AFRICAN DECOLONISATION, FIFTY YEARS OF POST-COLONIAL METASTASIS OF THE COLONIAL CANCER : CASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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While concluding his seminal book, *The Politics in the Congo*, Crawford Young wrote the following:

> Belgium had constructed in Africa a colonial state which stood out by the thoroughness of its organization, the formidable accretion of power through an interlocking alliance of state, church, and capital, and the ambition of its economic and social objectives. The very strength of the system as a colonial structure, and its steadfast refusal to face effectively the problem of political adaptation until it began to disintegrate, made an ordered transfer of power peculiarly difficult. A colonizer who suddenly lost the profound conviction of the righteousness of his policy was confronted with a revolution by colonized which lacked both structure and ideology. Total colonialism was replaced by total independence virtually overnight, yet the very completeness of the victory of the colonized had as its concomitant an impotence which emptied success of its substance. (Young 1965:572)

Since this abrupt and failed decolonization as underlined by Young, the Congo has never recovered and recent history would not deny it. In his recent gaze on the DRC, John Le Carre wrote: ““If one were patrolling the globe in search of great problems to address, the DRC would be the logical first stop.” According to Le Carre, the Congo—which has been bleeding to death for five centuries, victim of Arab slaves, the United Nations, the French, the British—is now victim of the Rwandans and the mineral companies. Rwanda has indeed become a gold and diamond exporter without one single gold or diamond mine in the country of “*mille collines*” (thousand hills—the popular term for Rwanda).

In April 2009, I was invited by the Institute of African studies at John Hopkins University to respond to Herman Cohen who wrote a commentary in the New York Times encouraging the DRC to let Rwandans exploit the minerals in eastern Congo. According to Cohen, Rwanda is already smuggling minerals from eastern DRC. If the DRC allows Rwandans to officially exploit mineral in the east and collect taxes from Rwandan companies, the country will receive at least some return which is now entirely going to Rwanda.

This argument is economically sound. But, simply because it is economically beneficial does not mean that it is socially and politically acceptable. Eastern Congo is not only an economic space, it is also a political space where people have claims to th4ir patrimony—on their land and everything it contains. My answer to Herman Cohen argument was that this argument sounds exactly like one put forward about the nuclear waste by Lawrence Summers, an influential economic advisor to the US administration under Barak Obama. Summers is reported to have said that nuclear waste should be sent to Africa because African people do not live long enough to get cancer: since the average lifespan of African was less than 50 years, Africans would die before contracting cancer. Therefore, the logic averred, by sending nuclear waste to Africa, with financial compensation, Africans will in fact have their lives improved. By accepting nuclear waste—and the financial benefits to result from that, Africans could ease their hardship. In economic terms, therefore Africa is "under-polluted": the cost of pollution in Africa is less than the cost of pollution in the West. But even if Summers's logic would seem economically sound, however, it is ethically and morally unacceptable. So too with Herman Cohen's proposal to validate Rwandan extraction of Congolese mineral wealth.

A second objection to Cohen's proposition relates to the assertion that Rwanda was acting only like a middleman who has been empowered by outside power brokers, who are in the West. By empowering Rwanda at the expense of the DRC, the West (mostly Americans and the British) have created instability in eastern Congo where the Congolese Tusti and/or the Banyamulenge, a tiny minority supported by the Rwandan government, have laid claims to land and have provoked confrontations with other ethnic groups. According to Cohen, no Western State is ready to point the finger to Rwanda at the moment. Rwanda was therefore encouraged to steal and pillage Congo's resource.

Indeed, plundering the Congo is not a new phenomenon. It did not start with the current war. From long before the publication of Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*, it was well known that King Leopold's "Congo Free State" was little more than but a barbaric looting enterprise. It was similarly common knowledge that the uranium used by Americans to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki came from Shinkolobwe mining in Katanga, but the benefits went to Belgium – through the cancellation of its war debts and not to the Congo as colony. Once again, the Belgians simply drew on Congolese wealth to address their own postwar financial debt. The Cold War pro-imperialist Mobutist dictatorship and its economic high-jacking of the country's resources to benefit Mobutu's networks of clients revealed the same logic of predation. The neo-Mobutist solitary dictatorship of Kabila transformed the world's most attractive minerals market into a buccaneer industry enriching Kabila and his family network at the expense of the Congolese people. What is new in the 1998 post-Cold War era is that the looting of resources is taking place in a profoundly different context than the last century's. At least three autonomous power centers hae emerged—Kinshasa, Goma and Gbadolite—with continuous shifts in the identity of key actors who are introducing new commodity chains. The three centers are connected to countries that back them militarily. What is new is the current situation is that those who are plundering the resources of the DRC are from neighboring countries, including Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe; they are the new patrons, local warlords being their clients.

