lobbying the politicians and raising awareness on particular issues, they usually do not involve in direct mediation of peace, even though they may establish relations with representatives of conflicting parties and promote their interests to decision-makers.

Cooper (2008) discussed whether celebrities even do a diplomacy and found out that they fit into the characteristics of diplomatic culture. For celebrity diplomats, such as George Clooney, who engage themselves in conflict resolutions processes, it is crucial to create relationships with state officials, since “they are eager to balance what can be considered ‘megaphone diplomacy’ with face-to-face engagement with official actors up to the level of chief executive, whether presidents or prime ministers” (Cooper 2008: 2–3). Political representation and conflicting parties use celebrities to boost their credibility (Cooper 2008: 3) and vice versa, celebrities promote their agenda through lobbying the politicians and they are in fact part of the establishment they widely criticise. Besides that, in particular cases, as evidenced in the case of George Clooney’s engagement with the peace process in South Sudan, celebrities may create personal ties with politicians from conflicting parties and negotiate with them directly, which may be not so welcome to diplomats and conflict resolution experts since celebrities are not official representatives of the states they come from and they may not express official stances of governments. However, because of their popularity, their

voices are being heard, they are able to generate wide press coverage of the issues they promote and to turn public opinion in the intended direction. Celebrities engagement in political issues is then criticised for “diverting attention from worthy causes to those which are ‘sexy,’ and failing to represent the disenfranchised” and celebrities are seen “to be superficial and to remain unaccountable” (Wheeler 2013: 159).

### **The Role of Celebrities in the Current International Politics**

Celebrity means, according to the definition of Rojek (2001: 10), the “attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere,” whereas “glamour is associated with favourable public recognition” and “notoriety is unfavourable public recognition.” In some cases, celebrity is a result of the “concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries,” which is connected to the rise of mass-media (Rojek 2001: 18). Celebrity has become a source of power and celebrity status may assure access to a political field. Therefore, celebrity may be understood, in conformity with Driessens (2013: 550), as a form of capital based on “recurrent media representations or accumulated media visibility.”

Celebrities emerged as new actors in international politics recently, starting in the 1960s with the UN’s effort to bring attention to its agenda. Since then, celebrities such as Audrey Hepburn, Mia Farrow, Angelina Jolie or Madonna have engaged in various campaigns in Africa. Over time, then, celebrities have become influential proponents not only of UN’s agenda but also of the agenda of their own. “Celebrity diplomacy” is the term introduced to international relations by Cooper (2008) and used in order to signify that diplomacy is not just the privilege of experts, but that even non-state actors and individuals exercise it. The celebrities’ expertise is based on emotions, not their knowledge or education in the field of diplomacy, international relations or development studies. As Abrahamsen (2012: 141) states, “the celebrity is a different kind of expert, whose knowledge is not derived from numbers, deduction, or semi-structured interviews, but from ‘feeling the pain’ of the poor and from offering an emotional connection to the subjects of development.” In order to become “celebrity diplomats,” “individuals must not only possess ample communication skills, a sense of mission, and some global reach. They must enter into the official diplomatic world and operate through the matrix of complex relationships with state officials” (Cooper

2008: 7). Celebrities have a good access to media because of their popularity and, on the contrary, media coverage is essential for promoting their aims and gaining more publicity and popularity (Kogen 2015).

The role of celebrities in development and humanitarian affairs has recently been the subject of great concern in various scholarly works (e.g. Piknerov and Rybakov 2017; Muller 2013a; Muller 2013b; Kogen 2015; Kapoor 2012; Repo and Yrjol 2011; Yrjol 2009; Richey and Brockington 2019). Celebrities' involvement in development issues began already with their engagement with the UN's agenda as Goodwill Ambassadors starting with an appointment of Danny Kaye as the first UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador in 1953. Later, in 1997 a new group of celebrities was appointed as Messengers of Peace by Kofi Annan in order to promote the UN's agenda itself (Wheeler 2011: 11; Alleyne 2005: 176). Since then, despite designation of several ambassadors from developing countries, such as Malala Yousafzai, the majority of them is coming from the Global North and considered to promote the "Western-style" values. Therefore, the appointment of Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace have been the subject of critique by e.g. Alleyne (2005), who argues that their designation is ethno-centric and elitist. Similarly, all celebrity diplomacy and "celebritisation" of development may be understood in connection to policies created in the North (Piknerov and Rybakov 2017: 23; Kapoor 2012). Even though there are academic works on non-Western celebrities engaging themselves in charity and development issues (e.g. Cooper, Dobson and Wheeler 2017), the general understanding of celebrity humanitarianism is that it is a mechanism through which Western celebrities promote their help in the Global South. The impact of celebrities coming from the Global South, such as the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour, is negligible in comparison to celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, Bono Vox or Madonna who have generally a greater influence consisting of the ability to turn public opinion via media and lobby policy and decision-makers in the West thanks to their access to international organisations, politicians and other actors.

