

From Past to Present: Some Historical Truism's About the Congo

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Congo is in the heart of Africa enormously rich in mineral resources yet consciously one of the most abused countries in the world. Around 1880s when most of the Europe were "civilizing" the whole world through there noble project of colonizing.

King Leopold of Belgium successfully captured the center of Africa today known as Congo as a private land. The pretext used by the dead King was that he is going to protect the "natives from Arab Slavers" and open the way for "Christian missionaries" and "Western Capitalists". Eventually he did open the doors but for his own pockets. The abuse against natives were such that John Harris of Baringa contacted the Kings chief agent in Congo because of horrifying treatments he saw against the natives.

"I have just returned from a journey inland to the village of Insongo Mboyo. The abject misery and utter abandon is positively indescribable. I was so moved, Your Excellency, by the people's stories that I took the liberty of promising them that in future you will only kill them for crimes they commit"[1].

Africans must have wondered in awe at first sight of the coming of Europeans knowing that different kind of people in color, race are actually existing somewhere on this planet. Under *Leopold's* regime certain quotas were fixed to extract rubber, ivory and other precious metals, men and children were set to work for hours and hours and were given quotas and whoever failed to deliver quota got their hands cut off. More than 10 million people's lost their lives or had their hands cut just because they fell short of their quotas[2]. It was the most devastating form of slavery, subjugation, intolerance and hate seen in the history of the mankind. Women were chained forcing men to look for rubber, ivory as compared to work in the fields for food. Thus, resulting in famine, but were the Africans inferior or backwards that they were subject to such treatment? Inferior in military, vulnerable to guns and ships, Yes.

Howard Zinn writes that the "The African Civilization" was an advance in its own way if compared with Europe, in a reasonable way it was even more "admirable" but it did include "cruelties, hierarchical privileges, and the readiness to sacrifice human lives for religion and profit"; it was also a culture and civilization of 100 million people very well skilled in farming, weaving, ceramics, sculpture [3]. In terms of law as European private property and capitalist nature received more protection where in England as of 1740, "a child could be hanged for stealing a rag of cotton" but in Congo, alien to private ownership, communal life persisted and theft was punished with "fines" or various "servitude" [4]. The brutal colonization finally ended in Congo in early 1960, in the first of its elections, Congolese people elected Patrice

Lumumba, an anti-colonist, democratic, social and human right activist who was killed by “Belgian and CIA secret agents” but the story didn’t end there, the agents made sure his body never to be found. After being killed by firing squad, his body was put “in a barrel of acid and made it disappear”. The country turned out to be ruled by worst dictatorship. “Until very recently, in November 2001, the Belgian Parliament did not acknowledge the government’s responsibility in the murder of Patrice Lumumba”[5] .

Currently the precious metals like we use in our cell phones and computers, even car batteries (Coltan), come from Congo. Many of these mines are controlled by rebel groups like FDLR and Mai Mai with their own interests and agendas and foreign support. The UN is very well aware of these facts. In 2001, UN, in its report “The illegal exploitation of natural resources in Congo”, found two major reasons for the current situation:

1. the influence of rebel groups like “Rwandan Patriotic Army” and “Ugandan Military Commanders”
2. rise of “large networks” of “top Military” and “business men” who rely on cheap labor and thrive with profits of slavery of civilians in their mines [6].

According to Noam Chomsky, “in the past decade” the eastern Congo has seen the worst time where 5 million people have died from “horrible atrocities” where United States is indirectly involved. The important “mineral” of our cellphone – “Coltan” – comes from Congo. “Multinational corporations are there exploiting the very rich mineral resources of the region. It’s almost an international war in Africa”[7]. According to Charlotte Simon-Bongumba, founder of NGO Mothers of Congo who considers the UN as an “accomplice” in this whole situation, says “there is connection; as lots of British companies invest in Congo, especially in the mines which fuels sexual violence done by soldiers who work with British Mining Companies, including some French companies, Canadian companies. 48 women in an hour are raped in Congo. *When asked* how many British and Foreign companies we are we talking about, *she replied*:

“We are talking about 85 companies so far, 85 may be more. The supply chain lead up to big brand name iPhone and I always say how could they sleep at night?” [8]. (*Italics added*).

In 2016 Amnesty, International presented its report on Coltan and Congo titled “THIS IS WHAT WE DIE FOR” put forward some gruesome truisms “children young as seven” working in the mines with adults were exposed to “hard metal lung disease, respiratory sanitization, asthma, shortness of breath, and decrease pulmonary function, and dermatitis” where workers do not have the most basic “protective equipment, such as gloves, work clothes, or facemasks”. Women who carry 50kg of cobalt speak of problems with their “lungs”. UNICEF estimating as much as “40,000 boys and girls” working in the mines in the southern region while working nearly 12 hours for \$1 to \$2 a day, even children working spent 12 hours in the mines. In some mines, miners dig deep with their “chisels, mallets, and other hand tools”. The miners go down in the mines with “bare feet” with support from small “ledges”; in some places they have to “crawl” often collapsing, every day there is a death of some miners which is normal now. Women who are involved in washing, sorting ore, contain cobalt including many children. “Women had babies and infants with them” working again like men for 12 hours for \$1.5 or \$1 a day.[9]

I wouldn't be writing this article without some Coltan involved in it. I do not know from where it came from nor I will never know. Why? Because the manufacturers do publish the list of suppliers of their company but do not know from where the supplier get it. In other words, they do the moral things by publishing the long and endless list but what happens with the company they deal they don't care or don't want to know. It's like trying to bury the facts quickly and moving on, there rises a moral question here that these companies which produce cell phones after every few months should really be making these cellphones so soon after one another? And we should ask ourselves do we really need to buy cellphones every 4 or 6 months or every year?

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Notes

[1] Mark Dummett, "King Leopold's legacy of DR Congo violence", BBC News, February 24 2004. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3516965.stm>

[2] Ibid

[3] Howard Zinn, "A People's History of the United States, Harper Perennial, 2005, P 26 discusses the birth of Slavery in Africa

[4] Ibid

[5] Telesutv.net, "55 years ago, the CIA Murdered Congolese Revolutionary Leader Patrice Lumumba" The Dawn, January 18, 2015. Available at <http://www.thedawn-news.org/2016/01/20/55-years-ago-the-cia-murdered-patrice-lumumba-congolese-revolutionary-leader/>

[6] Francine Crimmins, "Guilt edged smartphones an unhappy Christmas gift", Eureka Street, December 18 2016. Available at <http://eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=50490#.WHEXnFN97IU>

[7] Harrison Samphir, "Noam Chomsky | On Shutdown, Waning US Influence, Syrian Showdown", Truthout, October 08 2013. Available at <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/19287-in-conversation-with-noam-chomsky-on-us-politics-global-affairs-and-capitalist-reform>

[8] Going Underground RT, Congo, Mobile Phones, Sexual Violence These companies need to be investigated, June 20 2015 Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-E6la4nw0o>

[9] Amnesty International, "THIS IS WHAT WE DIE FOR: Human Rights Abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Power the Global Trade in Cobalt" 2016

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