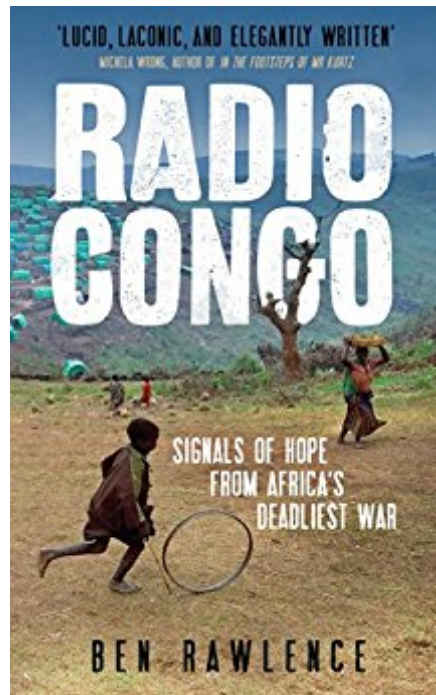




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Radio Congo: Signals Of Hope From Africa's Deadliest War



Synopsis

While poring over dust-caked pamphlets in the library, Ben Rawlence stumbles upon the photo of a lost city of colonial Congo--a glistening, modern metropolis built by huge tin mines and European capitalists. Today, that city, Manono, sits beyond the infamous "Triangle of Death," in an area rarely reached by outsiders since war turned the country's rivers to blood. In this compelling debut, Rawlence sets out to gather the news from this ghost town in one of the most dangerous places in the world. Ignoring the advice of locals, reporters, and mercenaries, he travels by foot, motorbike, and canoe, taking his time and meeting the people who are rebuilding their homes with hope, faith, and nervous instinct. We meet Benjamin, the kindly father of the most terrifying Mai Mai warlord; Leya, who happily gives up a good job in Zambia to return to her razed town; Colonel Ibrahim, a guerrilla turned army officer; the Lebanese cousins Mohammed and Mohammed, who oversee the remains of Manono's great mine; the priest Jean-Baptiste, who explains the conjoined prices of beer and normality; and the talk-show host Mama Christine, who dispenses counsel and courage in equal measure. From the "blood cheese" of Goma to the decaying city of Manono, Rawlence shares the real story of Congo during and after the war, and finds not just a lost city but the seeds of a peaceful future.

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Customer Reviews

As a teacher of Congolese refugees and a 1970s traveller in the Congo, it was interesting to compare how little had really changed for these people who are living in such a potentially rich country. It gave me insight into the conditions which have left most of the Congolese people I teach with PTSD. Radio Congo also depicts the resilience of the people and how they survive despite these setbacks. In my classroom it is evident just how determined they are, despite setbacks, to seize the opportunity to better themselves through education. Indeed, one of my students, a widow, has four daughters, two of whom are studying medicine at University and working part time to keep food on the table. I was also impressed with Rawlence's sketch of the high value property on Lake Kivu which is rented to aid agencies and also the ultra comfortable dining habits of the aid workers in the midst of so much destitution. The cynic in me can never understand how "aid workers" don't experience some form of dissonance when surrounded by so much poverty whilst sipping on wine or living in luxury accommodation. Full points for writing such an entertaining account of such a forgotten part of the world.

This book helped me understand so much more on the awful wars that have been going on. Very well written. georgiaScottsdale

A good romp through one of the most interesting places on earth - certainly one of the most unpredictable and volatile. I read most books "Congo related" and this one didn't disappoint.

excellent story of life in an area we know so little about. look forward to reading his new boo, City of Thorns.

Young man has gutsy adventures off the beaten path in Congo. Way off the beaten path, and in that sense admirable. No hanging out in Kinshasa. But I didn't see the "signals of hope" referred to in the title.

Great story that describes his travels through war ravaged Congo. I like books that show me part of the world I am likely to never see.

The title of the book leads one to believe that there would be more stories of the ways in which radios operate and help and affect the lives of people in the eastern DRC, but it only has one anecdotal story on a local radio station. This is a travelogue, a description of all the human life encountered on the road less traveled in Katanga province - a place where rarely foreigners enter. This is the biggest achievement of this book. Otherwise it is quite an easy to write, but an honest portrayal of the precarious conditions that people face in the eastern part of the country..all the characters and the wild truths of lives in all its varieties. But it is a bit unforgiving for the author who is a researcher at Human Rights Watch to write the shortest recap of the history of the conflict in DRC, unfortunately omitting a lot, and not always factual..the author's specialization on kiswahili speaking history of Eastern Africa is obvious, and these parts of the story are enjoyable. This is yet another road movie type book in the category of "traveling to the remote parts of Congo". Although honest, it is not very different from other books that have appeared these past few years, many of them written by journalists. It would have been more respectful to set this road story in a more appropriate historical and political context to improve the readers' understanding on why things are as they stand.

Once I started this book it was hard to lay down... I became completely absorbed in the compelling story of how Rawlence overcame one challenge after another on his recent journey overland into the heart of Congo. Few of the westerners he consulted believed that he would achieve his goals of reaching Manono - a mining town that once flourished with modernist architecture and every convenience for the wealthy during the Belgian colonization - and finding out how the local people are coping with the aftermath of a terrible war - people whose voices are seldom heard. His compassion, fluency in Swahili, willingness to accept local foods, customs and risks with humour, and tolerance of long hours of physical stress, clearly endeared Rawlence to the characters he met along the way - from Batwa pygmies (the original "forest people" of the Congo) to Catholic priests and disarmed rebels. His deep understanding of African history and politics - skillfully woven into the personal encounters and into the counterpoint of dramatic scenery and impoverished living conditions - means that I learnt more by reading this book than I had ever gleaned from news reports. The fact that Rawlence survived and brought back these stories is reason to hope that the deep reserves of human ingenuity, generosity and kindness that he found will outlast the exploitation of mineral reserves that continues even in the fragile peace.

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