Despite the fact that developmental and political issues are connected and intertwined, the subject of the present study is the role of celebrities in conflict resolution processes. First of all, however, it is important to discuss the general role of celebrities in international affairs. Celebrities' engagement in international affairs has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, they are praised for being able to turn attention to particular issues

and to influence public opinion (Cooper 2008). On the other, the critique is targeted to their alleged promotion of global inequalities (e.g. Alleyne 2005, Kapoor 2012) and mostly to their simplification of the causes of poverty (e.g. Müller 2013a). Kellner (2010: 123) argues, that “media spectacle” connected to celebrities’ engagement in developmental and political issues may lead to a “pressure for politicians, as well as celebrity diplomats, to substitute spectacle for substance and engage in symbolic politics rather than the hard work of diplomacy, policy formations and debate, compromise, and then the laborious work of implementation.” Yrjölä (2009) even elaborates that celebrities (in this case Bob Geldof and Bono Vox) produce and reproduce Africa according to colonial imaginary while pushing for economic changes there. Generally, celebrities’ involvement is widely criticised for their lack of accountability and the inefficiency of their humanitarian campaigns in Africa (Yrjölä 2009).

Celebrities create a discourse on the developing world using a patrimonial language, portraying developing countries as those who need saviours from the West to resolve their issues. Kogen (2015: 54) sees their impact on public opinion in two ways: “1) in entrenching historical narratives of the other as a child, a victim, and politically underdeveloped, and the United States as savior and hero; and 2) in narrowly defining for viewers how they can engage politically with the global other.” They create the image of “global other” as those who are not responsible for their own issues and present a simplified picture of developing countries to an audience in the West in order to gain more support and financial sources for the development agenda.

Recently, celebrities have become those who share the same space with decision-makers and are, therefore, able to influence their policies (Yrjölä 2009). For instance, the American actor Ben Affleck has been advocating for the respect for human rights in Eastern Congo by launching the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI). Besides charity work, the ECI has also engaged itself in the effort to influence policy makers in the USA by releasing the paper “*Strengthening United States Foreign Policy in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*” Affleck himself was successful in presenting the issues of Eastern Congo in US Congress and various American agencies (Richey and Budabin 2016b) and was able to shift the understanding and perception of Eastern Congo in the North (Budabin 2016).

Celebrities have engaged in the advocating of human rights and lobbying efforts for the case of Sudan as well. In this context, for example, Mia Farrow is being portrayed as the one who “got UN troops in Darfur” (see Cooper and Schrumm 2007 cited in Huliaras and Tzifakis 2012: 418) and besides that, her influence on Chinese policy in Darfur has been of interest (e.g. Budabin 2015). Celebrities have played an important role in the process of bringing independence to South Sudan as well, according to some observers (Huliaras and Tzifakis 2012: 418; Goffe 2011; Howden 2013; Fadlalla 2016). Regardless of criticism or advocating the roles of celebrities in international affairs, they are generally portrayed as independent and autonomous actors who develop their own individual strategies (Huliaras and Tzifakis 2012: 418). However, they are also being accused of using their engagement in global development and political issues for promoting their own interests and agenda (e.g. Shea 2006).

### **Conflict Resolution Process in South Sudan**

The independent South Sudan was declared on 8 July 2011 after a long-winding civil war and as a result of a referendum on independence which took place on 8 January 2011 and in which 98,8 per cent of south Sudanese residents voted for secession. The referendum was based on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in 2005. It was an outcome of the peace process supported by various actors, such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in particular. According to Ylonen (2014: 13), external actors and mainly the USA played a prominent role in negotiating the agreement. The engagement of the USA in the Sudanese peace process was driven by their interest to deter Islamism in the Horn of Africa, apparent mainly after the 1993 attack in New York and bombing of the US embassies in Dar es-Salaam and Nairobi in 1998. In order to support the regime’s change in Khartoum, which became even more desirable after the 11 September attacks, the USA started to support SPLM and peace process in South Sudan. The US government had been pushed to act by various human rights activists, NGOs and even congressmen (Ylonen 2014: 24–25). Khartoum was in fact forced to cooperate with the US government on the fight against terrorism and negotiate a peace in South Sudan with the SPLM/A also because it was unable to fight multiple struggles, with the conflict in Darfur not seeming to end. The possibility of creating

an independent South Sudanese state, even though it was considered to be a last-resort solution in the CPA, was supported by international actors and promoted by various figures, including celebrities and George Clooney in particular, with the argument that the South Sudanese nation deserves independence after it had struggled during the long-term civil war in Sudan and that independence would prevent South Sudan to return to war with the North (Vertin 2016). With the death of John Garang, a proponent of a new democratic South Sudan, it became apparent that the independence would be inevitable. Implementation of the CPA was not to a large extent monitored by external actors and was left to the will of the two participating parties. As a result, in accordance with Aalen (2013), conclusion of the CPA did not mean starting the process of nation building and democratisation in South Sudan, but in fact strengthened the exclusive position of elites both in Sudan and South Sudan who continued their destabilising strategies and actions.

