

## WHITE MALICE

*The CIA and the covert recolonization of Africa*

Susan Williams

London: C. Hurst & Co., 2021, £25, h/b

### **Robin Ramsay**

**T**his is a very big book, 517 pages of text and another 70 of notes, sources and index. Williams' previous book was *Who killed Dag Hammarskjold? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*,<sup>1</sup> and this is a massive extension and elaboration of the themes in that.

So, what do we want a review to do? Centrally, describe the book's contents and tell the reader if it's any good or not. Second thing first then: this is wonderful, a landmark. As for the contents, happily, towards the end of it Professor Williams offers a kind of summary of her text, much better than any version I could manage.

'Nevertheless, pressing on a range of sources has produced some extraordinary findings in relation to the Congo, Ghana and other African territories during their transformation from the status of colony, occupied by a European power, to independence. The best sources have been university archives and individuals who decided to speak about their past involvement with the CIA in Africa, most notably John Stockwell. It appears that the years of finding freedom—between the independence of Ghana in 1957 and the CIA-backed overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966—were also the years of an intense and rapid infiltration into Africa by the CIA. The agency's operations took place in the territories themselves and at the UN in New York.

The uncovered information reveals an extent and breadth of CIA activities in Africa that beggars belief. These activities took various forms and were performed by an extensive network that included Americans at agency headquarters in Washington; American agents operating under cover; American agents under non-official cover in the field and at the UN; Africans brought to the US and then recruited for use in various countries

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed in *Lobster 64* at <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster64/lob64-misc-reviews.pdf>.

and situations, such as the Kenyan Washington Okumu; African assets recruited and used locally; third-country agents such as QJWIN and WI-ROGUE; and cultural patronage through Paris and elsewhere.

Underpinning the success of these activities were dollars. “Money ran the game”, notes [Lise] Namikas. “Even by 1960 standards the CIA had a reputation for spending”. Estimates of how much the CIA spent, she adds, are hard to gauge. In 2014, Stephen Weissman wrote that between 1960 and 1968, CIA activity in the Congo “ranked as the largest covert operation in the agency’s history, costing an estimated \$90–\$150 million in current dollars”. But this did not include the cost of “the aircraft, weapons, and transportation and maintenance services provided by the Defense Department”.

CIA money was distributed, both within the US and in Africa, through a range of conduits, including dummy organisations and pass-throughs such as the Farfield Foundation. Bribes were handed out to selected politicians, to union leaders and to diplomats at the UN. CIA funds were used to pay for soldiers’ wages and for weapons. They paid for front organisations, such as Imbrey’s public relations office in New York, Overseas Regional Surveys Associates. The funds were used to set up airlines under cover and to buy and deliver aircraft, including the Fouga that may have shot down the plane carrying UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld.

Active intervention fostered division between different political groups, such as Holden Roberto’s UPA, heavily backed by the CIA, and the MPLA—both of which were fighting for the freedom of Angola from Portuguese rule. The consequent strife sowed the seeds for decades of suffering in Angola.

Plans were implemented for assassinations. Governments were overthrown. The UN secretary general’s communications were accessed in real time in Washington, when he was on a flight in any part of the world, courtesy of the cipher CX-52 machine.<sup>2</sup>

Propaganda and covert influence operations formed a thick web,

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<sup>2</sup> Nick Must commented:

The CX-52 was an early product of Crypto AG, the Swiss cryptological machine manufacturer whose devices were trusted to provide ‘secure’ communications at nation state level since the early 1950s. It was only recently revealed (in February 2020) that Crypto AG had been directly placed into the hands of the CIA and BND in 1970. . . and that they had been cracking the encrypted messages – of both allies and enemies – since day one, anyway! See (e.g.) <<https://tinyurl.com/4xpks4hp>> or <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/national-security/cia-crypto-encryption-machines-espionage>>.

frequently facilitated by CIA fronts dedicated to Africa, which were set up with the collaboration of powerful businessmen with interests in Africa. The fronts included the African-American Institute, with its headquarters conveniently located just minutes from UN headquarters in New York, and the American Society of African Culture. Both organisations published Africa-focused journals, perfect for covers and heavy with propaganda. Highly respected organisations such as the American Fund for Free Jurists were penetrated by CIA officials using false pretences and were used to funnel funds secretly.

Cultural and educational centres, such as the Mbari Centres in Nigeria and the Institut d'Études Congolaises in Brazzaville, were set up. They organised conferences and events, such as the seminar in Ibadan, Nigeria, attended by an unwitting Lumumba, and the first Congress of African Writers and Intellectuals at the University of Makerere, Uganda. Underpinning all these activities was the hand of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a CIA front with an Africa programme based in Paris and with fingers in most parts of the world.' (pp. 509-11)

The first part of the book is scene-setting, the rise of African nationalism and anti-colonialism. Ghana was the first African colony to achieve independence in 1957. But two years earlier the big event had been the Bandung conference at which 29 African and Asian states resolved to create a non-aligned bloc to steer a middle way between the pressures from the Anglo-American and Soviet blocs.

