

Why isn't the East Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis a Cause for Hollywood Celebrities?

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Finding a celebrity with a cause is about as easy as finding a plastic surgeon in Los Angeles, but they are thin on the ground for the refugees fleeing the Ukrainian civil war.

*"Is there a time for keeping a distance
A time to turn your eyes away
Is there a time for keeping your head down
For getting on with your day?"*

U2, Miss Sarajevo, 1995

Where's Bono? George Clooney? Even Madonna?

They could be having a communal conclave in a pub near the U2 frontman's Dublin home, or be chewing on Margarita's at the ER star's Lake Como pile, but one thing these celebrity activists are not doing is commenting on a horrific refugee crisis in Europe. Given that they have rarely seen a cause they couldn't sponsor or a bandwagon they couldn't leap onto, something is amiss.

In the 90s, the mere mention of Bosnia (slowly pronounced BOS-KNEE-AH for emphasis) was enough to get Bono in a tizzy about human rights and displaced persons. So much so that he wrote a rather good song about it and roped in the late Luciano Pavarotti to add gravitas. Madonna was falling over herself a few years ago about Malawi, and Clooney took Sudan so seriously that he led a 'Save Darfur' rally in Washington.

However, despite around three-quarters of a million Ukrainians fleeing to Russia alone this year, the celebs have placed their pulpits in storage and have absolutely nothing to say. Notwithstanding the reputation of its ladies, it appears Ukraine just isn't sexy enough for the superstar lobbyists.

Starved of the oxygen real star-power can grant, pro-Kiev movements have had to reach for the Z list for empathy. Instead of Brangelina, backers include Carl Bildt (looks too much like an accountant), Zbigniew Brzezinski (helped create Al Qaeda), The Scorpions (last top 10 hit in 1991) and Lithuanian punk-rocker Andrius Mamontovas (who?).

Even the domestic (I wish there was a letter after Z) list just aren't playing ball with the cuddly Poroshenko-ites, who formerly were Yuliya-ites and will probably soon be God-knows-what-ites. The most photographed Ukrainian celeb in foreign media, Valeria Lykhanova (AKA the 'human barbie'), answered Maidan's call by going on holidays in the new Russian province of Crimea. She told GQ magazine: *"The next step is to cut off Ukraine entirely,*

because all I get there is shit. Why waste myself on this?"



People walk in front of a building damaged by, what locals say, was recent shelling by Ukrainian forces in Donetsk August 20, 2014 (Reuters / Maxim Shemetov)

Impossibly proportioned ladies aside, the only Hollywood luminary to touch on the subject so far appears to be Milla Jovovich who was born in Kiev and might be expected to have strong opinions. Initially, Milla seemed concerned, tweeting in January: *"My heart hurts when I see what's happening in the Ukraine! I believe in my amazing people and know they will find a peaceful solution."*

However, as the initially peaceful Maidan protests were hi-jacked by far-right nutters and the blood lust began, Jovovich became silent. Recently, she's restricted herself to tweeting pictures of her trip to Cannes and Antibes in France, a world away from the horror of her birthplace. Milla's only other intervention thus far has been to lend support to two Russian journalists detained by pro-Kiev forces in May - the #saveourguys campaign. With that photo, the screen siren broke the hearts of Ukrainian Nationalists who believed she just might have been one of them.

Milla had earlier tweeted in response to *'patriotic'* trolls: *"I'm Russian and Montenegrin! But have been living in the US since I was 5!"* - pretty much clarifying where her sympathies lie.

Another movie star, who at first sympathized, was Austrian strong-man Arnold Schwarzenegger. In January, he sent a video message in support of Maidan but, then again, *'Arnie'* moonlights as a Republican Party politician and was *'Governator'* of California fo*r two terms. He shares the same political allegiance as John McCain and backed the Arizona senator in the 2008 US presidential election and it's here that I think I've found the problem - the Kiev cause is too closely associated with McCain and McCain is just not *'cool'* enough. In fact, McCain is to street cred what The Essential Barry Manilow album is to hipsters.

His position on Iran (or I-ran as he insists on calling it) plus his advocacy of the US staying in Iraq for “one hundred years” means being photographed with the ‘White Tornado’ is as appealing in Tinseltown as being pictured with Syrian terrorists. Incidentally, the failed White House candidate has actually been snapped in the company of Syrian terrorists. He also chose a running mate who claimed to be a foreign policy expert because she could “see Russia from my window.”



Ukrainian refugees who arrived in the Novosibirsk Region are greeted by the Emergency Situations Ministry staff and social workers at the Novosibirsk-Glavny railway station (RIA Novosti / Alexandr Kryazhev)

Once McCain stood on Maidan with Kiev’s ‘revolutionary’ leaders it seems they became Dire Straits in the eyes of Hollywood, and Dire Straits are about as trendy as calling ‘The Holidays’ Christmas.

Of course, there is a very serious matter behind the frivolity. This week the United Nations agency for refugees (UNHCR) confirmed that over 730,000 Ukrainians have fled to Russia this year with a further 117,000 displaced inside the failed state. Around 750 have applied for asylum in the EU, which is supposed to be their ‘friend’ – with friends like that, indeed.

The biggest movement of Europeans – in a period of months – since World War Two is an appalling tragedy and needs to be urgently highlighted. However, with the vast majority of Western media slavishly toeing the NATO line, no matter how dreadful Kiev’s atrocities, don’t hold your breath waiting for Hollywood to intervene. For the moment, the celebrity world stands with John McCain and his fellow neo-con travellers and Ukraine’s victims aren’t box-office yet.

That said, U2 have a new album slated for release this fall and, with his lectures on Africa becoming tedious, Bono might be looking for a new cause. Miss Donetsk, anyone? Cadence

might be a problem but as the Dubliner's favorite poet, Seamus Heaney, wrote "hope and history don't rhyme."

Bryan MacDonald is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and teacher. He wrote for Irish Independent and Daily Mail. He has also frequently appeared on RTE and Newstalk in Ireland as well as RT.

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