Therefore, after the establishment of an independent South Sudan, the legitimacy of the government was questioned and opposition got significant support to fight governmental forces (Nyadera 2018: 61). The main line of the conflict took place between President Salva Kiir from the Dinka ethnic group and his Vice-president Riek Machar coming from the Nuer. Instead of ethnic conflict, however, the renewed civil war in South Sudan should be understood as a failed transition and as a nation and state-building process (see e.g. Rudincová 2017; de Waal 2014). There are several narratives apparent in connection to the causes of civil war in South Sudan, according to Nyadera (2018). The narrative of oil fuelling the war may be connected with the findings of the Sentry, a US-based think-tank founded by Clooney and Prendergast, in which the investigations revealed that oil revenues were used to finance the civil war and enrich the small warring elites in the country (The Sentry 2016). According to Rolandsen (2015), it was the “combination of a weak patrimonial state, a wartime mentality and lack of peaceful mechanisms for political contestation and transition that brought about the current war.” The conflict was complicated also by the involvement of various international actors, mainly the neighbouring states.

The peace negotiations took place since the outbreak of new South Sudanese civil war in December 2013 and after a series of non-respected cessations of hostilities throughout 2014 and 2015, it resulted in signing the peace accord on 27 August 2015. The peace agreement was negotiated by the IGAD PLUS,

which incorporated the representatives of IGAD and five representatives of the African Union (Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa), the AU Commission, China, the EU, Norway, the UK, USA and UN (Office of the IGAD Special Envoys for South Sudan, April 2015). As a result of the agreement, the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), in which Riek Machar was appointed as Prime Minister, was established in April 2016. However, in June 2016 the government collapsed, and Machar had to leave the country. The international community engaged itself in efforts to stabilise the country through international organisations. For example, the USA pushed diplomatically the deployment of additional UN peacekeepers to be sent to Juba which was later authorised by the UN Security Council Resolution 2304 (Blanchard 2016).

Renewed peace talks mediated by the Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir resulted in signing the Declaration of Agreement in Khartoum on 27 June 2018. The peace talks were completed by the signing of the power-sharing agreement between the Government of South Sudan and opposition forces on 5 August 2018 (Agreement on Outstanding Issues of Governance 2018). On 22 February 2020 the new South Sudanese unity government was formed with Salva Kiir as President and Riek Machar as Vice President.

### **Celebrities as Mediators in Conflict Resolution in Sudan: The Case of George Clooney**

George Clooney started his involvement in Sudan first with his father Nick Clooney in the campaign against genocide in Darfur in 2006. He advocated against the violation of human rights and cooperated with NGOs such as Save Darfur in organizing protests against the Sudanese government in Washington, D.C. in April 2006. Thanks to his popularity he became the leading advocate for the Darfurian case and was successful in raising awareness about the situation in Darfur (Fadlalla 2016). Using his fame as a celebrity and financial capital, he established several organisations to develop campaigns in conflicting areas. In 2008 he co-founded the NGO “Not on Our Watch” in order to “develop projects and campaigns that bring global attention to forgotten international crises” (Budabin 2019: 67). When Sudan started to prepare for the referendum on South Sudanese independence, he switched his attention to this issue and supported leaders of South Sudanese movements ever since. He appeared on TV in autumn 2010, a few months before the referendum, in order to warn the American public about possible

genocide in South Sudan (Fadlalla 2016: 14–15). When engaging himself first with the issue of violating human rights in Darfur, and also with the case of South Sudanese independence, Clooney was acting as a member of a wider transnational advocacy network consisting of organisations of religious groups, non-governmental organisations and other members of the civil society, including an African diaspora. In this sense, he was successful in drawing attention to the cases he advocated and effectively used his fame and contacts in order to approach policy makers and international organisations including the UN, and to promote the agenda concerning Darfur and South Sudan.

Already in December 2010, George Clooney and John Prendergast established an organisation called the Satellite Sentinel Project, which monitors conflict outbreaks in South Sudan using DigitalGlobe satellites (Budabin 2019). In order to secure funding for this project, Clooney engaged himself in business activities, since he became a brand ambassador for the Nespresso trade mark. He supported the partnership between Nespresso, NGO TechnoServe and USAID “to rebuild the coffee industry in the new country of South Sudan and improve coffee farmer livelihoods” (Nestle-Nespresso, undated) by exporting the coffee for Nespresso from South Sudan. Even though it has been presented as a chance for South Sudanese farmers and a good opportunity for a newly created country to diversify its export, in fact “the presence of Clooney likely reduced the risk of this investment for Nespresso while at the same time enriching the company’s CSR profile” (Budabin 2019: 68). Therefore, by close cooperating with business, Clooney risked compromising his moral authority and credibility of his engagement in South Sudan.

