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Susan Williams, *White Malice: the CIA and the Neo-Colonisation of Africa*. Hurst, UK, £25/Public Affairs \$35, 688 pages, 2021, ISBN 9781787385559
Jacana Media, Johannesburg, RSA, R450, 651 pages, 2021, ISBN 9781431431724.

Reviewed by: Judy Seidman, a cultural worker and visual artist and independent scholar.

Susan Williams' 2021 study *White Malice* revisits the role of the CIA in post-colonial Africa over the decade following Ghana's independence in 1957. As well as building on recent and important revisionist histories¹, Williams collates, evaluates, and publicises a significant body of previously classified, ignored, or denied evidence about CIA actions in newly independent African states². This work not only challenges the existing discourse on post-colonial African struggles, but it opens the door to a better understanding of people's struggles for political and economic self-determination within a democratic, pan-Africanist framework.

I was a teenager in Ghana between 1962 and Nkrumah's 1966 overthrow.³ Too many established narratives about Ghana under Nkrumah contrast uncomfortably with my experiences and memories. The solid, factual, scholarly information that *White Malice* pulls together challenges those embedded narratives while affirming my own recollections. Moreover, this book poses new insights and directions for research, with direct relevance for my ongoing research into the arts and culture of Africa's liberation struggles.

In *White Malice*, Williams presents convincing evidence that the US Government used "any particular kind of activity" necessary to undermine newly

¹ These include amongst others: Frances Stonor Saunders' 1999 book *Who paid the piper? The CIA and the cultural war* journalist Stephan Kimzer's 2019 book "*Poisoner in Chief*", as well as Susan Williams' 2011 book *Who Killed Hammaraskjold?: The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, which has been credited with reopening the inquiry in Dag Hammarskjöld's death.

² Prominent amongst these sources are: Rapport's 1967 exposé on CIA operations, and the *New York Times* articles following up on it; the USA archive of JFK Assassination Records (declassified, redacted and released over several decades), and the annual USA Foreign Relations (FRUS) documentation; John Stockwell's 1978 book *In Search of Enemies*; Larry Devlin's memoir *Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting the Cold War in a Hot Zone* (2008); and other interviews and records by Africa based CIA agents.

³ See Seidman, *Drawn Lines* (an autobiography)

independent states that the country labelled “communist-leaning” (whether this label was justified or not). Particularly, the US government withheld economic support from elected governments, supported separatists, spread public disaffection, denied international and UN assistance, and ultimately undertook assassinations and para-military interventions. The CIA established its Africa structures in 1959 for these purposes.

One key activity was promoting the theme that Africa remains “unable to govern itself and... in need of assistance from the West”⁴. Post-colonial African leadership is portrayed as corrupt, tribal, and authoritarian--if not downright dictatorial and communist-inspired.⁵ This remains the embedded scholarly analysis (mainstream and progressive) even today. A recent book on Nkrumah notes that leading Africanist scholar Ali Mazrui characterised Nkrumah as ‘the Leninist Czar,’... Marable referred to him as ‘the Bonapartist benefactor’,” that Nkrumah was beset by “growing corruption and bureaucratization, along with the cult of personality,” and that “Pobee, Bretton, Omari, and Lacouture depict Nkrumah as a tyrannical megalomaniac”.⁶ More recently, negative discourse about Africa has been revisited and entrenched in the theory named “Afro-pessimism”⁷. Yet, the meticulous and scholarly record of US and CIA actions in Africa assembled in *White Malice* forces us to rethink this long-dominant discourse. *White Malice* constructs its case around two relatively well-documented CIA operations: against Ghana’s Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and against the Congo’s Patrice Lumumba. Around this core, Williams sketches the wider picture of the CIA in Africa: working alongside and within government and diplomatic structures; completing overt and covert intelligence operations, and its links to businesses and US -based civil society structures and figures in arts, culture and education, trade unions, civil rights groups, and non-profit organizations. CIA operations were variously open and clandestine and used both witting and unwitting individuals.

Although much of Williams' information about the CIA has been available in some form for decades, it has been occluded, ignored, or side-lined; labelled rumour, assumption, or propaganda; or dismissed as unrelated unproven factoids--outliers from accepted scholarship. *White Malice* tracks down hard evidence. It draws on an extensive range of sources from journalistic exposés, scholarly research, and US government archives to whistleblower’s stories, and the memoirs of CIA agents. Williams is meticulous about distinguishing between proof and strong suggestive evidence. The result reveals, in William’s own words, “an extent and breadth of CIA activities in Africa that beggars belief.”

