

Media Coverup on the Corporate Pillage and Destruction of sub-Saharan Africa

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Noting that periodically sub-Saharan Africa receives some attention in the US and at least since Mr Clinton moved into the Big House has occasionally been given attention by news and pundits- of all persuasions- I remain struck by the determination to treat the events in the Congo Basin/ East Africa as unique and detached deformities of the Dark Continent. Reporting and commentary acquire more colour and sparkle but once squeezed into view, reveal themselves to be the same dubious paste of unknown content. This situation has by no means improved now that the Big House is occupied by a man of Kenyan and Kansan descent. One example washed through the US liberal journal, Atlantic, is an article by Samantha Powers. The writing to the Left is not much better since with few exceptions her assumptions are shared widely across the North American and European political spectrum.

Rwanda is not unique- despite the attempts to wrap it in its very own “war crimes tribunal” (ICTR). In fact the proper comparison for Rwanda is Indonesia (1965) where a million odd were murdered at the insistence of US and UK corporate interests represented by their governments overtly and covertly. The US and its international harem of corporate-driven states used the same tactics in Rwanda that they did when they gave Suharto the green light to annihilate anyone who might be capable of continuing support for the post-colonial nationalism of Sukarno. This is the genealogy that needs to be reported: Congo’s Lumumba (1960), Ghana’s Nkrumah (1966), Indonesia’s Sukarno were just the most prominent personalities murdered or forced into exile to prevent the people of their respective countries from attaining independence and control over their own resources.

Despite the work by veterans like Stockwell, Agee, et al. who detail first hand the USG function as enforcer of corporate control over the resources of former colonies and dependencies or even the journalistic efforts of people like Kwitney, Blum, and others to record the heinous conduct of corporations that could be named, the “news” and “commentary” rarely takes even the barest notice of what could be found in an hour’s desk research. Banalities are uttered about the government’s dramatis personaewhich without even checking their official biographies- which often enough show the slug-like slime trail of their careers in corporate or covert action.

Just to take some typical examples, reporting of the diplomatic missions of deceased General Vernon Walters and current US pro-consul in Central Asia, Richard Holbrooke, involves routinely ignoring their ignominious careers providing ground support US-sponsored terror regimes — although this information would have made their conduct for more comprehensible to the reader. Sometimes the reporting is so myopic that the author has apparently neglected to read anything else published in the same medium or as in the case of one broadcaster reporting on a “colour” movement in Iran, neglected to review even

her own past reporting on the same subject.

Another curiosity is that in media obsessed with statistics there are rarely if any cumulative reports of the death tolls. Reporting incidental daily figures in isolation prevents anyone from grasping the volume or proportion of deaths and casualties, either absolutely or relatively. Everyone can quote 6 million Jews. Those with somewhat more circumspect mental faculties include the 20 million who died because of the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. However who can say how many Africans have been murdered in the Congo Basin. Never mind those who still dispute the number of deaths in the “triangular trade”. The Société Générale destroyed the records for the Belgian contribution but despite almost constant UN presence in the region there are no reliable totals. Those that are used pertain almost entirely to the Rwanda case as if the rest of the Congo had been pacified since 1960. Are we to believe that if we have no memory of African history then no one in Africa does either? Of course the only parts of Africa that receive any coverage are those where there is visible fighting. The “peaceful” plunder of the remainder of the continent goes largely ignored.

Americans- and as a result those bombarded with US media too- are saturated with stories about the extractive practices of the NSDAP regime (well supported by all the major extractive corporations on the Allied side). People here and in the US can repeat from memorising (to call it memory would be gross distortion) often incomplete, inaccurate or downright false statements about the operation of our government under the NSDAP. Yet no one can say anything coherent about more than two centuries of vicious extraction from Africa- let alone the ongoing theft and murder. People standing at the bar over a drink can chat away about “lampshades” made from the skin of murdered KZ prisoners. Yet no one can say a word about the men, women and children who were disfigured, tortured, murdered and robbed by American and European corporations to supply free copper or other raw materials for super-profits. A footnote some time ago explained that one of the rare materials (coltan) in the Congo basin is a mineral needed for cell-phone production. Do iPhone-linked liberals think about the corporate mass murder in the Congo which contributes to their exclusive and stylish 24-7 reachability? Certainly almost no one reports about it. Roger Casement was probably the last person to report the high crimes of the Congo in any depth and he was destroyed as a person by the Belgian and British States for doing it.