Another activity of Clooney and Prendergast aiming in urging the US government to act in order to ensure peace in South Sudan and deal with responsible elites was an Enough project. It drew attention to corruption among the South Sudanese political and army leaders and urged the USA and the international community to impose sanctions on them. In September 2016 Enough’s Sentry initiative released a report *War Crimes Shouldn’t Pay* with a foreword by Clooney and Prendergast, in which it accused South Sudanese elites, including president Salva Kiir, for fuelling the war by corruption money (The Sentry 2016). However, they were the same South Sudanese elites, who were supported by Clooney when preparing for independence in 2011 and afterwards. His support of South Sudanese

independence and pre-independence elite was criticised (e.g. Vertin 2016), since once they became the leading power in the newly established state; they brought South Sudan back to violence and they have been responsible for the large political and financial corruption in the country. Vertin admitted that celebrity advocating helped the South Sudanese case to bring more attention, however, he was critical on the one-sided and black and white portraying of the issue.

Clooney himself sees his role as articulating the topics and raising awareness about the violation of human rights in Sudan. He expressed his intentions, for example, in a speech at the UN Security Council in September 2006 on the issue of Darfur stating that “he was there to represent the voices of the people who cannot speak for themselves” (Clooney 2006, cit. in Huliaras and Tzifakos 2012: 423). He used his influence and reminded the UN Security Council that it is responsible for protecting civilians in Darfur. This suggests that Clooney was well aware that he, as a celebrity, was able to influence policy-making process in this respect. However, his own presentation of his role was much more modest than presented by media. As will be shown in the following parts of this article, the media create an almost non-critical image of his involvement and overestimated his role in the political processes in Sudan by stressing his personal commitment and power to act. This is evidenced by the fact that various online newspaper articles (e.g. Goffe 2011; Howden 2013; Gettleman 2011; Perry 2014) display celebrities and George Clooney in particular as the ones who contributed to South Sudanese independence. For his role in this process, Clooney was called by Newsweek Magazine a “21st-century celebrity statesman” (Avlon 2011). It suggests that he is not understood by media just as one who articulates the issue and raises awareness but, in the contrary, the one who is able to act in favour of the case. Clooney’s role as an advocate for human rights violations in Africa has been praised by his fellow human rights activist John Prendergast who claims: “Celebrities have been crucial in building awareness on a wide range of things that would otherwise be just a distant concern” (cited in Glaister 2007). Prendergast stressed the particular role of George Clooney and Angelina Jolie, since according to him, “Clooney is smarter than any politician I’ve dealt with on this issue. Angelina [Jolie] is as clued in on the policy issues as any politician” (cit. in Glaister 2007).

However, at the same time, the role of George Clooney in political processes in Sudan has not only been praised, but also been criticised in presented media for bringing a simplified and one-sided portrayal of Sudanese conflicts. Already in 2006, the American international human rights lawyer Nina Shea criticised Clooney for “using the Darfur issue as just another partisan bludgeon for Bush-bashing” (Shea 2006) in her commentary to a conservative magazine, *National Review*. Six years later, however, she took back her criticism admitting that

George Clooney has shown dedication to the beleaguered Sudanese people, and is now willing to name and shame their tormentors, as well as Khartoum’s principal financial backer: China. He has generously devoted his time and risked his life and limb to draw world attention to the ongoing atrocities, and has proposed constructive policy advice to the American president (Shea 2012).

Nesrine Malik, a columnist for the *Guardian*, when commenting on Clooney’s advocating for the Nuba Mountain people’s case claims that “Clooney’s campaign is rooted in a political culture that does not care for nuance” and “promotes a black-and-white understanding of some situations, often underscored by moral superiority” (Malik 2012). Rob Crilly, a commentator for the *Telegraph*, comments on Clooney’s involvement in a similar way: “It is an analysis that reduces Africa to simple notions of good versus evil, and suggests that outsiders hold the key to finding solutions” (cit. in Malik 2012).

The role of George Clooney in the process of gaining South Sudanese independence has been recognised by diplomats as well. According to Enoch Awejok from the Sudanese embassy in Washington, Clooney played an irreplaceable role in the process of South Sudanese independence. He even claims that “without George Clooney and the churches, the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] would not have occurred” and that they “still have an effective role to play in resolving the outstanding issues in Sudan” (Goffe 2011). In fact, however, Clooney started to articulate the need to gain independence for South Sudan almost immediately before the referendum took place on 9 January 2011. In the same manner, Barrie Walkley, the then US consul general in Sudan, evaluated Clooney’s role in this process by stating: “Once you got someone like George Clooney, for example...” [...] “George packs power” (Gettleman 2011). And concerning the referendum on independence held in 2011, he asked: “Would this have

taken place without celebrities?” and answered: “I think the celebrities had a lot to do with it” (Gettleman 2011). Celebrities, in fact helped to turn public attention to the referendum on independence in South Sudan and helped to promote the US agenda in the region. The USA supported the case of South Sudan in order to weaken the Sudanese government and resolve the long-term Sudanese conflict as part of the wider war on terror. That is also why American diplomats and politics welcomed Clooney’s engagement in the case.

