

Are “Democracy Now” Correspondents in Libya Feeding Us the State Department and Pentagon Line?

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Is the independent media movement’s flagship radio-TV show Democracy Now! pushing the State Department and Pentagon line on Libya instead of “going where the silence is” and telling the truth without fear or favor? Are its Libyan correspondents embedded with the US-backed Libyan rebels to such an extent that they have minimized and failed to follow up persistent reports of ethnic cleansing in Libya or investigate whether alleged “mercenaries” ever existed or Khadaffi’s “massacres” ever took place?

Have Democracy Now’s correspondents in Libya, Anjali Kamat and Sharif Abdel-Kodous minimized or avoided reporting upon the persecution of black Libyans and sub-Saharan African migrants by US-backed Libyan rebels?

Have they reported massacres that may not have happened, and mercenaries who might not have existed?

Have they ignored or minimized the impact of US and NATO bombing and the presence of Saudi, Qatari and other foreign forces on the ground in Libya, also in support of the US-backed Libyan rebels?

Have they simply embedded themselves with US-backed forces in Libya to pass the views of the Pentagon and State Department to us as “independent, unembedded news”?

It’s hard to know all of this for certain. We’re over here, they’re over there, and Libya is very much a war zone.

I’m not in Libya and never have been, but people who have say the country is anywhere from a quarter to half what we would call “black” in the US. It’s hard not to notice that Anjali Kamat can’t find any black Libyans to talk to, and that none are visible among the US-backed Libyan rebels.

There have been many persistent reports from too many sources have pointed to widespread persecutions of black Libyans and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. There are reports of all-black towns in Libya which have been wiped off the map by the Libyan rebels and their allies. Our own Cynthia McKinney has visited the families of some who were lynched — hanged by jeering mobs who used their cell phones to record the ghastly spectacle. Some of the videos of these lynchings were still on YouTube as late as last week.

Make no mistake, Democracy Now is one of the few places that have reported the

persecution of migrants and black Libyans. But a careful search of Democracy Now stories from the past six or seven months reveals that of this handful of mentions of ethnic cleansing in Libya, all except one on [March 7, 2011](#), [7] in which Anjali Kamat interviewed migrants from several countries awaiting transport out of Libya originated from Democracy Now studios stateside.

DN's correspondents in Libya apparently have more important things to do than interview the black Libyan and migrant victims of what Kamat called "populist rage," a curious and revealing term for lynch law in Libya.

In that same segment, Kamat queried Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch about the existence and identity of Khadafi's alleged "African mercenaries"

PETER BOUCKAERT: I think the whole story of the African mercenaries in Libya should be a case study for journalism schools all across the United States, because it's a prime example of irresponsible reporting and just lazy reporting. You know, rather than going out and investigating these incidents and whether they're true, these rumors, Western journalists from very reputable publications just published the rumors as true. And they talked about African men running wild, raping women and all of these things, which is just about as racist a myth as you can get.

ANJALI KAMAT: Can you say a little bit about who the mercenaries actually are?

PETER BOUCKAERT: Certainly, it's possible that Gaddafi used African mercenaries, because Gaddafi has been involved in training and financing and arming rebel groups around Africa. He's been very involved in the Chadian civil war, and he's been involved in the conflict in Darfur, where he's been financing some rebel factions just to have a role around the negotiation table. So he does have the capacity not to go recruit African mercenaries, but to use the groups that he's already training and financing. And it's possible that some of those fighters have been mobilized around Tripoli or even in the east. But before we jump to that conclusion, we should investigate. And for the moment, all of the cases we have investigated in the east, these allegations have turned out not to be true.

Clearly Anjali Kamat is one of those lazy and irresponsible reporters. She has carried tales of African mercenaries fighting for Muammar Khadafi many times over the last few months, with no more proof than the rest. Here is a representative segment of hers from a [February 25 DN broadcast](#). [8].

We saw some of the ammunition that was used against demonstrators by the pro-Gaddafi security forces and by mercenaries hired by the Gaddafi regime against these protesters. They included live ammunition as well as much larger — what doctors called anti-aircraft artillery, you know, incredibly large-looking bullets that were pulled out from the bodies of wounded and killed protesters.