The CIA enters at chapter five. Towards the end of his life, former CIA big-wig, Richard Bissell, wrote something which is quoted by Williams.

' "My responsibilities as deputy director for plans", wrote Richard Bissell in 1996, "encompassed crises all over the globe. Africa was one field in which the forces of East and West were destined to clash; the Congo . . . was on the verge of civil war". He added, "In all of underdeveloped Africa, which really meant southern Africa up to the Sahara, the Congo was the most important prize in the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States".

Bissell believed that "from today's perspective, many episodes might be considered distasteful, but during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years the Soviet danger seemed real and all actions were aimed at thwarting it". (p. 511)

'The Soviet danger seemed real' is the lie. And as former head of the U2 programme, nobody knew better than Bissell that the Soviets were not a

threat to the US. Prior to those surveillance flights which began in 1957, what was happening behind 'the iron curtain', e.g. how many missiles the Soviets had, etc., was unknown and the 'danger' belief was just viable. By 1960 it was clear to US intelligence and military that the Soviet Union was a nuclear minnow, compared to the US. That 'danger' was the rationalisation for the CIA's activities. There was no Soviet danger in Africa, so they just made it up when they needed it. The real 'danger' to American interests was African nationalism. The American interest in the Congo was driven by the presence of uranium, and they didn't want the Soviets getting their hands on it.<sup>3</sup>

US interest in the uranium began during WW2 and the CIA's predecessor, OSS, was there.

'The OSS station in the Belgian Congo had a unique, top-secret mission: to protect the export of uranium from the Congo to America and to keep it out of enemy hands. Congolese ore was essential for the Manhattan Project, which produced the world's first atomic weapons and was led by the United States, with some assistance from Britain and Canada. This uranium was used to build the first atomic bomb to be tested: the Trinity test in New Mexico, in July 1945, which launched the atomic age. It was also used to build the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki the following month—on 6 August and 9 August, respectively.

The source of the ore was the Shinkolobwe mine in Katanga, the southern province of the Congo. Shinkolobwe produced uranium that was far richer than any other uranium in the world: it assayed as high as 75 per cent uranium oxide, with an average of 65 per cent. By contrast, ores of marketable quality from the Colorado Plateau in the US and from Canada contained two-tenths of 1 per cent . . . .' (pp. 30/31)

In retrospect it is obvious that any African leader in the Congo who didn't swear allegiance to the American embassy and promise to let the US control the uranium was going to be disposed of. Patrice Lumumba, the nationalist Congolese leader at the time, didn't understand this or didn't care (which of those isn't clear to me) so he was ousted and killed. Williams devotes 250 pages to the Congo and the death of Lumumba. The events, military, political and diplomatic, preceding that murder are detailed day by day, sometimes even hour by hour. To justify the killing of Lumumba and the installation of an American puppet, the CIA duly invented a 'communist plot'. Williams quotes

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<sup>3</sup> Williams notes on p. 34: 'By 1959, about 9 per cent of the world's copper, 49 percent of cobalt (rising to 54 percent in 1960), 69 percent of industrial diamonds, and 6.5 percent of tin came from the Congo.' But it was the uranium that really mattered.

Larry Devlin, the CIA station chief in the Congo at the time:

'I can say only that I believed that his [Lumumba's] lack of understanding of world politics and his dalliance with the Soviet Union made him a serious danger to the United States. We were, after all, involved in a major war, albeit a cold one. Had the Soviet Union succeeded in gaining control of a large part of the African continent and its resources, it could have carried us over the thin red line into a Hot War. In a Hot War, one has to kill one's enemies or be defeated. In the Cold War it was much the same, only one had to remove the enemy from a position of power in which he could contribute to the weakening of the United States' role in the world.' (p. 400)

This was the first big operation by the Agency's Africa Division, created in 1959 in its Directorate of Plans, the covert ops branch.

Williams devotes another big chunk of the book to the CIA (and British) attempts to undermine/depose Kwame Nkrumah, president of Ghana, the first former colony to achieve independence, and the focus of much of Africa's rising nationalism. He was eventually removed in a coup in 1966. She has another detailed run through the 1961 death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld but is still unable to say with certainty which state or agency shot down his plane, though she nudges towards the CIA in this latest examination. And there is a detailed look at the Agency's influence operations in Africa and in Europe, and with Africans in exile, using the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

I'll stay it again: wonderful, a landmark.