### **Results of the Discourse Analysis of Selected Media**

As stated in the introduction, the celebrities’ involvement in the conflict-resolution process was analysed by the method of critical discourse analysis of articles published in both international (*The Guardian*) and regionally oriented (*Sudan Tribune*) online media. Generally, *The Guardian* articles and commentaries have praised Clooney’s role as human rights activist and his raising awareness about human rights violation in Sudan and South Sudan. However, there have been a number of critical commentaries targeting especially his uncritical support of South Sudanese political representation in the era before and during the referendum on independence which was held in 2011. It came out during the analysis that the topics connected to Sudan and South Sudan may not be strictly separated since they both focus on similar issues and are interconnected. There are also actors involved in both countries and connected issues, such as policy-makers and human rights activists. Besides, several articles informed about the violence in the border regions between Sudan and South Sudan that broke up after the declaration of South Sudanese independence, such as the Nuba mountains.

Five topics connected to the involvement of George Clooney in South Sudan were identified both in *The Guardian* online version of the newspaper and the *Sudan Tribune*: 1) His efforts connected to the emergence of independent South Sudan; 2) His campaign against the Sudanese government in general; 3) the Satellite Sentinel Project used to monitor violation of human rights by the Government of Sudan; 4) a Nespresso campaign connected to the promotion of the South Sudanese coffee exports; 5) the Sentry project and its report on corruption within the South Sudanese government and high-ranking military officers.

In the *Sudan Tribune* were published more articles focused exclusively on “celebrity involvement” and it was more concerned with the role of celebrities

in the conflict resolution in South Sudan and in raising awareness about the violation of human rights in the region. This is because this online newspaper is more regionally-oriented and publishes news and articles connected to the developments in Sudan and, therefore, can deal with more specific topics in the region. In media articles published in the *Sudan Tribune* Clooney's image is less critical and his self-identification was stressed. Clooney has consistently declared that he himself is not and has not tried to become an "expert" on Sudan and, instead, understands himself as a "megaphone" and stressed his own personal experience and commitment to the case when claiming: "I have been to Sudan and the region a number of times..." (Reeves 2012). Clooney's role, then, consists predominantly in the raising of awareness, which may be illustrated by his own statement: "I'm just trying to raise attention. Let your Congress know, let your president know..." (*Sudan Tribune* 2012a). Since he has a prominent position as a Hollywood star and is praised for his long-term activities connected to the promotion of human rights and criticism of the Sudanese regime, he has an extraordinary access to policy makers. For example, he presented cases of violation of human rights in Sudan and South Sudan to the US Senate Committee on foreign relations and discussed with US president Obama the possibility of lifting sanctions on Sudan. Moreover, George Clooney was a part of the group of celebrities (together with Don Cheadle, Mia Farrow, Omer Ismail and John Prendergast) who signed a letter to President Obama urging him to block the granting of a visa to Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for the purpose of attending the United Nations General Assembly in 2013 (*Sudan Tribune* 2013a).

### ***Simplified Narratives of South Sudan Independence***

The role of celebrities in advocating for the referendum on South Sudanese independence has been emphasised by selected media. According to the commentary of Daniel Howden for *The Guardian*, for example, the "birth of South Sudan has been soaked in celebrity like no other." Besides Clooney, also Matt Dillon and Don Cheadle were presented as those who have been "occasional visitors who have tried to use their star power to place the international public firmly in the corner of this plucky upstart nation" (Howden 2013). However, at the same time, Clooney has been criticised for his black and white understanding of the Sudanese conflict and simplifications of it. As Howden (2013) states,

the actors were highly effective at communicating a narrative about the new country that borrowed from a single script. [...] It was a seductive story that could be well told by handsome movie stars against the lavish backdrop supplied by South Sudan's superheated swamps and deserts and often beautiful people.

During the struggle for South Sudanese independence, Clooney was an uncritical proponent of the case and a supporter of South Sudanese actors, such as Salva Kiir. However, later it came out that the South Sudanese government, led by Kiir, is dealing with problems of corruption and nepotism and Clooney himself published vastly critical stances towards it while presenting the results of an investigation commissioned by himself and released by the Sentry (Smith 2016). He was very critical about the South Sudanese government, stating before his meeting with President Obama: "The simple fact is they're stealing the money to fund their militias to attack and kill one another" (Davey 2016). The influence of Clooney and his Enough Project on decision-making in American politics is also illustrated by a decision made by President Trump to extend the deadline on whether to lift US sanctions against Sudan in 2017. The Enough Project "welcomed the delay on a decision but urged the Trump administration to update the engagement plan put to Khartoum to address the core issues that keep the country in "perpetual crisis" (Summers 2017). All these quotations suggest that Clooney and other involved celebrities are portrayed by *The Guardian* and its commentaries as those who have had a great impact on granting independence to South Sudan and preserve their influence further when advocating for the punishment of the corrupt political representation in the newly-born country.

