



The Uncertain Business of Doing Good: Outsiders in Africa

Larry Krotz

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The relationship between Westerners and Africa has long been conflicted and complicated. Frequently exploitative, it is also just as often propelled by an almost irresistible urge to 'do good'. The persistence of this impulse is intriguing. From Doctor Livingstone 150 years ago to the rock star Bono today, outsiders have championed foreign intervention in Africa in political, social, economic, and health care reforms. But underlying all these good intentions, isn't there a hierarchical belief that we, as outsiders, somehow know what's best for Africa?

As a journalist and documentary filmmaker, Larry Krotz follows the projects of Canadian, American, British and European scientists, NGOs, lawyers, and peacekeepers, all motivated in some manner by the desire to 'do good' in Africa. He focuses specifically on people involved in trying to end the Angolan civil war, AIDS research in Kenya, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the UNIM circumcision research project in Kenya. Along with telling their stories, he examines the ethical and social implications of humanitarian and research projects in Africa, raising many difficult, yet critically important, questions. How have we come to think the way we do about Africa and its people? What has motivated us to action, for good or ill? And, in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, is there a choice between doing nothing and doing the well-intended, but, perhaps, wrong thing?

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