So perhaps it is dangerous to publish the whole story- not the one that focuses on the Tarzan-vision of Africans- when talking about Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. Authors who are fixated on the violent results rather than the chain of causality, make the same mistakes repeatedly. But maybe these are not mistakes. Maybe this is the real purpose of such articles, to confirm the prejudices with spice. Mr Clinton’s “apology” for neglecting the Rwanda crisis had nothing to do with being “black” in even the most absurd sense of this deceit, reported by at least one commentator. Like most US presidential posing it was duplicitous.

The massacres were not the tragic rage of peasants in factional warfare but the orchestrated assault on broad swathes of the population with machetes bought en masse and deployed by death squads of the same calibre US and UK governments have organised in every part of the world to murder and demoralise rural populations. Neither Clinton needed to know any of this. Whether Mr Clinton did is also immaterial. His posturing was part of the campaign in part orchestrated by the institutions like the IRC to sell a new brand

of “missionary”-style intervention to defend corporate plunder.

In the 19th century Christian missionaries were sent into target countries– usually with generous support by whatever companies had a financial interest in the territory. The provocation of aggressive and caustic Christendom normally triggered resistance and such resistance was then marketed at home as brutal native savagery against “peaceful Christian missionaries”. (In fact it could be argued that the sole reason why Christendom is so obsessively described as “peace-loving and humble” at home is to mask its thousand-year history of filthy, brutal, self-righteous greed.) Thus the protective forces of the sending State acquired a pretext for invasion and slaughter, followed by occupation of the targeted lands and enslavement of the local labour. Today this doctrine and strategy is called “humanitarian interventionism”. While in the Big House, Mr Clinton was its principal missionary. People like the Bush presidents spared us the hypocrisy of humanitarianism, preferring the more overt language of “full spectrum dominance” and “global war” etc.

There is still no common coherent recognition of US imperial policy in Asia starting with the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth. Yet only by taking seriously the emergent US vision of Japan as a base for US force projection fed by the rice bags from Korea and Indochina (elaborated esp. in Vol. 2 of Bruce Cumings Origins of the Korean War) can one grasp the tenacity of US aggression in the region. In Latin America there was at least nominal independence so the actions there are properly treated as invasions and subversion. None of this has really stopped and when it did, was rarely more than for “the pause that refreshes”– soft drink diplomacy, so to speak.

Before it was the “white man’s burden” and “manifest destiny”. Then it became development and anti-communism. Now it is “humanitarian intervention” and “globalisation”. These are all re-branding for the same vicious, greedy practices of an elite raised in filth and hypocrisy, to put it nicely. As Noam Chomsky has often said (see also an interview posted to GR) there is a tendency to focus on governments as if they were the only actors in international affairs. This has not been the case at least since the British crown chartered the Honourable East India Company in 1708.

The reporting today reminds me of an experience I had in the not too distant past. For whatever reason, mainly habit, I have used the same brand of white toothpaste for decades. Periodically the packaging and labelling are changed so that it is impossible to detect from the now five or six different variants of toothcare substance under the same brand the plain white paste that I have been using since I was a child. I cannot say whether this toothpaste is of particularly high quality but it has the least repulsive taste and feel of all the stuff I have had to try on various occasions in my life. No one in the store could tell me which of the packages contained plain white toothpaste. Of course the same product is still made but in the pathological determination to disguise a standard product with novelty even the name is changed at varying intervals. The machine for marketing this firm’s product cannot grasp the notion of clear and consistent labelling for its standard product(s). In fact there is no interest at all in selling products which one can understand and/ or identify.

That is the way most people write about current events– especially those which are not new but comprise standard products produced more or less the same for decades or centuries. There is no interest in the reader recognising the product for what it is. The reader has also become addicted to this planned ignorance and no longer even asks about the genuine product content– happy as he or she is to see new packaging, the more sparkling the better.

It would be an enormous assistance to readers to identify the product in consistent and clear ways rather than presenting and re-presenting the “events” as if they were new, simply because of the need to dazzle with new packaging (presidential or ambassadorial as the case may be).

Some stores here and probably in the US offer the option of disposing of the outer packaging of an item bought- at the checkout before leaving the store. One idea is to encourage the store to reduce the amount of packaging the customer is obliged to take home and to aggregate the collection of such waste and recyclables. But the question remains- why should the packaging be necessary in the first place? Well maybe before writing an article about a “news” product, the same question ought to be asked: why is the “news” packaging needed? Much fuss is made about government secrecy but this is truly exaggerated. The main reason people are misinformed is not government secrecy but the continuous re-packaging of low-fact paste and its witting and unwitting distribution by lazy or somnambulant journalists and pundits. Maybe the most ecological way to inform readers is to write the story, the history, without the dazzle and sparkles designed to distract- to allow the reader to see the facts on the shelf plainly.

That would be an enormous improvement in the original product indeed.

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