Clooney and other celebrities have been praised for advocating a referendum on independence in South Sudan in articles published in the *Sudan Tribune* as well. According to Paan Luel Wel (2011), "private American citizens did their part too" in the process of attainment good relations between the governments of the USA and Sudan at the wake of the South Sudanese referendum. The commitment of George Clooney to the South Sudanese case is put into the context of wider engagement in the region, mentioning especially launching the Satellite Sentinel Project. The role of celebrities during the South Sudanese referendum on independence has also been mentioned in articles dealing with renewed violence in South Sudan. A campaign for the peaceful conduct of a

referendum in South Sudan has been praised thus: “Prendergast and fellow US actor George Clooney also helped direct Sudan Now, a 2011 campaign for the peaceful conduct of a referendum in South Sudan, in which its citizens overwhelmingly chose separation from Sudan” (*Sudan Tribune* 2014).

Contrary to *The Guardian*, the *Sudan Tribune* has published articles concerned with the relations between Clooney (and Prendergast) and President Salva Kiir. For example, media mentioned that they together discussed the worsening relations between Sudan and South Sudan and “the status of the post-secession negotiation between the two countries as well as the situation of the people affected by the conflict in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states” (*Sudan Tribune* 2012b). President Kiir also admitted that he has underscored the roles played by the celebrities’ duo in advocating for global peace, particularly in South Sudan. He was aware that good relations with celebrities is a key to gain independence. Besides that, the article has mentioned an exclusive access of Clooney to decision-makers and American politicians, including US President Barack Obama and the then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (*Sudan Tribune* 2012b).

### ***Human rights as geopolitics***

George Clooney is being portrayed mostly as a human rights activist, especially in connection to raising awareness about the violation of human rights and the humanitarian situation in Darfur and the Nuba mountains region in South Kordofan. It is interesting that Clooney’s involvement as the UN Messenger of Peace was the subject of solely one article published in *The Guardian* during the selected time-frame (Child 2014). Therefore, it can be suggested that for the media, his involvement as a private person or as a part of organisations founded both by him and his co-workers is more interesting than his work for the UN. In the context of the Nuba mountains campaign, Clooney has been portrayed as a fearless advocate of the Sudanese issues who puts on his life in order to warn about the violation of human rights in the region. He himself presented his own experience from the Nuba mountains before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee by showing a movie which was filmed during his trip to the region. Its screening helped him to attract not only the committee, but also the public and journalists. Stressing his own personal experience also added weight to his proclamations and efforts. Media emphasised that his role and performance before the Commission has been praised also by influential policy makers such as

senator John Kerry, who stated that “Clooney is a tremendous example of the best citizen activism” (Harris 2012a).

Clooney’s human rights activism, besides that, helped him to access various influential actors with advocating the South Sudanese independence case. And after that, he “urged the US to work closely with China [...] to try and solve the issue” [violation of human rights in the Nuba mountains region] (Harris 2012a), which suggests that he has a certain influence on creating the US policy towards Sudan, which contributes to his role as a celebrity diplomat. He then urged for sending a US envoy to China to discuss the issue and for the imposition of firmer sanctions against top Sudanese governmental figures. In this case, Clooney met with President Obama, who promised him he “would pressure Chinese president Hu Jintao to seek a resolution to the region’s ongoing conflict at an upcoming meeting” (Devereaux 2012). Later, Clooney was regarded as “one of the first voices to speak out, before the US president or the head of the United Nations,” when violence erupted in South Sudan in 2013. In his speech he urged the need for a “robust UN response” (Howden 2013). He also informed president Obama about the results of the investigation commission which revealed corruption inside the South Sudanese government. He said he would “urge the international community, including South Sudan’s neighbours, to crack down on banks that fail to stop dubious transactions, and impose asset freezes on those responsible for human rights violations” (Smith 2016).

### ***The Satellite Sentinel Project as Spying***

The third topic connected with the involvement of George Clooney with Sudan was the Satellite Sentinel Project, launched by Clooney and Prendergast in 2010. Clooney has justified the launching of this programme by his effort to “raise attention” to the violation of human rights in Sudan in general in order to “stop a war before it starts.” He referred to the inability of the international community to deal with massive human rights violations by stating: “We were late to Rwanda. We were late to Congo. We were late to Darfur. There is no time to wait.” He justified the launching of the project by his statement: “We want to let potential perpetrators of genocide and other war crimes know that we’re watching, the world is watching” (Mc Greal 2010). The launching of this programme has been praised by *The Guardian*, which admitted that “Clooney’s impact is really being felt” and that the director of SSP and his team “were able to have an impact” when issuing a warning that there was

going to be an imminent attack on Kumuk in the Blue Nile province in 2011 (Harris 2012b). And additionally, Paul Harris explained for *The Guardian* that launching the Satellite Sentinel Project “was all Clooney’s idea, turning him from just another Hollywood liberal with a pet cause to a genuine expert and campaigner on Sudan” (Harris 2012b).