Plunder, of course, is not restricted to war situations. It was already occurring in Congo before the war. If a group of people possesses discretionary powers without accountability to a third party, this group can easily enrich itself to the detriment of others.

Table 1: Trade Balance of DRC and fraudulent exports of Diamond (in mln USD)

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Exports	1,562	1,546	1,448	1,442	749	687
Official diamond exports	331	347	314	399	237	200
Fraudulent diamond exports	400	417	411	480	284	239

Diamond exports as % of overall exports	47%	49%	51%	60%	69%	64%
Imports	870	1,089	769	1,102	568	596
Balance	692	457	697	320	180	89

Source: Banque Nationale congolaise, condense de statistiques, different numeros, Kinshasa, 2000-5/2001 (S. Marysse 2003)

The table demonstrates that Congolese state was already weakened before the war. The National Bank of Congo estimates that diamond smuggling was as large a category as official diamond exports. What the table does not show, however, is that anti-smuggling controls in Congo are not very watertight, because of what William Reno calls the "shadow state", whereby power extends informally from the official state to non-state areas, often circumventing the law. This "criminalization" of state did not start with the invasion of Rwanda and Uganda, though their actions greatly exacerbated the existing situation. First, as table 1 shows, diamond production and smuggling declined during the war years of 1999 and 2000. However, as the occupied territories do not report exports, it would appear from other statistics (from these neighboring countries) that the plunder continued, albeit to the benefit of a different military-commercial group. Table 2 suggests that the occupation has been quite ruthless. Indeed, there has been a significant increase in the scale of plunder, as shown in the benefits flowing to the Rwandan and Ugandan military and commercial classes, who have links with international trading houses. Windfall profits for these two neighboring countries now exceeds the total revenue of the Congolese state. It is well known that the US and the Bretton Woods institutions provide both direct and indirect support for Rwanda and Uganda, both of which have full access to international financial flows; both countries, for that matter, have been admitted to the HIPC debt reduction programme. Such international support also suggests that, although Africa is increasingly run by the Africans and although the likelihood of direct military intervention by the hegemonic powers has been reduced, the latter do continue to play a role in the shaping and directing of wars and conflict on the continent.

Table 2: Declared and Non-declared Mineral Exports by Rwanda and Uganda

In mln.USD	Rwanda	Rwanda	Uganda	Uganda
	1999	2000	1999	2000
Diamond				
Official exports	0.4	1.8	1.8	1.3
Non-declared diamond exports for Rwanda and reexports by Uganda	40	40	1.8	1.3
Gold (1)				
Official exports	0.1	0.1	95.0	89.9
Non-declared gold exports for Rwanda and reexports by Uganda	29	29	95.0	89.9
Coltan				
Official exports	24	16.6	13.9	-
Non-declared coltan exports	240	240	13.9	-
Total declared export of minerals (2)	61.2	68.4	438.8	380.5
Total exports declared and non-declared	309	309	110.7	91.2
In % of declared exports	505%	452%	25%	24%

Total value added of plundered diamond, gold and coltan	119	119	61.1	45.3
In % of GDP (3)	6.1%	5.2%	1.1%	0.8%
In % of military expenses (4)	146%	137%	53%	43%

Sources: S.Marysse and C. Andre, 2001:323-327.

(1) We have estimated the value of gold exports by multiplying the exported kilos by the gold price on 30 April 2001(US$8,300/kilo)
(2) IMF, Rwanda Staff Report for 2000 Article IV Consultation and requests for the Third Annual Arrangement under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and for Extension of Commitment Period, Washington, IMF, 12 December 2000, p.39; IMF, Uganda. Staff Report for the 2001 article IV Consultation, Second Review under the Third Annual Arrangement Under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and Request for Waiver of Performance Criteria, Washington, IMF, 19 January 2000, p.43
(3) IMF, Uganda Staff Report, op cit., 12 March 2001, p.8,37
(4) IMF, Uganda Staff Report, op cit., 12 March 2001, p.8,40