⁴ Future Learn, “Afro-Pessimism”, University of East Anglia

⁵ The negative image of Africa is described in Hawk, BG, *Africa’s Media Image*, London, Praeger, 1992.

⁶ Dr Ama Biney *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 2011, p. 20

⁷ see Frank B Wilkerson III, *Afropessimism*, Liveright Publishing, 07 Apr 2020

For instance, timelines throughout the book are not always clear. Key events, concepts and connections are hidden in the mass of detail, and facts often emerge from different voices telling parallel, interlinked, and, at times, contradictory stories. As one example, I struggled to follow the events around Patrice Lumumba's assassination. Halfway through *White Malice*, Congo army Chief of Staff Joseph Desire Mobutu (Mobutu Sese Seko) declared a coup against Lumumba on 14 September, 1960; CIA Chief of Station "Devlin later claimed that the CIA was responsible for this" (248-9). Months later, Mobutu's forces arrested Lumumba and two of his ministers; Mobutu handed them to Moïse Tshombe's Katanga forces, who tortured and killed them. It took a back search to page 131 to confirm that in 2004, Delvin publicly acknowledged that the same Joseph Mobutu was an informant for both the Belgium government and Delvin himself during negotiations for Congo's independence. Another back-search confirmed support and resources from the Belgian government and mining company Union Minière for Tshombe's separatist rebellion against Lumumba (117, 196). Yet another search was required to uncover how, in August 1960, CIA director Allen Dulles had argued that it was "important to preserve Katanga as a separate viable asset" (236).

At times throughout *White Malice*, the complex details that comprise evidence need more explanation and context than the book provides. This problem is seen in responses to Williams' discussion of CIA interventions in African arts and culture. While Stonor Saunders (1999) has already ably exposed CIA operations in international arts and culture, *White Malice* provides less known, and critically important, information on specific CIA operations targeting African artists and intellectuals. These include possible CIA involvement in the alleged suicide of South Africa writer Nat Nakasa in 1964⁸, and suspected action against musician Paul Robeson (848)⁹ and author Franz Fanon (478)¹⁰. However, without context, I failed to see the relevance of the cultural front: "It ... stretches credulity to link any of Africa's problems, even tangentially, with the art of Jackson Pollock."¹¹

⁸ Nakasa fell to his death from the New York apartment of Jack Thompson. The director of the Farfield Foundation was later exposed as a CIA front. Thompson gave key testimony that Nakasa was depressed and suicidal the night of his death (p. 473).

⁹ See also "Did the CIA poison Paul Robeson?" *Counterpunch* 199
<https://www.counterpunch.org/1999/04/01/did-the-cia-poison-paul-robeson/>

¹⁰ See Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, "Medical Care as a Political Weapon: Reflections on Frantz Fanon's Treatment and Death from Cancer in Amerika' (2022):
<https://rashidmod.com/?p=3249>.

¹¹ Review of *White Malice* by *Financial Times* Africa editor David Pilling. Pilling further argues: "The revelations imbue the narrative with a conspiratorial air that can go too far. If the CIA sees a Red under every bed, then Williams sees the manipulative hand of the CIA in every glove."

Finally, importantly, albeit unavoidably, Williams relies predominantly on sources within the US, its government, the CIA itself, and “first-world”-based investigators and researchers as most archives about Africa were curated by and stored in “first-world” centres. Sadly, ostensible “global”—the most readily available—archives are too often an echo chamber for their own hegemonic sources. Consequently, *White Malice* contains too few of the vibrant African voices, beliefs, visions, strengths and achievements—pan-Africanism, African unity, and self-determination—that the CIA and global powers set out to suppress. Until these voices and successes are acknowledged and referenced, Cold War justifications, arguing that Africa’s elected leaders and governments had fallen under Soviet influence and had to be removed, stands uncontested.

Overall, however, *White Malice* makes a major contribution to our understanding of where Africa is today. Hopes, visions, and ideals infusing Africa’s liberation from colonialism were undermined and deliberately silenced and with malice. Simply understanding that silencing, however, does not in itself construct a complete new narrative. Rather, it begins the work. The road forward stands open: rescuing the ignored and suppressed stories of Africa’s struggles, hopes and visions—building a new archive by excavating not only buried documents, but personal experiences and community histories. Only once all these are in the discourse can we—as we must—construct new narratives.

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