The Satellite Sentinel Project was also evaluated positively by the *Sudan Tribune*, since e.g. “George Clooney and John Prendergast envisaged and implemented a situation where future genocide would be witnessed live on the ground as they occur to deny the perpetrators any chance of hiding their atrocious foot tracks” (Wël 2011). The *Sudan Tribune* articles also reproduced the description of findings of the SSP surveillance in the context of the renewed violence in the region of Abyei, the contested region between Sudan and South Sudan (*Sudan Tribune* 2011), or the possible military assault on South Kordofan (*Sudan Tribune* 2013b). For his involvement in the Satellite Sentinel Project, Clooney earned a nickname “the anti-genocide paparazzi” which has been used by *Sudan Tribune* commentators in several cases (e.g. 2012b; 2012c; 2012a). It is also interesting, that Clooney stresses his role as “American,” which suggests the position of saviours ascribed to Americans by him: “We as Americans – as human beings – have to make sure that these atrocities do not take place” (*Sudan Tribune* 2012a). This suggests the reproducing of the simplified division of the world to North and South and a denial of agency to Africans themselves.

### ***Sentry Project as a Fight against Corruption***

In 2016, the Sentry project, co-founded by Clooney, released a report accusing South Sudanese officials of profiteering from war. In this case, the media news stressed an important negotiating position by stating that “Clooney and colleagues will present the findings to President Obama and urge international community to crack down on banks that fail to stop dubious transactions, and impose asset freezes on those responsible for human rights violations” (Smith 2016). As analysed in the earlier parts of the present article, Clooney advocated for the reaction of the international community to stop the corruption and misuse of public fund by the political representation of South Sudan.

A great deal of attention of the *Sudan Tribune* has been paid to the investigation of corruption inside the South Sudanese government by the

initiative Sentry, co-founded by Prendergast and Clooney. The initiative released the document “War Crimes Shouldn’t Pay” which reveals how president Kiir, Vice President Riek Machar and their allies used “stashed fortunes that include overseas mansions, luxury cars, and stakes in an array of businesses – major multinational oil and mining companies, banks, casinos, and an airline — and have left a trail of murky transactions, insider deals, and outright fraud” (*Sudan Tribune* 2016). The report offered recommendations for a policy approach to prevent atrocities and to promote peace, which were praised and regarded as innovative (*Sudan Tribune* 2016).

When discussing about freezing the offshore accounts of Sudanese officials, Clooney told the Senate Committee that they are “the greatest war criminals of this century, by far” (*Sudan Tribune* 2012c) and called their money to be frozen in order not to be able to finance the violence in border areas between Sudan and South Sudan. Clooney again supported his claims by stressing his own personal experience when he detailed the audience “how he and fellow peace activist, John Prendergast, survived aerial bombing campaigns allegedly carried out by rockets, while touring villages in the Nuba mountains” (*Sudan Tribune* 2012c).

### ***Nespresso Campaign as a Business Solution to Promoting Peace***

George Clooney used his Nespresso campaign to support the coffee exports from South Sudan since according to him, “coffee production helps to pacify regions” (Gunther 2015). His role has been understood by media as irreplaceable, and it was mentioned that “if Clooney wasn’t there, then arguably there wouldn’t be a drive to source coffee from Sudan” (Siegle 2013). Clooney himself expressed the link between a Nespresso campaign and Satellite Sentinel since he claimed to spend most of the money he made on Nespresso commercials on the satellite tracking of the borders between North and South Sudan (Siegle 2013). It is interesting that on the contrary to other topics identified in *The Guardian*, the Nespresso campaign has not been a subject of criticism by commentaries. The articles published on this topic were in favour of this campaign, since the money gained from it would be used to the project for supervising violation of human rights. Besides that, launching the exports of coffee from South Sudan for Nespresso was understood as an opportunity and none of the controversies connected to this business has been mentioned. The only criticism was targeted at Nespresso’s usage of single-serve aluminium pods (Gunther 2015).

The export of coffee from South Sudan for Nespresso capsules has been a subject of solely one article published in the *Sudan Tribune* in the selected time-frame (*Sudan Tribune* 2013c), only neutrally announcing the launching of the campaign and stressing the possible opportunities for South Sudan in diversifying its exports.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The roles that have been ascribed to George Clooney in selected media have been varied. He has been presented mainly as a peacemaker, an anti-genocide paparazzi or an expert on Sudan. His roles as imagined and represented in media are overestimated and presented in conformity with the wider context of American engagement in the region. In accordance with Richey and Budabin (2016a) and Richey (2016: 10), his roles in the media analysed are diverse, depending on whether his activities took place in the North or the South. In the South, he visited sites where human rights were violated and launched project to follow violent activities. In the North, he performed as a celebrity diplomat, advocating for the punishment of the violation of human rights in Sudan and supporting the South Sudanese independence.