Several conclusions can be drawn from this table. First, in terms of non-declared exports, Rwanda had a greater stake in this war than Uganda. Seen from this perspective, ending the war would not be beneficial to Rwanda. The UN Panel, for example, estimates that the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) made at least USD 250 million from coltan sales alone over a period of 18 months in 1999 and 2000 (UN Panel, 2001:36). Second, the extent of plunder is of course considerably smaller that the total of non-declared exports, because a large proportion of the latter is value added that results from the cost of production. Third, the value added that would have benefited Congolese traders and producers in peacetime is sizeable. Finally, as formal budget accounts for military spending by Rwanda and Uganda were limited, as a condition for access to the financial flows provided by the Bretton Wood institutions, it is now quite clear that wartime plundering, off the books, helped finance the conflict and has unduly prolonged people's suffering. The "ostrich" policy of denial, by a number of bilateral donors and the International Financial Institutions, characterized by the continuation of funding for the invading countries, even with full knowledge that funds are fungible, has therefore indirectly condoned the continuation of war.

My third argument against M. Cohen's proposition is that the Congo minerals which M. Cohen wants the Rwandans to be able to exploit legally only transit to Rwanda and end up in the West. In fact Congo minerals are shipped to Western countries either directly or via Rwanda. This is a major obstacle to the development of the Congo. Since colonial times, the markets of the colonies were linked to the world market as providers of raw material: Congo could only provide raw material to the world market and these extractive links to the world economy were protected by the colonial administration. In the post-colonial period, however, these same structures are maintained and protected by African leaders themselves, whom Fred Cooper calls "gatekeepers." These structures maintain African countries in general and the Congo in particular in mass poverty. In the ladder of production raw materials bring the cheapest; the more one transforms the raw material the more value added one creates. By keeping African economies at the level of furnishing raw materials, the West, which deals with the transformation phase, ensures that they will remain the major beneficiaries from such economic activity. Even though it may bring great wealth to a tiny number of African beneficiaries, the policy M. Cohen is suggesting does not question these structures of continuing impoverishment.

For Congolese, minerals, agricultural products, works of art and culture are the assets we possess to built and modernize our country. By continuing to ship raw materials to the West with a very little return in terms of value added, the Congo is sure of remaining poor forever. What is important for the Congolese is to learn how to transform their raw material in order to get from it the most value added. By doing so, the Congo will participate to the world economy not as raw material provider, but as a full member with variety of items to sell in the world market.

The DRC and Africa in general couldn't escape the acquisition of industrial technologies and the building a sound manufacturing base to support the production of value added goods and services. The last fifty years were lost years as far as industrialization is concerned. In the case of the Congo, contacts with outside world, including the Chinese, have never been about upgrading the technical capacity of domestic firms or about promoting industrial alliances to enable the country's firms to access emerging and existing knowledge and skills at home and abroad. The Congo has to move out of the structure whereby it is a mere provider of raw material to become technology friendly country otherwise it will be indefinitely losing to multinational companies and to metropolitan states.

It seems that the beneficiaries of the colonial as well as the post independent extractive structures are networks of private organizations, most notably transnational corporations, metropolitan states, and their mediating 'multilateral institutions' and friends including Rwanda. The world's moral sensibilities have been transformed in the new era – in which historical and ideological differences on how to manage wealth and create a bourgeoisie have ended, as Francis Fukuyama, the prophet of the new age of super-profit, has put it. There seem to be a relationship between the world's dominant liberal moral discourses and the changing conceptions of war in the heart of Africa. In the face of the interest of multinational corporations, the concept of nation-state seems increasingly meaningless. As David Moore (2003) puts it, any institution is written off as an arena of "rent-seeking," corruption and parasitism: the IBMs, Shells, Coca-Colas and Nikes of the world are the only "ethical" entities left. The pursuit of profit by self-interested large businesses is the only remaining avenue of "moral" gain. Thus 'ethics' is inevitably coupled with "business," and the language of business portrays the activity of pursuing profit as natural, harmonious and peaceful. John Le Carré is correct when he points out that the new ethos of globalization asserts that business is not the self-interest of economics but the pinnacle of ethical behavior. If we can be persuaded that the pursuit of profit is a natural law rather than a lowly pursuit of 'economic self-interest', then the language of the market has become truly hegemonic. What Karl Polanyi feared is becoming realized in full. This silent hegemony of the market is leading Africa directly towards the "demolition of its societies" and protracted wars with dire consequences on people's lives.

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