Many of the patients that I spoke to talked about being — coming out to the protests being very inspired by what they had seen on their televisions from the scenes from Tunisia and Egypt. And when they saw what happened in Tunisia and when they saw what happened in Egypt, they felt that they had to rise up, as well, against their dictatorship in their own country. And they talked

about going out in largely peaceful protests. They were armed only with stones and rocks, and they were met with very heavy machine-gun fire.

They were fired upon by Gaddafi's security forces as well as mercenaries. And some of these mercenaries were captured by citizen groups in Al Bayda. And we talked to some of the hospital staff, as well as patients, about these mercenaries. They uniformly said that all of the mercenaries were foreigners, were not Libyans, but what we heard from some of the doctors and nurses was that some of the mercenaries had admitted to the doctors that they had been paid quite well by Muammar Gaddafi in order to come and attack protesters in Al Bayda.

So like every other Western reporter, Anjal Kamat never saw any "mercenaries," just their oversized bullets. She never saw any mass graves of the hundreds or thousands allegedly killed by Khadaffi's "heavy machine gun fire" either, or that would be on Democracy Now too. It's not. Nobody's located the thousands of wounded survivors either, that must have been the result of shooting into crowds killing hundreds of people, and none of this has stopped Democracy Now from carrying the story just like Fox News or CNN or MSNBC.

Something is really wrong with this picture. We have to wonder whether, at least as far as the war in Libya goes, whether Democracy Now is simply feeding us the line of corporate media, the Pentagon and the State Department's rather than fulfilling the role of unembedded, independent journalists.

Twenty years ago the US trained and supplied Indonesian army was on a genocidal rampage through East Timor. Blessed by the White House and the Pentagon and ignored by corporate media they would ultimately slaughter a horrific one third of East Timor's inhabitants.

Amy Goodman was one of a handful of unbought, unbossed Western journalists and film makers who worked, at the risk of her own life and freedom, with Timorese reporters to get the story of the US endorsed genocide out. In November 1991 Goodman and Australian reporter Alan Nairn witnessed and tried to intervene in the massacre of a funeral procession in Santa Cruz. They were savagely beaten, but survived. They were doing what correct and courageous journalists have always done.

In 2004 unembedded journalist Dahr Jamail took his life in his hands to enter the besieged Iraqi city of Fallujah, while US Marines were shelling its hospitals and TV stations, dropping white phosphorus on houses and sniping at civilians whenever they appeared in the streets. Many of his reports then and since have also appeared on Democracy Now. Again, Jamail was doing what honest reporters in a war zone are supposed to do.

Democracy Now reporters used to question authority and empire, not serve it. Goodman in the 1990s and Jamail in 2004 told stories that made US officials furious, all of us uncomfortable, and that sometimes put their own safety at risk. That's not what we see from Democracy Now's coverage in Libya today, which can hardly be distinguished from that of Al-Jazeera or CNN.

On Democracy Now's [September 14](#) [9]show, African scholar Mahmood Mamdani pointed out Anjali Kamat's blind spot.

MAHMOOD MAMDANI: I've never been to Libya, OK? So, what struck me

about Anjali's description is the backdrop is missing. The backdrop is the manner of change in Libya, the heavy involvement of external forces in expediting, rapid fashion, change in Libya, and that manner of involvement being basically bombardment. In East Africa, which is where I've been for the last eight months, this has been the cause of huge concern, huge concern because Libya is not atypical. Egypt and Tunisia might be slightly atypical when it comes to the African continent. Libya is far more characteristic of countries which are divided, which have leaders who have been in power for several decades, which have strong military forces and sort of formally democratic regimes, but otherwise really autocratic regimes, and where the opposition is salivating the prospect of any kind of external involvement which will bring about a regime change inside these countries. So there is a real sense of danger around the corner. What is going to happen to the African continent? That's one thing.

There it is. What Uncle Sam has done in Libya can be done in almost any African country. Is this right? Is this just? Is this what the US government ought to be doing with our dollars and lives? These are the questions Democracy Now reporters in Libya, and its hosts at home should be asking more often.

As for Ms. Kamat, she is missing her calling. She can make a lot more money at CNN or MSNBC or some other big time English language place. She knows what to say, and has been auditioning all year long. It's time for her to go, and for Democracy Now to find a real reporter or two, if that's the business they're still in. I hope it is.

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