He acted as a witness during meetings with crucial politicians and as a lobbyist in order to gain support for his case. He himself presented his engagement in a more modest way and understood his role mostly as a “megaphone” for those who may not speak for themselves. He also stressed his obligation to help Sudanese people as an American: “We as Americans – as human beings – have to make sure that these atrocities do not take place” (*Sudan Tribune* 2012a), which suggests his understanding of Americans as those who have a responsibility to watch over and oppose violations of human rights in the world. It represents the replication of a simplified division of the world in South and North and the denial of an agency to Africans to resolve their issues. It is not without interest that Clooney’s engagement in the Nespresso campaign to export coffee from South Sudan has been presented by the media without any criticism and even without any indication that these business relations could possible lead to replicate the North-South divide in an economic sense.

Compared to other celebrities engaging in Africa and Sudan such as Mia Farrow or Angelina Jolie George Clooney has adopted a more independent stance and more diverse roles. He has become personally attached to the

case even by his involvement in business campaigns in order to raise money for the South Sudanese case. Even though he may be seen as part of a wider network of human activists dealing with Sudanese issues, including NGOs, Sudanese diaspora or other parts of civil society, he, contrary to Angelina Jolie, for example, who has served as a Special Envoy of the UNHCR, does not currently stand out as a representative of any international organisation. In the past, he served as a UN Messenger of Peace since 2009, however, in 2014 he resigned from this role. Instead of his engagement with international organisations, he personally co-founded several initiatives in order to deal with the human rights violations in Sudan and South Sudan. His style of engagement, in comparison to other celebrities, is also diverse in that he, instead of focusing on the “humanitarian” engagement and the fight against poverty, deals with more “political” issues, such as the violation of human rights, the promotion of South Sudanese independence, and newly the fight against corruption in South Sudan. In this context, he even established personal relations with political representation of South Sudanese independence movements who later became part of the South Sudanese establishment taking part in the new civil war in the country.

Celebrities are imagined and represented by media as powerful actors since (1) they are highly visible and receive a lot of press coverage; and (2) they are perceived to have a significant influence. George Clooney’s role in the process of granting independence to South Sudan has been praised by a number of articles in the news part of online newspapers as well as in commentaries. His involvement in various issues connected to developmental policies as well as his contribution to raising awareness mainly by launching the Satellite Sentinel Project through which his organisation monitored alleged violation of human rights in the region, has been the most widely presented topic in the selected media analysed.

Clooney was presented as the one who contributed directly to South Sudanese independence by his effort and campaign. These findings are in accordance with Kogen (2015), who mainly criticised the fact that celebrities create the image of powerful West who can solve the issues of developing countries. Moreover, this image created by media use the masculinised face of celebrities’ engagement (see Richey and Brockington 2019). Clooney is portrayed as the one who puts his life on the line in order to reveal the truth about the violation of human rights in South Sudan. Media also stress his power to act, both as a

lobbyist in Congress and as the one who took part in launching the Satellite Sentinel project. Stressing his masculine strength and almost non-critical approach to his engagement in Sudan by media suggests the gendering of his celebrity activism (Richey and Brockington 2019).

Generally, the role of celebrities' in conflict resolution mainly consists in raising attention to particular cases. They have an access even to policy makers and may shift strategies and propose new ones in conflict management. Clooney, for instance, warned about the violation of human rights in Sudan in front of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and even had access to the American President Obama and then President Trump - advocating the imposition of US sanctions on violators of human rights in Sudan, including President Omar al-Bashir. However, celebrities' insight to the crises and conflicts is limited and therefore, their understanding is one-sided, often simplified and black and white which may lead to granting support to "wrong" leaders and actors. In accordance with Cooper's (2008) understanding of celebrity diplomats, George Clooney has successfully intervened and promoted the South Sudanese case. He supported the leaders of SPLM and Salva Kiir in particular, as was mentioned in *Sudan Tribune* articles. By his campaign he used a simplified picture of the conflict and in fact created the categories of right and wrong leaders. This simplified image, in fact, helped to raise a public awareness of the conflict and to turn attention to the South Sudanese referendum on independence. The fact that Clooney has supported in fact corrupt leaders, became clear in our analysed case especially when the Sentry report was released. South Sudanese political representation, originally supported and backed by Clooney, was accused of large-scale corruption and financing war from public sources.

George Clooney has been portrayed in the selected media in both ways, positive and critical. On the one hand, his good attention has been glorified especially in the earlier published articles, as he supported the independence of South Sudan especially and also advocated for dealing with the violation of human rights in Sudan and South Sudan. At the same time, however, various commentators were more critical about his support of leaders such as Salva Kiir when he was advocating South Sudanese independence. As was apparent from the analysis, media has highlighted the role of celebrities because they attract readers. At the same time, celebrities' portrayal as human rights activists may help them to gain more popularity. Potentially dangerous

in the long run is the fact that by their simplified presentation of the issues they contribute to the creation of stereotyped images of distant places and people and simplification to the "single story." Therefore, for the next stage of the research it would be interesting to analyse discursively the speeches of celebrities in connection to South Sudan in order to reveal metaphors that are connected, created and reproduced when talking about distant regions and their inhabitants.

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